

# TRAUMATIC FACT IN ADHIKARI'S "YOJANA"

*Badri Prasad Pokharel\**

## ABSTRACT

*Abroad study and employment has become compulsive to all Nepali who from the time of school aspire to go abroad so that they would get rid of the transitional turmoil of the country and if possible would settle there. People from middle class go abroad – mostly golf countries to earn money to run the domestic needs. Here, they become vulnerable to fall victims and their dependents would be doomed to lead a painful life. The sole source of the country is remittance such people send from there. However, the government is reluctant to make any plan to stop them from going there and endow them with plenty of opportunities so that they would not have to loiter along the hot sand rather toil in their own cozy soil. Dinesh Adhikari's "Yojana" (Planning) delineates the situation. This situation has been analyzed from trauma theory.*

**Key Words:** trauma, turmoil, flashback, experience, nightmare.

## INTRODUCTION

Abroad employment and its discourse have become a new issue for many writers to make their text in different forms. Several narratives have been created to let the readers know how horrible it is for not only those persons who go for jobs, but also those who are dependent on them. Those who lose their lives there, may be their lives would be finished and no more trouble of life should be coped with, but those who remain behind them – their minors, unskilled spouse, old parents etc. would have to live mountain-like-life ahead. The kin would have only memory of their lost loved one and the horrible facts that cause death that would not let them live peacefully rather nightmarishly. Here, I am writing this piece of writing penetrating the traumatic facts the people living in the developing countries like ours – abroad employment from Dinesh Adhikari's poem "Yojana" (Planning). This poem shows a helpless father who expects his son would return alive from a golf country.

## TRAUMA AS A THEORY

Trauma, a phenomenon which is too shocking to be fully registered upon occurrence and which manifests belatedly and somewhere else in intrusive images and compulsive reenactments, offers specific challenges to traditional notions of referentiality. The last twenty years or

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\* Mr. Pokharel is Lecturer in English at Bhaktapur Multiple Campus, Tribhuvan University, Bhaktapur, Nepal.

so have witnessed in different fields an upsurge of publications devoted to the phenomenon and its representation.

Trauma theory suggests the existence of a traumatic kind, one that cannot be made entirely conscious, in the sense of being fully retrieved or communicated without distortion. It narrates the wholeness of the pain endured by the victims or survivors. There are many general definitions of trauma. Among them one can be found in Cathy Caruth's collections of essays named *Trauma: Explorations in Memory* (1995) and *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative and History* (1996). To define it she says, "In its most general definition, trauma describes an *overwhelming experience* of sudden or catastrophic events in which the response to the event occurs in the often *delayed*, uncontrolled *repetitive* appearance of hallucinations and other intrusive phenomena" (Caruth 11). The fact that the event was overwhelming for the victim means that the victim's brain was not prepared for a shattering experience which rather haunts the victims time and again. This ultimately leads them in distortion of the regularity of the normalcy. The situation prevailed by the traumatic experience tortures the survivors and leads to post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), which Caruth explains, while the precise definition of post-traumatic stress disorder is contested, most descriptions generally agree that there is a response, sometimes delayed, to an overwhelming event or events, which takes the form of repeated intrusive hallucinations, dreams, thoughts or behaviors stemming from the event, along with numbing that may have begun during or after the experience, and possibly also increased arousal to (and avoidance of) stimuli recalling the event. (4)

The victims in such condition try to behave normally trying to forget the horrible past, whereas the mind would be preoccupied with them inherently. Here, traumatic events remain registered permanently in the minds rather than experienced.

According to Geoffrey H. Hartman, a notable critic of trauma theory, such events seem to have bypassed perception and consciousness and finally fall into the psyche. These perceptions can be presented with figures of speech. "That moment is now expressed, or made known, in its negativity; the artistic representation modifies that part of our desire for knowledge (epistemophilia) which is driven by images (scopophilia)" (540). Hence, to understand the traumatic facts one should understand the figurative or poetic language prevailing in the contexts.

Roger Luckhurst, a notable critic is in the view that traumatic fact would be a contradiction which is close to nescience just as to knowledge. Those confronted with such experience involving actual or threatened death or serious injury or a physical threat to the physical integrity of the self considered to be outside the range of normal experience are known to

have been with PTSD. Besides, people who have experienced wars, disasters, accidents, death casualties or other extreme stressor events feel to generate certain identifiable somatic and psycho-somatic disturbances. Along with myriad physical symptoms, such traumatic facts disrupt memory, and the individual identifications (4). Therefore, the traumatic event is persistently re-experienced through intrusive flashbacks, recurring dreams, or later situations that repeat or echo the original horrible events.

