

## HEALING TRAUMA WITH *METTA*: NEPALI TEXTS IN THE NEPALI CONTEXT

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### ABSTRACT

*Nepali society for more than one and half decades has been under panicked condition losing many lives and property which remained irreparable for a long time. It is our memory that helps us reminisce those horrible past events from which one can hardly get rid of, thus, we are inflicted with the memories – traumatic memories that neither let us get rid of it nor let us live out of. We, as part of this painful past, have been with this reality. Many survivors have imbibed this fact in the form of printed media – writing memoirs, stories, novels, poems, etc, from which one can be aware of many such details which make us feel even more traumatic. One can't live with this memory for a long time; thus, one needs a recovery of such painful past memory; for that a Buddhist tool can be a cure – metta.*

**KEYWORDS:** Trauma; *metta*; Buddhist approach; memory; reminiscence

### INTRODUCTION

Traumatic past can be represented in media, especially in literature. With the help of memory one can anticipate the holocaustic past that the mourners can hardly escape from but remain to be haunted time and again encountering mediated traumatic memories. With its help, one revitalizes trauma in writing memoirs or fiction presenting historical injustices and violation of human rights either in the colonial wars, slavery in America, South African Apartheid or the Australian stolen generation or Nepal's People's War. The logic of individual trauma in the narrative or other aesthetic forms is used to represent memory. Reminiscing the horrible past, the mourners face the threat of death each time either from opposite warring combatants or internal enemy within self. Here, the writers of memoirs or fiction are inclined to imbibe the past memories to let others know how they survived the holocaustic past manipulating different narrative structures, symbols and metaphors.

Fictional versions of memory, characterized by their dynamic relationship to memory concepts of other symbol systems such as psychology, religion, history, sociology and other areas of studies in social science may perpetuate old or anticipate the new images of remembering and forgetting the past facts that can make the relationship between literature and social discourses clear to listeners or readers. Metaphors of memory, the narrative representation of consciousness, the literary production of mnemonic space and of subjective time are some key issues related to memories and their aftermath. Ganga Bahadur Lama, Ganga Shrestha, Narayan Subedi, Tara

Rai, Nabin Jirel, Jagadish Ghimire, some of the writers to name a few, have depicted their real and fictional experiences making a distinction between “experiencing I” and “narrating I” out of their memory. However, there is a difference between pre-narrative experiences on the one hand, and on the other hand, narrative memory that created meaning retrospectively.

The way the writers present with first-person narrators is, in a sense, an occupation with literary representation of individual remembering and forgetting. Referring to these and other literary forms, Ganga Bahadur Lama’s *Das Barse Janayudh smritika Dobharu*, Ganga Shreshtha’s *Gadidarbar dekhi Singhdarbarsamma*, Nabin Jirel’s *Bhishan Dinharu (Chhapamarko Jivanyatra)*, Narayan Subedi’s *Sayadin Mao-badi Kabjama*, Tara Rai’s *Chapamar Yuwatiko Diary* and Jagadish Ghimire’s *Sakas* are able to remind the readers either of their or readers’ traumatic grief that they individually went through and they have successfully poured those mnemonic pasts on the papers with the help of many narrative forms, images and symbols. These writes up read as if the writers or mourners are still in the traumatic condition and are not in the condition to come out of it.

#### **TRAUMATIC PAST AND THEIR REMINISCENCE**

Trauma has become a key term for literary studies in the 21st century because mostly literary works deal with the terror and its aftermath that barricades survivors in trauma and painful memory. The word “trauma” has come from the ancient Greek meaning “wound” though its precise definition varies according to context and discipline, but there is a general consensus that it is a wound along with a set of physical manifestations that identify, produce and repeat uncontrollable and incalculable effects which should be endured long after its ostensible precipitating cause. Therefore, it “presents a unique set of challenges to understanding. ...because traumatic events often happen due to social forces as well as in the social world, trauma has an inherently political, historical and ethical dimension” (Marder, 2006, p.1). In this way, it is a far-reaching new insight of literary theory that has been a pathbreaking field for the theorists like Cathy Caruth, Shoshana Felman, Jenni Edkins, and Duncan Bell who brought it creatively on the borders of literature and psychoanalysis.

#### **TRAUMA IN THE NEPALI CONTEXT**

Over the last century, a great deal of writings have been done about the destruction, sorrow, sufferings and trauma which are experienced as the consequences of war, abuse, illness, crime, and family strife that all drive the dwellers into emotional isolation and make them appear as less than human in the eyes of the others – ultimately be it the victims or the perpetrators. They persist their roles until they get a clear understanding and acceptance or right view or what has transpired to them. Here, Nabin Jirel, Tara Rai, Ganga Bahadur Lama, and Ganga Shreshtha have been identified both as victims and perpetrators in the insurgence of People’s War as they are victims of the ongoing conflict in which they were targeted by the security forces whereas society was taking them as perpetrators as they, as a force, were creating a havoc on the denizen living in the surrounding.

