

Resilience and Refuge in Sonia Deryangala's Wave

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Abstract

Resilience is psychological and biological strengths which humans use to master the change successfully (Flach, 2002). It can be defined as the positive capacity of people to cope with disappointments, stress and catastrophe. (Patterson and Kelleber (2005) state that thriving is largely determined by a person's resilience capacity. Transmuting traumatic experiences have been a central theme in centuries of literature, poetry, and personal narratives (Saakvitne et al, 1998, 281). One such memoir is Sonali Deraniyagala's Wave which unfolds the harrowing saga of her life after tsunami of December 26th, 2004. The first-person narrative is the recollection of bitter memories when her family stays in a hotel on the seacoast of Yala, Colombo. She is psychologically disturbed by the sudden disappearance of all the members of her family just a day after the Christmas celebrations. She finds it difficult to compromise with the tragic disaster and starts to live in her memories. Surprisingly, she does not surrender herself to the chaos as she develops strength through her resilience. She bounces back the pain of loss through her recollections and seeks refuge in nature. She has good memory power which makes her recollect the incident of disaster very often with minute details. She tries to remember deliberately to endure the pain and does not wish to be consoled by anybody. Her inner strength is very similar to Janet (2014) 'resilience' which is defined as the ability to bounce back from adversity, frustration, and misfortune and withstand hardship. The present paper makes an attempt to understand how the author shares her real life experiences in facing the challenges of life and develops resilience to face the personal crises.

Keywords: Resilience, tsunami, disaster, disappearance, compromise, memories,

INTRODUCTION

Ecofeminism was coined by French feminist Françoise d'Eaubonne in 1974 which relates to the association of women and nature. The practitioners advocate an alternative worldview that values the earth as sacred, recognizes humanity's dependency on the natural world, and embraces all life as valuable. (Miles, K. 2018). The modern ecofeminist movement concentrated on the synergies between feminism and environmentalism to advance respect for both women and the natural world. Most of the early work on ecofeminism focused on tracing the relationship between women and the environment throughout history. According to Rosemary Ruether, all women must be strong enough to stand against the dominance of nature and fight for their own liberation. She urged environmentalists and women to work together and put an end to patriarchal systems that value power, hierarchy, and uneven socioeconomic relationships. Ruether's challenge was followed up by feminist academics and activists, who started criticising not only feminist ideas but also ecological theories that failed to include the impact of patriarchal structures. Ecofeminism had moved beyond its academic setting by the late 1980s and had established itself as a mainstream movement. Ynestra King's article "What Is Ecofeminism?" that published in The Nation in 1987. challenged Americans, about how their religious beliefs support the continued exploitation of the environment and persecution of women. Using King's article as a guide, the concept of ecofeminism expanded philosophically and in terms of support. On the other side, cultural ecofeminists promote a connection between women and the environment. They assert that women have a closer affinity with nature due to their biology, gender roles as family nurturers and food providers, and other factors (e.g., menstruation, pregnancy, and lactation). Cultural ecofeminists believe that women are biologically

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more connected to nature than men because of their ability to reproduce. They contend that a closer bond with the natural world in which humans must coexist with sensitivity should be valued by society. To save both nature and culture, cultural ecofeminism also has origins in nature-based religions and goddess and nature worship, as a means of atoning for both the spirituality of nature and the crucial part that women play in it.

Many women were nevertheless dissatisfied with the movement's restrictions. They objected to the appropriation of native cultures and faiths to further a philosophical viewpoint. The development and acknowledgement of the very real consequences of race, class, ethnicity, and sexuality on a woman's social status are essential components of contemporary ecofeminism. Women representing diverse cultures and those concern in environmental justice issues have campaigned to develop their own brand of ecofeminism that considers spirituality and local customs, as well as a celebration of their responsibilities as mothers and caregivers and an awareness of how Western colonization undermined those values. In the early 1970s, cultural ecofeminism asserted women-nature connections as liberating and empowering expressions of women's capabilities to care for nature.

