

Narrativization of Trauma as Performance in *Modiain*

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Abstract

This study scrutinizes and analyzes Mahabharata War from the perspective of performance studies. The text chosen for analysis is a seminal work of Bishweshwor Prasad Koirala as a satire against war, *Modiain*. The paper intends to show the violence, futility of war, enormous pain, fear, estrangement, unhappiness and shadow of war hanging in the mind of survivors mainly women. The specter of Nari narrates the war scene where the battlefield glistened and blurred like vapor coming out of hell. The agony of widowhood and looking for their lovers are other nodal points of the research. Further, war invites violation which is very chilling issue and the performance of war is very destructive. The events are deeply felt with pain when Nari narrates the war scene in the form of spirit.

Keywords: holocaust, narrativization, performance, specter, trauma

Introduction

This article, with its suggestive analysis, not the conclusive analysis, undertakes the position of Koirala's love of peace as that of Gandhi. Koirala's discussion of Mahabharat in his *Modiain* antagonizes the idealization of war. As war is no good to humanity, celebrating the war is all but an act against the humanity. This paper takes the methodological stance of the specter and discusses that the presence of a particular theme in the literary and the mythological texts is general-the symptom of the belatedness. However, the love of war cannot be accepted in any form.

Goodness or Greatness? The Overrated yet Least Practiced Maxim

Modiain or the Grocer's Wife (1964) was inscribed by eminent politician and literary figure Bishweshwor Prasad Koirala. Nepal and India were betrothed in revolutionary war during his time, Nepal against Rana rule and India against British

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rule. This novella displays the pathetic state of women in post Mahabharata era. This work is an influential satire against war. War is embodied as a pointless and damaging phenomenon from the viewpoint of "Nari". The spirit of Nari haunted the soul of Modiain and started to narrate the war scenery . The war took place at Kurukshetra between Kauravas and Pandavas. This war is because of the longing for supremacy and it asks for destruction, remoteness, disunion and anarchy. Haunting of spirit to recount the story displays Modiain as the performer and the nine years old 'I' is an audience. Narrativization of scene appeals to the humanistic sense which is the quintessence of this story.

The culture was patriarchal at that time and male members were involved in war, women were waiting dreadfully for their male partners but their waiting turns fruitless, women mislay their fathers, brothers, sons and husbands. Killing of human beings was just like killing of animals. Dead bodies were spread ubiquitously and it was trying to extricate who their kinsfolks were. The killing was like holocaust and genocide. "Kurukshetra was covered with millions of dead bodies, the battle field was noisy again with the ugly play and howling of scavengers, dogs, jackals, vultures and other carnivorous" (Koirala,1964, p. 55). The upshot of war is harrowing for women, so, this novella's message is be good, no need to be great, all great ones are not always good at their heart. Importantly, the discourse of being great might drive one to the way to the worsened paths. The rise to the might can take place even through the unethical road. For the same reason, Koirala requests the people from *Modiain* to remain good and not great.

This story reflects the philosophy of Koirala's bearing against war. He seemed to be the follower of Mahatma Gandhi, the right way for change according to him is through peaceable way. The performance in *Modiain* is reiterating the Mahabharata war through the eye of Modiain. The spirit of Nari emanates to Modiain like in *Hamlet*. As in *Hamlet*, there is the possibility of demonization or the celebration of the women's body. In many of the texts, this is the case. The women are not treated with the harmonious perspectives. These extreme positions to treat women are not the judicious ones.

For Koirala, war is unwarrantable, the bitterness of war is told through Modiain to a nine year old boy. Great persons brought holocaust and disaster, good persons simply want peace and try to act in peaceful way. So, Modiain wished good instead of great. This is the moral lesson the novella tries to carry. This story telling is materialized when a boy and a Misirji are in expedition on the Indian railways to the town Darbanga of Bihar.

In course of his visit, Modiain was haunted by the spirit of Nari, the symbolic character and started reciting story of Mahabharata War. The ghostly spirit is known as specter. Specters are such spirits who present themselves from generation to generations. Haunting of the spirit is the performance. That performative act is staged directly there. Haunting goes round and round and comes back like Marx the intellectual who is haunting Europe. The specter of communism is haunting Europe. In *Hamlet*, the spirit of the father is going to come back and will soon say to him "I am thy Father's Spirit" (Shakespeare, 1935, Act 1, sc. 5). This means according to Valery "Kant gave birth to Hegel. Hegel gave birth to Marx, Marx gave birth to Derrida. Industrialist and Capitalist use Marxism most and the specters of Marx is haunting Europe" (Derrida, 1994, p. 4). This chain of the birth of the theorists is haunting the people's minds. They are not free from the perspectives; they are the prisoners of their perspectives. When one thinks that one's perspective is the ultimate one, he/she is already chained in the perspectival chains. He is haunted by that .

