
TESTIMONY AND NARRATIVE OF PAHADI'S "THE TEARS OF TERROR"

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Abstract

This paper makes an attempt to analyze trauma and testimony in Kishor Pahadi's "The Tears of Terror" by applying cultural trauma perspectives. The story has brought some painful experiences of a conflict victim during the ten years Maoist conflict that took the lives of more than seventeen thousand innocent people. This article aims to bring the facts about conflicts and wars which have always brought destruction in human life, and later pain and suffering for those who survived the disaster, but such catastrophes can have a creative dimension upon the victims who have witnessed the events. These painful memories in the form of testimony can be a source for writing narratives which can help one understand history and many hidden facts – emotional attachments of the victims and of the perpetrators, that happened quite long ago. Wars fought in past have been talked about and brought out in narratives for a long time. Narrativizing the past conflict as it was has been considered an important task for writers. Bearing witness to such events and presenting them as testimony has become a crucial task for many literary works.

Keywords: *insurgency, narrative, remembering, testimony, trauma*

Introduction

Remembering past events one would mourn for what he or she has lost over the time. But, as Dominick Lacrapa mentions, complicated past should be disclosed truthfully in order for a process of working it through to be historically informed and understood, besides being effective ritually and politically "in creating both a livable society and a national collectivity" (44). Both victims and perpetrators should feel historically and emotionally appointed by the gravity of traumatic events they have survived and come out with painful experiences "to narrate the story and bear witness to the history" (Felman, "Education and Crisis", 15). Bearing witness and testifying what one has witnessed would have a crucial mode of presenting historical facts in the form of narratives. Testimony is seen to be composed of pieces of memory of occurrences that "have not settled into understanding or remembrance, acts that cannot be construed as knowledge not assimilated into full cognition, events in excess of our frames of references" (16). Inscribing one's life testimony in generic forms - the narrative of how the subject matters were unwittingly enacted and how testimony turned out to be critically important factor to unfold the mysterious past, would help conceive a focused avenue of inquiry and varied constellation of texts. I have taken a Nepali story, "The Tears of Terror" written by Kishor Pahadi and translated by Govind Raj Bhattarai focusing on the ten year Maoist insurgency and its atrocity on the citizenry. This essay centralizes its main concern on how this narrative as testimony helps one unfold the hidden

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testimonials to the readers at present time; and the narrator as a witness is seen bringing a fore the facts of this conflict.

Theoretical Analysis

Testimony as presented at court by the witnesses would be a good evidence for the judges to put forward their verdicts; which can help one narrativize in generic forms. Trauma has become essential in solving or resolving the difficult cases at the court too. Shoshana Felman has set out to develop the main features of the interaction of the law and trauma and when trauma is confronted in a courtroom, it is often inflicted with a particular judicial blindness that inadvertently repeats the trauma and reenacts its structure (*Juridical*, 67). Observing the emergence of this kind of relationship between testimony and trauma, it results from three interrelated twentieth-century occurrences, “discovery of psychoanalysis, unprecedented number of disastrous events on a mass scale, and unprecedented and repeated use of instruments of law to cope with the traumatic legacies and the collective injuries left by these events” (Hunt 1). That always leaves one in painful condition. The victims would not only need to survive to tell their stories, but they need “to tell their stories in order to survive” (Laub 63). The situation of being exposed to information may endanger to individuals and forgetting and misremembering can be adaptive to get relieve from the troublesome past – “chronic depression, masochistic life patterns, chronic anxiety and psychosomatic disease” (Krystal 77). The events that are processed and remembered will be related to the degree to which a negative event represents a betrayal by a trusted other “by motivating withdrawal or confrontation with the perpetrator, thus risking a relationship vital to the victim’s survival” (Deprieux 193). In this condition, a new concept deals with implications for the larger memory and trauma field particularly with regard to forgetting and misremembering events. Posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), “the psychiatric syndrome that arises out of the experience of trauma” (Brown 100), has been used to “describe symptomatic responses to trauma in relation to mental health, and the clinical object that ascribed evidentiary value to the idea that an event actually took place, has itself existed as a distinct clinical disorder for more than 40 years” (Stevens 1). It has seen the development of an extensive body of research and multiple clusters of investigation that grow up around it. Supporting the views, Kenneth V. Hardy opines, “Without a clear and descriptive language to describe this experience, those who suffer cannot coherently convey their pain, let alone heal” (25). This hidden trauma is closely tied to internalized devaluation and ultimately racial oppression.

The world is also not aloof from internal or external conflicts that later turned into terrorism, which ultimately left people battered severely over the last few decades. Terrorism defined as “premeditated, politically motivated violence perpetrated against non combatant targets by sub national groups or clandestine agents” (Iyer 2) along with foiled attacks and hoaxes, spontaneous hate crimes, most genocidal events, violent clashes between rival communities, attacks between two armed groups as well as counterterrorism operations by enforcement agencies. It has made people traumatic that can often claim more lives than terrorist incidents themselves. The victims’ experience would be a kind of atrophy to provide a link between individual and collective patterns of memory, but this memory would create the “given occurrence within the total lived experience of the subject or the community” (Newmark 237). The psychoanalytic perception of trauma can,

therefore, reinforce the value to language and literature in the process of handling traumatic events.