To begin with, Tara Rai, a member of troupe of cultural group of People’s War, arrested by security forces on verge of being shot and buried like her comrades, was detained and kept in jails one after another. Rai (2010) has narrated this memory in

her diary like this:

My heart turned to be cliff being victimized again and again. The situation had made me endure hardships being captivated. In the life journey I fell down, shattered and splintered seeing my own shadow and aloofed from the self. How can I express my compulsion and helplessness? Where to pour down? The nights I spent weeping and crying encroached me continuously. . . (p. 148)

She is in the situation that neither she can emit those horrible memories nor escape them or contemplate them easily as others. Ganga Bahadur Lama (2007), a combatant and party's long time member who lost one leg in the battle with the security force and forced to live a secluded life not only from the party for which he gave up all his desires and responsibilities to family, but also from the self and now in the condition. He expresses his grief in this way,

The life lying alone being wounded is my own choice. I was not alone having wounded from the hurts of revolutionary works or consciousness. There were thousands in the queue. I was not aware of the communist party's conspiracy, treachery, flattery, discrimination being high and low, up and down etc. . . . I was aligned to omit all kinds of discriminatory facts but became victim of such ills. (p. 107)

Lama is on the verge of dilemma what he did and lost and trying to escape from those horrible memories. Even today he is known as "living martyr" (Amrit, 2015, p.16).

Similarly, Nabin Jirel, a fighter of People's Liberation Army (PLA) who spent a great deal of time in the war participating in various battlefield with the state's force has expressed his traumatic experience in his memoir *Bhishan Dinharu* like this:

After involving in the People's War everything of my life got changed. Heap of corpses at the battlefield seemed simple to my innocent eyes. My feelings started getting stern like the rocks of mountain Gaurishankar. Each of my footsteps got betrothed with the bomb explosions and gun shots. In life many times I felt my heart whether it was pounding to make me realize if I was alive or not and got it beating. I felt extreme happy realizing myself alive after going through various dangerous situations. In many places I remained awaiting to fulfill the quota for sacrifice in the war. But this opportunity never came maybe being coward or foolish. However, the days I spent in battlefield, I spent only counting how many we killed and how many got killed. (p. i)

Jirel, now living as an activist, elucidates how those days that he spent chasing the opposite force or being chased many times confronting death many times.

Narayan Subedi, a headmaster of a secondary school at Rolpa, once abducted by the Maoists in the name of ruling commoners from their own Jana Sarkar and remained in their captivity for one hundred days sleeping on ground, having very nominal meal, wearing the same clothes in dark rooms whole days and nights, while changing shelters being blindfolded and hands tied tightly backside and ultimately mourning for his family. In his memoir, *Sayadin Maoibadi Kabjama*, he wrote after his release from their captivity. He, paying all the dues of his meals and other accessories, has clearly expressed his grief as:

The days and nights were the same to me, but one thing that never left me away from me that is the threat of death, which can approach me anytime.

Each moment I spent anticipating if I get killed, how they would know about it, who would inform them, what they would do and how they would face this situation etc. And if the gun pointing towards me get shot at me, then? (126)

Writing the memoir, he has tried to console himself in the process of healing his grief and letting people know what happened in those hundred days in his life his cope with it.

Unlike Subedi who underwent with traumatic experience in Maoists' 'concentration camp' as a captive, Ganga Shrshta, the then adviser of ex-Prime Minister Baburam Bhattarai, then a combatant who fought many battles against the government forces and a writer, has expressed his past memory in an anthology of his memoir essays, *Gadidarbar dekhi Singhadarbarsamma*. He remembers those comrades who fought with him in many battles and unfortunately, lost their lives, and enlisted in the charts of martyrs. His narrative goes like this: "One communist fighter when involves in the war confronts either death or salvation and faces death time and again as hide and seek. Now all these horrible and terrific events haunt me all the times. Time has spent so far, but what we fought for, have not found yet, but what we lost never comes back again" (p. v). People with war trauma often experience the symptoms post-traumatic state disorder (PTSD) i.e. intrusive thoughts, avoidance, emotional numbing and hyper-arousal.