MEMOIR

To move on in life is the spirit behind Sonali Deraniyagala's memoir *Wave* which reflects the ebbs and flows of life. The image of water serves as a creator and destructor of life. The first-person narrative in *Wave* is the recollection of tsunami disaster of December 26th, 2004. Sonali Deraniyagala's bitter experience of the disaster is predominantly a psychological disturbance which can be compared with the waves of tsunami. The title 'Wave' is metaphorical in the sense of environmental disaster besides human crises. Sonali and Steve, along with their children Vik and Malli stay in a hotel on the sea coast of Yala. It was a visit to her parental house in Colombo to celebrate Christmas. Except Sonali, all the members of her family including her parents become the victims of the wave. Thousands of people are killed by tsunami which is an earthquake under the sea and the biggest natural disaster. It takes four years for her to digest the truth of the death of her family members. When the children were playing with Christmas gifts in the hotel room, the wave comes all of a sudden and her children vanish from her life without any kind of indication. She is both physically and mentally wounded. She does not want to die because she lives in her memories. Though it becomes difficult to compromise with the tragic disaster, she expects herself not to surrender to the unknown chaos. She visits the places where they shared their life. Only nature has the power of healing any kind of wound. When she shares her presence on the shores of the lake, birches, frozen fog, her mind untangles and untwists her heart. She is startled by her boldness in trespassing back to her life. After six years, when she travels on the same road with Steve's sister's family, she learns life lessons from birds and animals of the ocean. She observes that the wave does not scare away the pair of white eagles that nested by the lagoon of Yala hotel. She spots them when visits for the first time after the wave. She gains reassurance by giving a glimpse which is a distraction from her grief. Momentarily, She gains happiness and spellbound by the presence of blue whale and hopes that they will breach her agony. She savors relief ultimately and takes refuge on the boat and feels like staying forever. She is lulled by the breeze from the sea and the rocking of the boat. She feels snug in the same ocean which has once created disaster in her life. She settles amidst the blue whales. She rests in disbelief with what had happened to her. She finds the solace and wants to compress and misshape the impossible truth of her loss. The majesty of the creatures loosens her heart. She wonders if she has gone into trance by the beauty of nature for the first time after six years of the wave.

Ocean as Recreation

Sonali recalls how her family started from London to reach Colombo exactly four years ago. The eighth of December, the day Steve wrote a check, and they flew out of Heathrow's Terminal Four. (104) Steve and she were impatient to wait for the three days stay in a small hotel on the coast. She imagines the room with enormous windows that open to the ocean on three sides so the din of quickening waves smashing against rock even enters her dreams. Then she plans they would go to her parents' house in Yala where the soundless feet of a baby elephant hiding under its mother's belly would enthrall them. (101) During the short trips away from Colombo with her friend Lester before tsunami, ocean serves as an entertainment to her family. She knew a place where turtles came ashore to lay their eggs, (49) They enjoyed watching a green turtle dropping soft eggs

