



Symbolical and Metaphorical Representation of People's Movement and Quest for Peace in Dhakal's "Mother and the Motherland"

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Abstract

This article analyzes trauma in Narayan Dhakal's "Mother and the Motherland" (*Janani Janmabhūmischha*) by applying psychological aspects of trauma theory propagated by Cathy Caruth to study the symbolical references for the consequences of Second Movement (2006). But, it has tried to bring out the crucial facts of the Movement analyzing the symbolic and metaphoric aspects in the story. Trauma theory has been used to formalize the historical events which people after long span of time would have forgotten and the literary writing would be a testimony of this historical event. It has been used to focalize those events in the literary forms. The story as a piece of art has stood as a symbolical and metaphorical discourse to scrutinize the minor details that might have happened around two decades ago. Caruth's classic form of trauma theory has been applied as a medium to pinpoint the painful experiences of a dutiful security person as well as to evaluate writing the past event as a testimony would resolve the issue or exasperate the situation further.

Keywords: Democracy, metaphor, People's Movement, symbol, trauma

Introduction

Stories of Conflict and War, an anthology of twenty-five short stories written on the periphery of the Maoist insurgency and the Second People's Movement that introduced republican democracy in Nepal. These stories are symbolic and

indirectly suggest different analytical perspectives of traumatic experiences whether of rebels or of security force during the People's Movement. These stories, on the one hand, show the real pictures of the war and its bitter consequences upon the ordinary people,

Symbolical and Metaphorical Representation of People's Movement and Quest for Peace

but, on the other hand, along with “its indirect impact in the life of the people they minutely portray the underlying experience” (Bhattarai, 2007, p. 12). With the help of symbols like statues, pillars, or shadow, the story writers have tried to bring the traumatic pains endured either by the security forces or the rebels. Such people whether in security force or in rebel are compelled to live in a misery. However, these grief-stricken people are seen anticipating for peace and better life in future in spite of several troubles. These stories mainly focus on the trauma and their anticipation for peace and stability in society.

Many political, cultural and social upheavals that have left a lot of the war victims in trauma can be good resources for writing narratives. Their traumatic experiences of violence as “the collective memories of the involved groups” (Hamburger et al, 2021, p. v) would be a narrative tool which can be “represented as new genre of Nepali literature” (Hutt, 2012, p. 111). Literary depictions of trauma “function to bear witness and testify to traumatic experience, since they break the silence and also redefine discourse, challenging memory and identity” (Barrette et al., 2011, p. ix). The narratives written about such atrocities, on the other hand, might become very “inauthentic because they try to reduce the violence to the language of feud” (Das and Nandi, 1985, p. 189), which would rather create a problem and that escalates the full scale of violence. It, ultimately would not help establish a peaceful society out of such rigorous atmosphere.

Dhakal's “Mother and the Motherland” (Janani Janmabhumischha) has been analyzed bringing the trauma

experienced by the major characters in the stories. Though this story pictures the bitter traumatic experiences of a soldier while bearing responsibilities for the nation and family. With the help of some symbols and metaphors, the writer has been successful in portraying the trauma of the war-victims during the Maoists' People's War. However, Dhakal has villainized the Maoist rebels naming them ‘terrorists’ who have created terror not only among people but also in the minds of the security personnel. Besides, he has not maintained a balance in portraying the characters' trauma by aligning to one side and demonizing another one, which, ultimately would help establish peace and stability in the war-affected society.

Caruth and Other Theorists' Stand on Trauma: A Theoretical Perspective

Trauma, as it perpetuates, brings forth the dimensions of social, political, historical as well as ethical issues which subsequently make the victims penetrate the events time and again. According to Pandey (2009), it is during mid-1990s trauma has been converged with other disciplines such as sociology, political science, philosophy, literature etc. which eventually help it emerge as trauma theory (p.125). He further explains, “Trauma theory concerns itself primarily with the temporary delay as the discourse of history which raises the question of the crisis of truth” (p.125). In seeking out the ethical facts of trauma, historical facts help one grasp the details. The conversion of trauma into narrative can help the story to be verbalized and communicated, “to be integrated into one's own and others' knowledge of the past” (Caruth, “Trauma”, 1995, p. 153). It should accept the pain that has

Symbolical and Metaphorical Representation of People's Movement and Quest for Peace

affected the victims. Then, he or she can feel relief.