The patients may have difficulty in sleeping and in communicating with friends and family and they may also "experience broader symptoms which do not fit with PTSD, such as depression, displays of anger, substance abuse or problems with relationships" (Hunt, 2004, p. 60). However, these symptoms do not present all the time but sometimes appear as a result of the person dealing with their memories or of the environmental and social changes. These fearful moments that are imprinted in heart have become a source of writing such many creative works. These five writers who have poured down their past reminiscence on the paper are still in the grip of the horrible past. They are haunted by those terrific memories; hence, they are traumatized and need the better process of healing.

#### **BUDDHIST APPROACH, METTA TO DEAL WITH TRAUMATIC PAST**

There are many important approaches in Buddhism that have been used in healing traumatic conflict and people infused by it. People like Patachara, Angumal, Amrapali, Ashoka, etc. after having lived very destructive life and infused many surveillance painful situations have adopted Buddhist approaches to come out of traumatic grief. They have also undertaken peaceful path even to exemplify others for the rightful way of living a sacred and pious life.

#### **TRAUMA AS SEEN IN BUDDHIST PRINCIPLES**

The sole reason for suffering in the world is desire that we all have in each pace of our life. None can escape it. Suffering, an outcome of past memory of trauma that can "trigger emotional distress, but it's important to note that the default mode of a traumatized nervous system is to experience pain, fear, and anxiety, and to anticipate catastrophe and disaster. This mode is referred to as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)" (Alexander and Goldstein, 2014, p. 650). Trauma, reminiscence of past painful events that causes sufferings in any form, is related to suffering as forwarded by Buddhist principles, i.e. the world is full of suffering, causes of suffering, and

suffering can be avoided and ways of avoiding suffering. Desires are the sole reasons behind each of the sufferings we have in our life.

#### *METTA AS A BUDDHIST TOOL*

In the world, Buddhist principles have been applied to solve the conflicts that have created trauma in the survivors even after a long time. Among these principles, I have applied *metta*, a Buddhist principle, which is a wish for happiness or true happiness or the wish for everyone else for healing trauma in those writers who have written memoirs. It can be defined as “loving kindness” that is implied for a desire to be there for other people: to cherish them, and to provide them with intimacy, nature and protection. In another way, *metta* is not only limited to “loving kindness,” but an attitude of goodwill, that is, wishing the other persons well, and realizing that true happiness that everyone will have to find for others (Burgard and May, 2010, p. 8). Here, the four sublime abodes (Brahmavihara) i.e. loving-kindness, compassion, altruistic joy and equanimity act as a soothing balm to those within the cycle of birth and death.

Besides, *metta* is seen as “an effective means: to overcome anger as it is the opposite of these violent and destructive states, to build up the required concentration base for the development of insight, and for a healthy relationship with every living being – so important for a happy family, society and the world” (Dhammarakkhita, 2001, p. 32). Each one should have to overcome ignorance for the right treatment of trauma. Our heart must be opened to all parties either supporting or opposing ones in the process of recovery and the integrated mental, emotional, and energetic transformations that should occur along with reconciliation, and that moves into atonement with the help of Right Actions. From this, we can see that *metta* bhavana is something that should be practised to some degree by everyone. Without it, one not only tends to fail in social and personal relationships, but is also at a great disadvantage when involved in spiritual practice (Heller, 2013, p. 5). Likewise, *metta* map can be implied to measure the multidimensional phenomena of the neurology and physiology of the body and the mental and emotional releases, which can be concurrent in the process of healing traumatic grief, and it can be the key to releasing trauma and elevating the individual to a new state of being.

Moreover, it can be a monitoring device and a useful vehicle for both victims and perpetrators. The traumatic grief that Nabin Jirel, Narayan Subedi, Ganga Bahadur Lama, Ganga Shrestha, and Tara Rai have expressed in their memoirs is all related to People’s War that caused havoc in Nepal’s socio-political life. Nabin Jirel and Ganga Shrestha who fought in the battles at different times have still some antagonistic views to the state force. Their traumatic past all closely impacted to the ferocious atrocities of the national security force, and discourse of army is all to their foe Jirel (2013) expresses his feeling: “The war is over but our enmity with the national security ever remained” (p. 247). On the other hand, Ganga Lama and Tara Rai did not fight in the war, but strongly participated in it one as an artist and other as a party cadre. Lama (2007) was sidelined and his life jeopardized by both his party’s self centered policy and the state security as he says, “I lost my leg and faith in the party, responsibility for the family, this is all by the conspiring decision of the party and the security’s attacks, my life is still in the mist”(p. 97). Rai’s deteriorated health either working for the party or in the jails and the party’s partiality and state’s security

personnel's positive behaviors have made her realize her past in certain jeopardy.