into the huge pit which they dug in the sand. (49). She crawls quietly up to the turtle and holds a warm egg in her palm which is magical. (49). They would walk on the beach following the footsteps of a solitary peacock. Vik and Malli enjoyed catching hermit crabs and placed them in a large blue basin that they had landscaped with sand tunnels and ditches and then release them by the water's edge at the end of the day. (65). Sonia enjoys cooking sea food with Steve. Their quest for fish sometimes took Steve and her to Billingsgate Fish market at dawn. They would stop and admire Devon crab in their gleaming purple shells and olive-skinned John Dory with disgruntled deep-sea faces and claw-like spikes on their dorsal fins. They would search for the sea bream with the brightest eyes and flesh that sprang to the touch with their plump monkish tails. They used to buy squid by the boxful and whole cuttlefish shinning in their pinkish cloaks, and tuna, and sometimes, swordfish. (170). Ocean is not new to Sonali and Steve. It was in 1984, when Sonali, Steve and their friends Kevin and Jonathan come to Colombo in Summer. They all flung off their shirts that night and dived from the tarred promenade right into the big August waves before she could say anything about the ocean there being dirty or about the strong currents that lurked. She would only come down to the seafront for a walk. (175). Ocean has served as a means of solace to them in late 1980s when insurrection in Southern Sri Lanka when anyone hardly visited Yala national park. Steve and Sonali used to bask in their solitude, staying weeks at a time in an empty hotel by the sea. It is the same ocean which served as a refuge which came in the form of tsunami disaster. (179). She has an emotional connection with Vik and whales. For many years after the disaster, she dares not to see the oceanic beauty, especially blue whales. All her concern is that Vik never got to see a blue whale. This makes her feel that she has no right to enjoy the beauty of whales. To watch whales without Vik is an agony to her. (182). After six years of long gap, she travels through Mirissa coast along with her friends in 2011. The ocean serves as a peaceful solace, especially when the two blue whales which slip under their boat. Initially she finds it hard to tolerate the landscape. (182). When their boat chops the water, she wishes the whale ahead of them would disappear as she cannot endure whales without Vik (184). The two whales bring about a lot of psychological transformation in her. They are graced with aquamarine glow in the sunlit water. She is spellbound with eleven such blue whales which sway in the ocean. (181) She and Malathi cling to the rails on the open deck with their eyes transfixed on the two blue whales alongside the boat The two whales rotate around their boat, they move with effortless grace, seeming to have powerful purpose. She wonders how whales could manage to escape the tsunami disaster if they were in the same ocean. A whale in the distance comes closer to them and they hear a loud sound of exhale and inhale. She hears a doleful sigh. (185). She sits on a damp cushion on the floor of the boat and not compelled anymore to grab every glimpse of the whales. Her earlier discord eases. She does not dread whales without Vik. She does not need much duck and dive from remembering. She is unclenched and calmed by the beauty of the creatures, by their pureness, and she finally savors the relief. (185-86). The sight of them is staggering, the sensation sacred. She is ultimately happy to be there and thankful even. (184) and wants to see more. She lifts her head to see the huge-pleated jaw. (185). She wants to stay on the boat forever. She is lulled by the breeze from the sea and the rocking boat. In such an endless expanse of ocean, she feels snug. To her the blue whales are unreal and baffling, yet she settles a while. She feels that somehow she can rest on the boat with disbelief about what happened, and with the impossible truth of her loss, which she has to compress often and misshape, She returns to normal chores of her life by cooking, teaching or flossing her teeth. The majesty of the creatures loosens her heart so that she can hold it whole or she has been put in a trance by the otherworldly blue whales (186)

Disaster of tsunami

When the wave hits Sonali's family, there was terrible crushing in her chest in the water. Almost dying. (113). During the tsunami she was spotted spinning going round and round in black mud. One of the men wrapped his shirt around her waist and dragged her quite a long way and put her in their van. she hung on to that tree just seconds before she would have been washed out to sea. (119) The wave came when they were playing with their Christmas presents in a hotel room, when they were not even in the ocean. (114) It was the biggest natural disaster in which two hundred thousand are dead. She grabs the shoulders of her two sons to escape the unexpected sea wave. She is ahead of Steve and reaches out for the jeep. (7) In an unbelievable state she regains her consciousness and realizes that she is drawn by water with a great speed. She is shoved through branches and trees resulting in injuries on her elbows and knees. (9) She struggles for life. She refuses to die as she has a good life which she does not want to be over as there is much to do. She is physically injured in such a way that