The principal feature of trauma is that the victim is not aware of the trauma at the time of the occurrence. Because of the unexpectedness of the event, the brain is not able to process the shock immediately, thus creating a gap between the occurrence of the trauma and the return to full consciousness. Freud has described trauma as the succession of the occurrence of the event followed by its suppression and finally by its return, and Caruth uses his insight to explain why some traumatic experiences do not seem to affect the victim upon occurrence. She says the victim of the train crash does not suppress or forget the trauma but he was never fully aware of the accident when it happened, so the accident did not leave a trace in the conscious of the individual. "The experience of trauma, the fact of latency, would thus seem to consist, not in forgetting of a reality that can hence never be fully known, but in an inherent latency within the experience itself" (Caruth 17). So whereas Freud says that the victim forgets the event after it occurred, referring to its return to consciousness, Caruth claims that the victim is not able to forget because he did not experience the event in the first place, due to 'dissociation'. This traumatic phenomenon is sometimes described as a very literal case of multiple personality disorder where the victim sees the whole accident happening from a distance or even hovering over the spectacle. This becomes a meaningful approach to manipulate the situation. It is only after a while, the victim can fully realize he was not only involved in the accident but also traumatized by it. One should notice that not the event itself that returns to haunt the patient but the fact that the event was shocking and unexpected and that it caught the victim completely by surprise.

A second characteristic to understand the traumatic fact is that surviving the accident or catastrophe has a double nature. One would think that after surviving a horrible accident, the victim, when recuperated from all the bodily and psychological injuries, would be happy to still be alive. But the realization would not be so easy to penetrate as that. The fact is that the trauma does not register at the moment of impact but rather, it hits with greater power later on. Similarly, again in the words of Cathy Caruth, "what Freud encounters in the traumatic neurosis is not the reaction to any horrible event but, rather, the peculiar and perplexing experience of survival" (60). Indeed, the survivors would feel much

intense what they have lost and how everything that happened sustained the mental injury for a long time. And surviving comrades in war, families in accidents or even thousands of nameless people in catastrophes, may make survivors feel guilt about such miraculous escapes. Moreover, this contradiction lies at the core of many narratives about trauma and survival, as these pose the question. The survivor cannot deal with the death of so many people nor face his or her own survival because of these deaths. The painful repetition in combination with the intrinsic latency of the trauma, forces the survivor to keep on confronting the event that was not fully grasped as it occurred. Caruth claims that "it is because the mind cannot confront the possibility of its death directly that survival becomes for the human being, paradoxically, an endless testimony of the impossibility of living" (62). What is terrifying for the survivors is not so much the dream but the waking up, because it is exactly this boundary between the dreamlike state and the full consciousness that forms the essence of the trauma for the survivor. While during the phase of sleeping and dreaming, the unconsciousness is doing all the work, the consciousness takes over when the person wakes up and it is right then that the trauma hits in all its strength.

A large part of the trauma consists not only of having survived but having survived without really being aware of it, which is a logical consequence of the inherent latency. It is through the flashbacks that the victim is confronted for the first time with the mystery of his or her own survival, as opposed to the mystery of one's near death experience. "Repetition, in other words, is not simply the attempt to grasp that one has almost died but more fundamentally and enigmatically, the very attempt to *claim one's own survival*" (64). That would help one penetrate the tangible situation.

Especially when reading works of art that includes events of trauma, readers would not have sympathy with the wrong persons. Although a perpetrator can be traumatized by what he or she has done as well, one cannot treat him or her in the same way as the actual victim of the event. One can best see a 'victim' as someone belonging to a social, political, and ethical category instead of just looking at the psychological state of the person because LaCapra thinks that "historical trauma is specific, and not everyone is subject to it or entitled to the subject position associated with it" (LaCapra, 78-9). Events happened recently or lately in history, would leave a tangible remark in the memory of both victims and perpetrators.

#### **TRAUMATIC FACT OF NEPAL**

The main source of national income in Nepal is remittances the foreign employees send mostly from golf countries. Foreign labour

migration and subsequent remittances prop up the country's ailing economy. But those who go for abroad employment would not have easy life. Each moment they face death threat from the employers and others. Among such, cardiac arrest, heart attack, natural cause, suicide, traffic accident, workplace accident, murder, rape and other unidentified causes make the situation even worse not only for them but also the family members dependent on them. Every year in the ratio of approximately more than five hundred Nepali have been losing life and making their family's condition even worse than previous. According to Ganesh Gurung of International Labour Office how a Nepali woman faces an unbearable torture and death in foreign countries.

Kani Sherpa of Sindhupalchowk district, wife of Nim Pashang Sherpa was sent to Kuwait for the job of a house-maid by 'New Sun Manpower' foreign employment agency on 1998. But later, her family in Nepal was informed that she had fallen ill and was admitted in Alraji Hospital, where she committed suicide, hanging herself in the midnight on 11-August-'98. Moreover, it was known that she had been severely beaten and thrown out of the window at 1 am by the eldest son of Md. Alat Miya, the employer, and as a result, her left leg was broken. Kani Sherpa, a young mother of four children and the wife of a disabled husband left her country and accepted the job of housemaid only to support her family. But, she was raped, beaten, harassed and finally she lost her life. (23)

It is again poverty that leads many families to push their children for abroad employment and many women into prostitution.