According to Anke Geertsma, traumatic narratives and testimonies are symbolic representation of the problems. For literature is the closest area where one can get to the real of trauma as she regards it as, "For psychoanalysis language and literature are valued because it is the place where trauma is constituted and exposed" (102). Traumatic events have the power to change a person's sense of self and safety in the world. The survivors – rape survivors, holocaust survivors, physical and mental abuse survivors attempt to make sense of their experience and pursue recovery from the damage maybe, through narratives, or self-help literature. Recounting the condition of the survivors, Ricki Thompson states, "This evolution of the narrator is the heart of why these narratives are tellable. . . Speaking through the personal narrative has become the most useful tool for survivors, accessing their memories in their journey to healing" (657). It is agreed that (re)living the experience through language is necessary. One of the major components of the recovery process is the establishment of a coherent personal narrative, testimony that not only fits with the survivor's memories and perceptions, but also it fits into the social constructions or cultural norms available to her.

The life story approach as a textual testimony "which can penetrate us like an actual life" (Felman, "Education and Crisis", 14) allows for a deep analysis of the transformation survivors experience through the act of narration. It is the (re)creation of self - one that is no longer a victim - that makes survivor narrators healing and beneficial. Readers' understanding of the psychological effects of trauma by war and conflict is benefitted by a detailed consideration of narratives written on periphery exploring the responses over the times and cultures.

Traumatic Testimony in "The Tears of Terror"

The fictional way of representing trauma has prompted an increasingly wide range of scholarship of writing. It is important to explore how national history and personal memory complement one another and how literature performs a recuperative function by allowing a verbalization of buried trauma as testimony in narrative. With the help of mourning, literature attempts to come to terms with the excruciating memories of past, question the ethical dimension attached to it and also "explores possibilities of healing through the process of reintegration with one's past" (Dutta 75). The historical facts or details always remain a fertile ground to weave the literary genres and to bring the fact to the people.

In exploring the history of various contexts such as of African slavery, Jewish Holocaust, Indo-Pak Wars and Vietnam War creating an abundance of literary testimony and pertaining to these painful historical events, it has been created to let one feel how painful it is to bear the suffering that one has to carry on while living his or her mayhem life. Kishor Pahadi's "The Tears of Terror" has explored the historical facts of Nepal's a decade-long insurgency in which common people had been sandwiched between the national security and rebels. They were lost in the mist of terrific past being traumatized being unable to identify his mates or foes; hence, remained escaping not from the rebels but from his own inner fear. The trauma they were pertaining on is unbearable and unspeakable to them.

Here, to present this condition, one typical character Chet dai, an innocent school teacher who had once been abducted away from his own home by the rebels and badly manhandled until he lost consciousness on the charge has been victims of “depression, sleep disturbances, repetitive dreams various chronic syndromes, and chronic anxiety” (Krystal 77). He had been witnessed by them “at chautara talking with the soldiers of Durga Battalion” (Pahadi 147), which has been a specimen to bring out the fact how innocent civilians were targeted without any reasons or treasons.

Having spent many days in the hospital for the treatment after being hauled by the rebels, he begins to resemble the rebels like Agni, one who had come in the group to kidnap him, in everyone and feared of all. Once on the way back home from the district headquarter for a trivial work, he was on a tea stall to sip a cup of tea, he happened see three young boys also sipping tea and asking for toilet. But he thought of them as the one who had come to abduct him and badly hauled him until “his family called out the villagers, the boys ran away and that saved his life”(148). Remembering the past traumatic event would make him obsess on the fact from which he could not escape, as in the words of Cathy Caruth, “The experience of trauma, the fact of latency, would thus seem to consist, not in the forgetting of a reality that can hence never be fully known; but in an inherent latency within the experience itself” (*Trauma Exploration* 187). On the whole, Chet dai is found roaming round on the experience that encroaches him time and again and he has been “on the return to origins in memory and on the return of the repressed” (Caruth, *Unclaimed*, 13) for a long time looking for a settlement of his unspeakable pain.

The condition of Chet dai has been noticed deteriorating in every step he is pursuing. Once he is seen returning home from the market, “the thought of running across a sort of gang fills him with terrible fear” (Pahadi 148). The faces of Agni and his gang always resemble in every stranger he encounters. Chet dai “was terrified at the thought of being alone all the way” (149). As he saw one walking in front of him, first he became happy having got a company in the dark, but suddenly the reminiscence of the rebels rushed into his mind, he even could not identify his own student who greeted him saying “Namaskar sir” (149). He even shuddered with the situation whether to accept it or not,

All once, the man cast a glance at Chet dai. He was alert to his presence. As he say Chet dai in front of him, he put out the cigarette burning in his hand hastily and greeted – Namaskar sir!

The man did greet Chet dai. He did not happen to be the boy who had once grabbed his hair. Rather, that was the boy whom Chet dai had taught sometimes in the past.

Chet dai could not even reply his greeting. He stood defeated and with eyes welled with the tears of terror, he kept on staring at his student. (149)

The very memory that leads one in the grip of horrible past would not let him realize that it was past which would not do anything in the present, rather, the painful memories encroach him time and again. Either bearing witness or presenting testimony in the form of narrative and other literary writing, one would get more relief from “trauma which needs to be healed or cured for retrieval of the past” (Pandey 136) and can live peacefully for a long time by “testifying to a

representation's relation to a (traumatic) event/actuality" (Radstone 12) and by resulting in the pathologization of all life lived through trauma with the help of language and representation.

Conclusion

In short, painful memory of the catastrophic events, if not narrativized whether orally or in written form, would encroach the victims and perpetrators for a long time. It is very important to narrativize such memories which can help in historiography as testimony for coming generations to know how the events happened and how the people worked through such occurrences. Narratives written on Nepal's ten years Maoists insurgency, if written from the heart not exaggerating the facts, would delineate the testimonials to the readers to cope with the disastrous past.

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