On the other hand, Narayan Subedi's condition is different because his regular duty as the head of a secondary school nailed the rebel who put him into custody for one hundred days' terrific refugees on the edge of a sword. It ultimately left him battered till the memoir was written, "I spent my days on the gun point changing my shelter being blindfolded at night without committing any serious crime against the rebel. If anything I thought, it would be my family and my daughters" (Subedi, 2014, p. 243). Even after about seven or eight years these people are not in the condition to remain aloof from the traumatic past that haunts them time and again.

To cure their painful past of traumatic grief, the Buddhist principle, which is called *metta* is an appropriate tool to heal their sorrowful experience. It will lead them in the motive of reconciliation with those factors that once was a great threat to them. It has been "used in a variety of clinical resolution scenarios, including corporate, academic, judicial, family therapy, individual, youth gangs, populations with chemical dependencies and others . . . in relationship to their perceived traumas and tragedies – versus situational challenges, which are also created through perception" (Wright, 1987, p. 2). The apathetic condition as seen in these survivors can have soothing using *metta* as a tool to diminish the consequences of trauma. In the same way, it is to provide a path to reduce suffering. In the Buddhist psychology, the elements i.e. right intention, impermanence, and compassion have been effectively incorporated into the principle of *metta* for teaching and transmitting the Dharma and also for mitigating the prevailing effects of negative circumstances and to prevent falling into the abyss of a fixed negative life orientation. It then becomes the focus of identification as "self" (p. 3). Lama and Rai who have seen both forces as a cause of mourning and creating trauma in their lives. They can get relief following the principles of *metta* i.e. compassion (*karuna*), sympathetic joy (*mudita*), and equanimity (*upeka*) to be perfect in his or her attitude and having good will to all being including the antagonists, one can kill all the ill-wills – wishing all individuals, or groups or entire nations suffer.

One can think that everyone is good, here is no problem, what I do is always good and true and ultimately think that we all have reactive mental patterns that may cause us to respond to certain people, or in certain situations with thoughts and even words and actions that express ill wills that cause suffering to arise for both ourselves and others. Loving kindness is something that each one has to cultivate to get relief from negative attitudes. Following the basic principle of *metta*: right thinking with meditation practice in conjunction, that will help the survivors like Subedi open the heart while taking to very deep states of concentration of those perpetrators in the heart or mind along with visualizing them in a happy mood. Contemplating time and again "May you be safe. May you be happy. May you be healthy. May you live with ease" (p. 6) can definitely relief them.

Likewise, Nabin Jirel and Ganga Bahadur Shrestha, after confronting the 'enemy' many times, are working for the party memorializing those horrible past that would always encroach them time and again. It is an indelible scar, which may be physical. It can be healed, but mental one can never be healed with any medicine, for that following the Buddhist principles like *metta*. They can have some relief, for instance: "The *metta* meditation helps us expand our compassion to all people, erasing the lines that we've drawn between ourselves, our friends, our enemies, and strangers" (p.

5). The tenets of this principle appeal friendliness for all even to the enemies of the past.

Both Shreshtha and Jirel can have soothing effects to heal the traumatic grief, ill will that they can have to those people who used to be their 'enemies'. Now friends or colleagues can have transmitted into loving kindness and reconciliation, and ultimately *metta* helps them to reconcile with the horrible past with the help of *metta* meditation. Moreover, they can develop friendliness to all having their traumatic grief healed. The main morale of *metta* lies at the heart of Buddha's beautiful ideal of peace, friendliness, amity and finally goodwill which ultimately guides each one Lama, Jirel, Shreshtha, Subedi, or Rai towards leading a serene life in the world. When it is practiced diligently in every activity, its intrinsic power enriches and empowers everyone to fight all ill wills and enmity and helps to heal the traumatic grieves they have been experiencing in their lives.

### CONCLUSION

The world is, now, under the threat of terrorism; school children, housewives, or senior citizens have been targeted; newspaper stations have been attacked; none can feel safe in any way. Both victimized and perpetrators are not aloof from the grief of their past. In the Nepali context, the survivors who later wrote the memoirs are either victimized or perpetrators who are traumatized and needing an safe escape from the grip of traumatic past; it is only the Buddhist principles like *metta* both can have relief from their past. The past will be a great source of encroaching sorrows that will never leave them as long as they live their lives. Following this principle, many traumatized and perpetrators have gained the good consequences, becoming an example for others; these five survivors of this decade-long conflict, whose past is all filled with the trauma that neither leaves them, nor it lets them live freely. It can have a better solution from the grief they are having till now.

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