Quest of Serenity and the Specter

Human being is the spirit of spirit. The Nari of Mahabharata war troubles Modiain. This means the war is haunting in the political era of Koirala and the war like that of Mahabharata is still haunting in our time . The political situation of Nepal was so precarious that time due to Rana regime there was the war. Country necessitated war for change but Koirala who was the follower of Mahatma Gandhi pursued serene way for political founding rather than hostilities. Koirala's quest of the serene world in the novel shows that he did not love to have the imposition of the war on the communities. Rather, he wanted to have a community that existed with the sense of harmony and peace. As Vanessa Sawyer states, "living in serenity is more like changing the habits of eating" (2005, p.124). It is the shift in the paradigm, it is the shift in the mode of thinking.

In *Modiain*, the specter of Nari is becoming body, a certain prodigious and voluptuous form of the spirit. Specter is like something:

As Marx himself spells out, and we will get to this, the specter is a paradoxical amalgamation, the becoming-body, a certain phenomenal and Carnal form of the spirit. It becomes, rather, some 'thing' that remains difficult to name; neither soul nor body, and both one and the other. (Derrida, 1994, p. 5)

So, specter is like something difficult to name. It's like non-present, present almost unnamable thing. We all play with ghost and specters. The specter of Mahabharata

war is not dead, the revolution took place in Nepal to throw Rana regime, to throw Monarchy. Prithivi Narayan Shah also conducted revolution to unify Nepal into one kingdom. Thus, the specter of Mahabharata war is haunting time and again. Ghost of Mahabharata war keeps on coming. Time changes but the epoch is not changed. Ghost is not seen in flesh and blood like in *Hamlet*. Even though in his ghost the king looks like himself the same happens with Koirala's Nari. Specter is the image of the image. Koirala's *Modiain* and the reference to the war of Mahabharat is also the association of the specter. Why did Koirala deal with the theme of war, the war of Mahabharat, an event that took place many years back and perhaps is the mythological instance? The speculation can be made about it from various perspectives, as one of the perspectives is that the presence of the specter. The themes recur because of the traumatized senses in the minds of the people. As the sense of the belatedness suggests, there are very themes left in the world of the literature and the philosophy that are rarely left untouched. "The belatedness is about what and when" (Barnaby, 2017, p. 5). It is about the quest for what and when as Barnaby suggests. The narrativization of the recurring themes in the new sheds is what the writers like Koirala had to do.

Spirit here means a definite power of transformation as in performance .The spirit comes by coming back that is revenant. A specter is always a revenant, one cannot control its comings and goings because it begins by coming back. The culmination of one is not the end of a certain thought of history. So, Koirala is also haunted by Mahabharata war. If the war is near Koirala remembers the Mahabharata war and its destruction. The writer seems like Art in *Maus* when Art is going to be father trauma haunts him on this he said "I can't believe I'm gonna to be a father in a couple of months. My father's ghost hangs over me" (Spiegelman,1991, p. 43). The concept like end of history, end of philosophy, last war were so usual like daily bread. This is like apocalyptic tone in philosophy. The vision of the end, the scene of the total collapse and the scenario representing the last day of the world are often seen in the literary scenes. *Modiain* contains the same sort of the apocalyptic scenario where the war of the Mahabharat sense is lurking over the characters in the novel and the end/doom is visualized.

Francis Fukuyama once said, "the end of coherent history" (2006, p. 12) but Derrida is responding to him the specter of Marx is still existing in the form of communism and industrialism then how can Marxism be dead?Marxism is haunting and haunting Europe. Similarly, the specter of Mahabharata war is haunting in all periods in the Indian subcontinent. The central question of this paper, as mentioned

elsewhere, is that why do the themes recur in the literary reproductions? Is it the 'I' like that of Marx in Europe and America? It must be that reason that the message of the war is present in Koirala, the writer of twentieth century.

Major note of Koirala was one war becomes the ideal for another war. War should be stopped and should let people to live in dignity and happiness. Even though people face the consequences of the war, they wish to avoid the war, the question is still fresh- why do the wars exist? One would not require the answers from Freud about the destructive and constructive impulses a person possesses. The other answer could be the idealization of a war. For example, the Nepali community as in *Modiain*, celebrates the beauty of the war of Mahabharat. The Nepali community takes the war as the role model, the war for the good of the people. Same is reiterated in the novel by Koirala. He means to show that people in the real lives do not love war. They believe that wars are not good to anyone. Still taking the war of Mahabharat as the ideal one, the killing of the bad ones for the rule of the good is another node of the questionable concern. This ambivalent concern of the people regarding the war is a serious concern for the discussion. However, Koirala's duplication, the discussion of the war of Mahabharat times and the discussion of Gita reminds us that the war is still with us. The great themes of war and the past epics cannot be forgotten soon, and such traumas in the past are repeated for various purposes.

In this 21st century, everyone has right to life, liberty and pursuit of happiness. If male members are killed in war, it affects the dignity and happiness of female. This should be understood even in the age of radical feminism. The suffering of females is the suffering of males. Their sufferings cannot be taken mutually exclusive to each other.