For Caruth (1995), it is literature as testimony which is one of the ways to tell one another about aspects of traumatic experience that cannot be contained by ordinary modes of expression and that may even exceed human understanding. Sharing and unfolding the knots about the past traumatic experiences can have some soothing features in reconciling with the warring sides and coming in meeting points, so that both sides can live together. While bringing the aesthetics of trauma and post-traumatic testimonies, Lacrapa (2014) is in opinion that in elucidating trauma and its aftereffects in culture and people, psychoanalytic concept is perpetuated with historical analysis and sociocultural as well as political critique (p.1). This aspect of analyzing traumatic experiences would be an ethical dimension to formalize the painful events. People no longer would remain brooded over their ethos and pathos, rather they would like to be free from such horrible past.

On the other hand, while highlighting on the importance of traumatic events which would bring some good sides to writers, Edkins (2006) in her "Remembering Relationality Trauma Time and Politics" states that the memory of the organized violence of genocide, slaveries, wars, famines, and terrorism has been an important site for political and literary investment (p.100). According to her, writers would have the traumatic memory a good source of creating their own world for analyzing not only commemoration of such events, but also the practices of redistribution, recovery and reconciliation for their reawakening (p.100). Each one would bring forth

important tenets of writing trauma. It can also be used to illustrate rhetoric used in the narratives written about wars and conflicts.

Ethical dilemma of Traumatic Experience of Security Personnel: Critical Analysis

Dhakal cannot foster peace because indirectly it stokes feelings of revenge and therefore a vicious cycle of revenge. Trauma seen in these stories is what the people experience as "unsupportable, horrifying, or overwhelming" (Humburger, 2021, p. 4). As a part of social fact, it "points to some underlying social experience which can be sociologically reflected" (p.4). But, on the other hand, the restraint in keeping to just a psychological impact due to the disruption in people's everyday life makes the atmosphere look morally monstrous. A compelling moral appeal as available in the story augurs well for peace.

Dhakal's "Mother and the Motherland" (*Janani Janmabhūmischha*), a story which shows pitiable condition of a soldier who is very patriotic to the nation, but at the same time confused with the terror created during the curfew in the area, shows how much the security force were frightened while performing their duty and how much darkness is filled in their mind that they see only terrorists in everyone or everything. The shadow is a symbol for creating a terror in the soldier's mind. It also appeals for peace has been destroyed, which indirectly symbolizes how much the contemporary Nepali society was far from peace and stability. The writer, while bringing the traumatic facts of the soldier, has used the language of 'other' by villainizing the rebels, which would not help establish

Symbolical and Metaphorical Representation of People's Movement and Quest for Peace
peace in the society.

The main focus of the story is the trauma of a soldier who has been on duty at midnight for the last three nights. He felt quite easy last two nights because in “both nights he was with his soldier friends patrolling in group” (Dhakal, 2007, p. 112). But this night he feels very insecure to himself because though his fellow soldier is also patrolling but he is two hundred meter far from him, he is not visible due to pitched darkness around. Besides, he hears a shrieking sound which mentally disturbs him the whole night. He supposes he has seen a shadow which might have made this sound, which he is not sure whether it is real or illusion. His seniors frequently visit on patrolling and remind him of his duty saying “*Janani janmabhumischha swargadapigariyasi* that is mother and motherland are greater than heaven” (p.114). He is determined to his duty. The memory of his family whom he misses a lot and has not met for the last seven years. He is “being overwhelmed by such feelings” (p. 114). He is very afraid of the still darkness of this night as “in front of his eyes was left only shadow and shadow” (p.114). Later, he feels the shadow is moving faster and realizes it is not his illusion rather “it was clear in the dark and it was moving towards him form about fifty meters far. Now it made his hair stand on end” (p.114). Supposing it a terrorist (Maoist), he warns him if he moves further, he would shoot. But, the shadow claims himself Buddha, Pashupatinath and Laxmi Prasad Devkota and asks for a cigarette. As a dutiful soldier, he could not believe him and shoots him. The shadow “screamed out and collapsed onto the floor and not a single sound came, only the natural smell of the gunpowder floated in the

air” (p.115). After this incident, he, no longer, feels fear while being in his duty.