she cannot straighten her body, with sand in her mouth. She keeps spitting up blood whenever she coughs (12). She understands that she is totally in an unknown landscape where she happens to hear voices in Sinhala, "Muhuda goda gahala. Mahasona avilla" (13). Mahasona is the demon of graveyards. Even in her complete bewilderment, she understands that something dreadful had happened with death everywhere. (12). There were fallen trees everywhere. A sign board has fallen in the dirt said YALA SAFARI REACH HOTEL. (61). The tsunami shattered the entire neighborhood. The air-conditioning unit, a pink mosquito net, the number plate of a car was disorderly fallen on the ground. A Japanese magazine dried to a curl, a room- service menu, a broken wine glass, a black high heeled shoe, a child's red underpants and so on. She is very scared to see if any object belongs to her family. (63). She learned some facts about the wave which was more than thirty feet high. It moved through the land at twenty-five miles an hour. It charged inland for more than two miles, then went back into the ocean. (62). She is shattered with the absence of her children. She is not sure of their situation if they are survived as she cannot leave them behind and tell them that they are thrown out of jeep into water (12) As she was without trousers, a person in rescue team takes off his shirt and ties it around her waist. They pull her along and drag her legs through mud as they find her heavy (13) When health aid team takes her to the hospital, she hopes her parents will also be there along with Steve, Vik and Malli. On the other hand, she also keeps thinking that she might not find them. A nurse offers her first aid when she finds Sonali very weak injured bleeding ankles and unsteady legs. (19) She keeps warning herself about the least chances of the survival of Steve and children. (18) When she sees the loaded tractors of dead bodies, she senses her hope dissolving. (22) Sonali is such a strong lady that she stiffens and does not shed tears in front of people. (24) She is frightened to hear people shrieking wild. She loses the smallest stir of hope. She is thwarted when she hears the word 'mortuary' (25) On her way to Colombo, she is given a great concern by the jeep driver Mette. She finds it difficult to recollect what happened to her when Mette's wife and daughter ask her about tsunami. The clock on the wall symbolizes that time and tide wait for none. She wonders if the hands on that clock were struck. (29). It is not that she is interested in going to Colombo but wants to escape from the madness of the hospital and get away from everybody to Mette's house. She finds relief in the van and wants to stay in it forever. She finds comfort in the darkness of night rather than the light. She is so disturbed psychologically that she panic when she sees even a flower because she is reminded of Malli who would stuck in her hair. Similarly, she expects a blade of grass must have been stamped by Vik. She desires the extinction of bats and crows of Colombo sky because she considers that they belonged to her old life which thrilled her always (35) She cannot expect 'tomorrow' as she is terrified by 'tomorrow'. The truth of 'tomorrow is emptiness. (29). She wonders how unknown tidal wave can kill her family when they are in hotel room. She regrets clinging to the branch and getting saved from the disaster. It is horrible to stay alone without them. The thorns on her feet almost piercing the skin when she walked is a symbolic representation of her injuries in life. Every camp, every hospital is searched for survivors. Newspaper and T. V advertisements prove in vain. Malli's photo posters on walls, shop windows and trishaws bring no results. She loses hope and pretends to ignore Rajiv's efforts. The shirt of Vik is found under a spiky bush, half buried in sand. She dusts off the sand. Those parts of the shirt that had not been bleached by salt water and Sun were still bright green. One of the sleeves still rolled up. (66). When she was scouring the ruins in Yala, she finds the blue sack intact with satin still a gleam entangled on the branch of a dead tree, (148). The bodies of Steve and Malli were identified by DNA testing. four months after the wave. She was under the impression that they had disappeared into the depths of the ocean. To her their deaths are as unreal as dream. (41). After 6 months of tsunami, when she visits her parent's house in Colombo, she hardly digests the death of her parents and utterly bewildered by the loss of her boys and Steve. (55) Unable to bear the loneliness, she gradually develops suicidal tendency. She keeps Googling the ways of killing. Each time she logs in to her laptop, she thinks that it is the only thing in her life that has not changed is her password (48). Alternatively, she also searches the ways of taming her pain? (44) Gradually she understands that she should stop remembering. She realizes that the more she remembers, the greater her agony is. She stops talking about them and even uttering their names. She makes up her mind to let their togetherness become as unreal as that wave. (44). To escape reality, she gets addicted to alcohol and sleeping pills for relief and hallucination. half-drunk and half-drugged she would search the Internet for images of the wave, destruction, dead bodies, mortuaries and mass graves. Sometimes she is aware of her numbness and avoids drinking to a deeper deadness to prevent herself from becoming insane. (48). When she visits her parental home in Colombo, She does not

want the barrenness and yearns to sit on every couch and chair they sat on for some warmth would seep into her. (56) Over the next months she keeps returning to the jungle and observes fresh green shoots sneaking out from the crushed brick. New vines climbing around tilting pillars which looked ancient like some holy site, a monastery for forest monks. Young ranawara bushes dripped yellow blossoms around the rooms (65). She resents this renewal and cannot accept nature to return to its normalcy.