By showing the specter of Nari in *Modiain*, Koirala is effecting awareness in political leaders to bring them in right track. This specter is the reminder that the past ghosts are lurking over them and the leaders must be wise enough to distinguish the bad from the good ones. They should not mis-educate themselves with the burden of past events. The historical and the mythological concerns of the literary landscapes are repeated for the people to examine and identify the good and bad for themselves. This is so because the people must be wise enough for differentiation.

In terms of political performance Koirala seems like Mahatma Gandhi. To free India of English rule, Gandhi said, "India must not resort to violence. What we need to do is to sacrifice ourselves. It is a cowardly thought, that of killing others" (Gandhi,

1997, p. 5). Here the writer's conviction that the war should not be valorized is the similarity between Gandhi and himself. He is of the idea that the war and its idealization in the ages is all but a futile act. The wars are present in the history of the humanity. Their recurrence is the human folly. His discussion of the war of the Mahabharat times is the gentle reminder of the stupidity of the war that human beings got engaged with themselves.

Instead of using violence Gandhi, advocates for 'love force', 'soul force' and 'passive resistance'. Gandhi advocates for passive resistance as the highest and most powerful form of resistance. People need sacrifice instead of killing others. Independence can also be achieved without violence. It is apparent in Koirala's works that spiritual freedom is the foundation upon which political freedom is based. Gandhi also expressed similar view in Hindu Swaraj, "Political change must be secondary to spiritual evolution" (5).

Koirala's message of "Be good, don't be great" is analogous to "small is beautiful" (5) concept of Mahatma Gandhi. Small things hardly request disaster therefore they are beautiful. In the similar way, good people want peace and synchronization but great people have thrust for power. In the name of power and position, they invite disaster like the action of uncle Claudius in *Hamlet*, Durodhana's thrust for power in *The Mahabharata*. In *Macbeth*, Macbeth murders King Duncan of Scotland with the support of his wife for the thrust of power. Here great people are inviting disaster. The great people are blind to distinguish the difference between the good and bad because their madness in enjoying the power is what makes them very blind.

If the performers of *The Mahabharat* have performed in gallant and philanthropist way then the Mahabharata war would not have happened, only then the oriental world as a stage was safer for all. Koirala also insisted on nonviolent resistance to injustice. Violence can never answer, it is counterproductive. As Mahatman, Gandhi said, "The best way to find yourself is to lose yourself in the service of other" (Rudolph & Susanne, 1967, p. 4). If we act like Duryodhana's we are not acting as an true selves. "We didnot hope for anything from Duryodhana, our king, because he was stubborn and even ready to set the whole world on fire" (Koirala, 1964, p. 44).

Hindu philosophy performs in unworldly and god-oriented way. Its concentration is not on life and living, but on salvation. There is dichotomy in Hindu Philosophy: body versus soul, worldly versus unwordly and life versus, salvation. Buddha denies soul while Hinduism lays emphasis on it (Bose, 1887, p. 131). The

emphasis of Hindu philosophy is on soul, unwordly and salvation. Worldly, emotional and moral things are also imperative for human beings. But Hindu philosophy has no concern with the moral norms set by the societies. Thus, this religion is amoral in the lens of Modiain. The celebration of war in the religions is something that one needs to guard against. The idealization of the war in the religious texts needs to be checked. In the name of the religions, teaching violence is something that is very objectionable.

Conclusion

Much of the story of *Modiain* revolves around Nari's misfortune to endure in single life. The reality the warriors and Nari faced are darker than the darkest dreams. The darkness can be understood more vividly. The next morning there was not a single man left in the village. She heard that her father and brother had enlisted themselves in the army of the Pandava's. Her husband and brother in law were in the army of the Kaurava's who will kill whom? Who will win, or lose this, intrafamily war? She appeals to the God. The version gives a concrete image of the war.

In *Modiain* life is desecrated and sentimentalities are affronted like in holocaust death camps. Killing took place throughout Kuraksatra, unimagined level of violence was enforced in the war. The action convicts itself. There were corpses everywhere; killed like animals. It is like discriminated killing. Women felt the depth of fear and physical as well as psychological discomfort. Males were nearly finished in the war. Separation of husband and wife was an excess pain for both of them. War memories haunt in the mind of surviving race i.e. female. Psychologically, female became weak and abnormal. There should be narrativization and communication of trauma to make it normal. Nari has done so in the form of a ghost.

Unparalleled level of ferocity is subjected to the human race. Through the narrative of the war scene from specter point of view, it appeals to humanistic sense. It reveals the victimhood very clearly. It discourages us to do violence. It contributes to promote peace. We find the scene like bleakness of survivor and the feeling of loss. Women undergo starvation, constant surveillance and random violence. A difficult and sad future lies ahead for women. The events are deeply felt with pain when Nari appears in the form of spirit and starts narrating the story. Women feel guilty of living. This is because of war effect.

This account, therefore, shows colossal discomfort, terror, falling-out, unhappiness and shadow of war dangling in the notice of survivors. Women's life has become a museum of ordeal that contains huge expanse of sufferings and exertion.

The performativity of the suffering and the women go parallel in hand in hand and this paper has made an effort to show the same thing.

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