Women domestic servants overseas are extremely vulnerable to sexual harassment in their workplace, and mental harassment from employers. Gurung adds, "There are no bilateral agreements between governments to address vulnerabilities of women labor migrants (18). They are expected to earn money, but always vulnerable to fall into appalling condition, that leaves their kin into mourning and suffering from even more acute economic hardship. The report of International Labour Organization 2016 shows a large number of deaths and often appalling living and working condition.

Various reports that sourced information from Nepali government institutions and the Nepali Embassy in Qatar disclosed that the deaths were occurring at the rate of one every two days in just one country. One newspaper deemed the situation "modern day slavery (1).

Although those reports were excellent in exposing the situation in one country, there is no comprehensive review of the situation among all destination countries. Nor has there been any attempt to take a critical look at the limitations of the data and how the reporting on death among migrant workers can be improved. This shows the reluctance of

government to such traumatic facts that have affected many households living in different parts of the country.

### **TRAUMA IN 'YOJANA' (PLANNING)**

Dinesh Adhikari is a prolific Nepali poet who has penned various poems and songs in different issues. His poem entitled "Yojana" (Planning) has recently been published in Kantipur daily on 21 January, 2017. The persona in the poem seems happy that the government is making plan to do various development works for people for example, eliminating the hours of load shedding, widening the narrow roads, constructing fun parks, providing telephoning facilities to all villages, building mansions for retired officials and erecting the republican pillar. Then, he says his fifteen year old son is very excited to enter sixteen year and making plan to make citizenship certificate and passport together so that he would fly to golf country in search of employment. The ironical panorama in the poem is that the succeeding government is doomed to make plan for developmental works let alone the opportunities for the youth who could contribute for such works. They are destined to suffer in the scorching heat of the golf countries tolerating all the panic of the employers and others.

Elucidating many horrible traumatic facts the migrant workers facing every moment in the golf countries, the reports presented by Amnesty International 2016 say that there are many workers who do not know what their rights are.

There are many workers who keep working like donkeys, without asking a question. They don't understand what is legally our entitlements, what our rights are. The company has been causing a lot of trouble. The company doesn't give them even the minimum facilities and treats them as sub-human beings. Sometimes they are not given drinking water and not given transport (31).

The persona, here, elucidating the harsh reality of the Nepali youth who aspire to be migrant workers right from the time they would be eligible to get citizenship and passport and destined to live a doomed life away from the country and family members.

Until this it is commendable that the country's economy depends on the remittances such youth send from there. But what happens when they die working there. Is it only the demise of the nation's economy or individual's too? The doomed situation that would be a drift of trauma from the physical to the mental realm would be beyond the penetration and the family's substitution. The survivors would have "psychic scars and mental wounds. The metaphor of a psychological impact still retains the sense of a wound caused by an exterior agent" (Luckhurst 3). Having this indelible mark one has to lead the life with various scarcities.

Here, again the poet Adhikari humbly requests the government if it has any plan to make such migrant youth return safely alive lest their relatives are destined to receive the dead body in the box at Tribhuvan International airport. He writes like this,

I know –  
 You can't give him employment Government  
 My concern is only this –  
 Do you have any such plan  
 To make him return the country alive  
 From Arab (5 My own translation).

Here, the persona, a poor father who is determined to send his son to such place from where his son is expected to return alive let alone any catastrophe occur to him, otherwise there are many fathers like him who should be ready to take the dead body in the box at the airport. The memory of their lost loved one would be the only option for them to lead their life ahead. Everyone would look forward to the actions and plan of the preceding government if it can do to help their lost loved one come back safely, otherwise dead body, so that they can do the last ritual here for the solace of the deceased soul. Having seen and tolerated such traumatic fact several times, people are still compelled to send their kin to such place and await the news that emboldens each strata of the society. Hereafter, they remain anticipating the traumatic event with intrusive flashbacks, recurring dreams, etc. and later with the situation which repeats or echoes the original horrible events.

Such traumatic memory one would have for a long time is intolerable to the survivors. The fact, maybe underestimated for some time, would deeply be esteemed in their cerebral. For Caruth, it is taken as a registration 'outside' registration owed much to the neurobiological speculation. The hypothesis is that "these discharges intensify emotional states which can be re-experienced later as terrifying returns to the initial traumatic scene, but block cognitive processing and so are unavailable to narrative memory" (Luckhurst 13). Even, as Adhikari has anticipated the fact for the people, it would never delete from the mind of those who have undergone with the tangible and intolerable memory. Let's see until what time each Nepali has been doomed to go through the fact.

### CONCLUSION

It has been several years Nepal has been seeing such traumatic facts, many texts have been written. A new genre has been recognized about such facts. Adhikari's "Yojana" (Planning) has exposed the bitter reality of the Nepali society, which each Nepali has been destined to live. If one is poor, he or she would loiter along the streets of India, if middle

class, in the hot climate of the golf countries, and if rich, then in the America or European countries. This way, each one would be living there a secluded, isolated, and neglected life, let alone flashing photos on the pages of Facebook. The dependents have been undergoing with the memories of their lost loved ones who would hardly come back again. If they would have anything, it is only their memory with which they have to live hereafter.

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