The disaster prompts her to sense the danger of life while whirling in the water and feels disappointed to learn that her life is going to end. (9). She struggles for life. She realizes that her head is above the billowing brown water with trees swirling around her and hardly finds anything to hold of flung about (10). While floating on her back, she observes the blue spotless sky with a flock of storks. The birds make her remember her lost son Vik who used to laugh at their pterodactyl like flight. (10). Sonali starts to live her life through her memories. Rescuing. The whole incident is unbelievable to her. She wants to stay in the unreal real world of not knowing anything. This is because of her unwilling state of accepting the truth of her life (14). She puts on a purple T-shirt with a smiling yellow teddy bear on front side. The colour purple symbolizes hope. She thinks of going back to Yala and check if her people are waiting for her and very soon, she switches on to the thought that they will not be there. (21-22). The questions of her friends and relatives double her sense of loss. She tells them that the jeep turned over water and was isolated from her parents, Steve and children. She is suggested to take sleeping pills. Sleep makes to forget the incident and wake up with a belief that everything is fine. She thinks that waiting for Steve and boys connecting their memories will become awful. In her words” (That I must not risk. (31-32). To live in hope is a way of escapism. To stay in dream is to feel the presence of Steve and boys. (32) She even visualizes Steve’s voice on phone. She regrets clinging to the branch and getting saved from the disaster. She questions repeatedly for not dying. It is horrible to stay alone without them. She wants to confirm the death of their children only when she sees the dead bodies. If their death is true, she decides to kill herself. She starts accepting the bitter reality that they will not fly to London and the boys will not be at school on Tuesday. No chance of Steve calling her from the office. Malli will not skip in a circle with some little girls. The Gruffalo. Malli will not cuddle her in bed and read about the Gruffalo. (34)

Resilience through memories

She lives in the recollection of the past memories When she sees the small square black rubber mat with little round bristles, unremarkably she thinks that it was the mat Vik wiped his muddy feet on when he bounded in from the garden. (57). The imprint of Vikram’s foot and the speck of dirt on his heel suddenly charges the room with their presence. She hears them, turning the page of a book and shifting softly on a rattan armchair. (58). She describes the experience of tsunami to Steve’s father and sister when they visit the spot. They stared at the floor of the bathroom, where Steve was when Sonali saw the wave. She retraced the path they took when they ran from the water and showed them the driveway where they climbed into the jeep. She finds a laminated research report written by Steve and a colleague. She gets emotional because it was touched by Steve’s hands. She clasps the paper to her chest and sobs. (63) She wants to search more and discover more belongings. She even scavenges the debris of the hotel and digs about and pounces on fragments of plastic. She wants to locate Malli’s socks and Crazy Crow, the big glove puppet with unruly black feathers that she had given Malli for Christmas, the day before the wave. (64). Early months after tsunami in October in London, she skims through Steve’s checkbook, which was in his draw. He had written three checks for the gardener, milkman and for the boys’ school dinners. Those two words, school dinners shatter her a lot (100). Three years and eight months after the wave she visits her house in London with fear. She wants all traces of it to be erased. (85). She walks into every room and sits on the floor and feels that the house has not lost its rhythm and does not need reviving. (86). She relives her life in past memories. She can almost slip into thinking that nothing has changed and wanders the house, makes some tea, looks out for the woodpecker that hammered holes in her garden shed. Sitting on the floor of the living room, leaning against the sofa and staring at the tops of those overgrown apple trees with that same tranquility, she slips into her old ways unthinkingly. (89) getting too close to the life she has lost (92). She remembers how Steve and the boys would feed the spiders. They would carefully place a live ant on the silken threads and marvel as the spider trapped it between its legs and squeezed it into pulp and suck up the ant juice like a milkshake. (94) It is a healing process to her with friends in her home eating chocolates and talking about the parties. She laughs remembering Vik booting a ball through the window next door. She

does not want to acknowledge the tragic incident. She is relieved to reenter the warmth of her life, even though she knows the bitterness of reality. (93). She is alarmed of not wishing to reawaken the memories and thankful for the dusty sheets at least to sneeze and distract herself. (94). Her home serves as a refuge and decides to keep returning for its warmth and comfort. (95). She recollects her daily conversations. (100). When she stares at the stub in Steve's checkbook, she holds herself for a few moments in the coherence and safety of the life they had even when everything seemed predictable. (101). She thinks that the boys would have grown out of the clothes in the wardrobes. She is a bereaved mother who considers her crises as defeat. (102). She is starved of loneliness as her life is faded without her husband and children's smiles. She recollects how a day before the wave they sat in the jeep and watched a young male leopard leaping across the branches of a palm tree, supremely poised and scornful of the troop of monkeys that taunted them from the surrounding canopy. And nearby a haze of blue tailed bee-eaters drifted in dust filled light. (104). To bury her loneliness, she stops revealing the tragic part of her life. In her view it is fraud as she shares drinks and jokes with people around her giving her cheery side. (106). She does not confess because she still disbelieves what happened. Sometimes she finds it hard to believe that she was their mom. What difference does it make when they are dead, and she is alive? (112) She does not understand how she is supposed to live without them. (108) no struggle of her's can match their deaths. She fantasizes about hurling herself into the heaving ocean in Yala, had she not clung to the branches during the wave. She is stunned by the reality of the truth that her motherhood is muted. She realizes that it is pointless to keep close to the memories and as she is no longer mom to them. She knows that she will go mad if she clings to the past life of them. At times, she feels helplessly responsible for their death. (112). Being their mother, she should have reached for them in whatever way she could, however futile or impossible it seemed to her. She feels that she has abandoned them, and the thought itself sickens her. (115). She develops guilt consciousness as she thinks she is selfish in protecting herself from the wave. She introspects herself the reason for not weeping, screaming and tearing her hair out and clawing the earth as they are the qualities of a true bereaved mother. (115). Gradually she reconciles with the reality of truth. She identifies her motherhood in them in nature when she visits the deserted shores of sub-Arctic Sweden. A lake of ice surrounded by naked birches sheathed in frozen fog, branches glowing like a stag's antlers in velvet in the mellow light drives away the shimmering emptiness in her, melts her defenses, untangles her mind and untwists her heart. She is startled at her boldness in trespassing her dark life. (116). After five summers without them in the garden, she starts rediscovering her family members (127). The span of five years has brought a lot of transformation in her. The dilemma of accepting the truth of reality is a matter of resilience which she develops from nature itself. Nature has a great healing power. She understands that the more she remembers, the more inconsolable. She develops inner strength and does not tussle with her memories. She realizes that cherishing her past memories will not heal her wound. (128). She pushes away the thoughts of her children's hurts and fears, suggestions of their frailty and tenderness. (129). She consciously attempts to reconcile with the tragedy to move on in life. She learns that it is pointless to cherish her children's personalities and their passions for they are now dead. She becomes very positive to unlock her mind and allow herself to know and wonder at her memories. (129). To have relief she pays very little attention to dissolve the line between the present and the past life. (131). In the process of healing, she does not find the absence of her family very heavy. She even wears Steve's sarong, and she remembers trying to inch away from him as he insisted on sleeping wrapped up in herself. She relives in the memories. She learns to tolerate the bareness of their bed (132). Despite hesitations, she replaces the carpet with a new floor. She gains strength in overcoming her grief. On the night of the twenty-sixth of December 2004, when she was being driven back to Colombo, she hides her head between her knees when the van raced along the reservoir. She cannot look because Vik will never see it again. After six years, when passing the same road with Steve's sister and her family, for the first time since the wave, she is able to look. (158). She learns life lessons from the ocean. She observes that the wave does not scare away the pair of white-bellied sea eagles that nested by the lagoon near Yala hotel. When she first comes back there after the wave and spots them, she does not dare to watch. She feels that they were Vik's eagles. She anticipates their reassurance. It is a distraction to gaze at the two eagles gliding the air thermals along with other birds like waders, crows (160).

CONCLUSION

Deraniyagala's *Wave* is an emotional memoir that connects to every human being in personal crises. The distressing tsunami of 2004 takes the lives of her husband, two young children and parents. Given the magnitude of her personal loss, the novel reflects a powerful exploration of resilience. Her narrative is a testimony to the human capacity to tolerate the unbelievable pain. *Wave*, being a real life experience serves as an anecdote to the people who suffer from the ebbs and flows of life.

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