This story is full of trauma of the soldier who represents all the security force during the emergency of the People's War. On the one hand, he has to bear responsibility by heart believing “*Janani janmabhumischha swargadapigariyasi*” that is mother and motherland are greater than heaven” (p.114) ignoring the responsibilities towards his wife and children whom he has not met for many years, on the other hand, at every moment he can't feel relief even seeing a shadow, he is mentally disturbed. He supposes he has heard a shrieking sound from a shadow, which is only his illusion but he supposes this shadow is of a Maoist terrorist who has come during the curfew; and he has been instructed to shoot at sight at anyone. The shadow's claiming himself as Buddha, Mahakavi Devkota and Pashupatinath is only his illusion due to continuing duty without proper rest and food in time. His timid and fatigued mind's anticipating all these figures symbolizes how much traumatized the soldier has been going through for a long time. His mind is encroached with patriotism and nationalism and forced to ignore the responsibility towards his family; which seems to have made him go through such illusionary figures. Shooting at the shadow which was claiming Buddha, Devkota and Pashupatinath and whom he supposes to be a Maoist and taking it to “the desolate area” (p.116) by an armored vehicle would signify the end of chance of prevailing peace and stability in the disturbed society. With such an instance, the writer has tried to show “an intellectual stand of peace and mocks at the situation that tries to worship non-violence or peace shooting at humanity

Symbolical and Metaphorical Representation of People's Movement and Quest for Peace and Buddhism" (Bhattarai, 2007, p.6). It is a great satire that everyone anticipates for peace and the security force shoot at the Buddha, the Mahakavi and God Pashupatinath, which indicates the chance of end of peace in near future.

How much the soldier is traumatized while remaining on sentry for three nights stand up on duty without blinking his eyes can be seen from his mentality of judging the illusionary shadow which "could even frighten any devil more horrific than the black night itself" (Dhakal, 2007, p. 112). Remembering his wife at fourteen past two at night "in the light of the armored truck" (p. 113) is a way of consoling his timid and fatigued mind so that he could have some relief and time could be passed. He misses his wife by looking at the watch which he had bought at Hong Kong bazaar. He thinks his wife would be happy with the watch he had bought to her at the same time. He smiles at himself "in the dark but his smile turned sour in no time" (p. 113). His missing of celebrating Dashain with his wife and children is a way to relief and it is many years "they have not celebrated Dashain together" (p. 113). These instances can be taken to justify the traumatic condition that every security person has been going on during the conflict with the rebels or during emergency period.

The writer with the help of traumatic characters like the soldier mentioned in the story is seen narrating their painful condition and they "see and relive the insistent reality of the past" (Caruth, "Recapturing the Past", 1995, p. 152). Such memories always remain overwhelming experiences which should be integrated with existing mental schemes and transmitted to

narrative language. To come out of such "reappearance of traumatic memories in the form of flashbacks, reenactments, and so on" (Van der Kolk and Hart, 1995, p. 176), one has to narrate the memories, to look back at what happened, which he or she "has given it a place in his life history, his autobiography, and thereby in the whole of his personality" (p. 176). He comes out of the trauma by shooting the shadow, the soldier gets relief to the condition which induces his pain. Finally, he is able to face the challenges awaiting ahead.

The story is written on the background of the curfew imposed during the second democratic movement. It is about an important event of history which is always written about glorious events ignoring the trauma of ordinary people of what Caruth (1995) says, "their history is repression" (*Unclaimed*, p.14). History should bring the traumatic events that happened in the life of ordinary people who become the victims of "overwhelming experience of sudden and catastrophic events" (p. 11). In this context, the story is successful in bringing a fore the real experience of ordinary people like the soldier who is dutiful, patriotic and always ready to sacrifice to maintain law and order in the society. There must be the description of trauma and other painful events happened in ordinary people's lives along with the events of developments and glories to be true testimony of real victims of a good cause. For this, Dhakal is successful.

The story is successful in bringing out the trauma of the soldiers who are presented as true victims of the war but the Maoists have been presented as terrorists who "blast the transformers" (Dhakal, 2007, p. 113). So there would only be dark and they could easily break

Symbolical and Metaphorical Representation of People's Movement and Quest for Peace

the curfew and attack on the security force. Maoists are in every soldier's mind as terrific figures and they don't hesitate to kill them even if they claim themselves as Budhha, Mahakavi and God Pashupatinath. Dhakal has pointed the Maoist rebels responsible for the soldiers' difficult life, and the story has been written supporting the security force while othering the Maoists. But as per middle voice "the appropriate way to write trauma" (Lacrapa, 2014, p. 19) propagated by Lacrapa, the story could have been written showing some dark sides of the security force and good sides of the rebels too, which the writer is failure. The writer has brought out the historical facts of ten years long insurgency that killed more than fifteen thousand lives and many others displaced as well as millions have badly been injured mentally and physically. While bringing out such facts, the writer is not very conscious in describing the event supporting one while villianizing another side. The writer seems to ignite the rebels' emotion to conflict.

"Mother and the Motherland" (*Janani janmabhumi schha swargadapigariyasi*) has ultimately brought out the trauma of the security personnel who remain devoting themselves on their duty whole day and night ignoring their family. They are always ready even to sacrifice themselves to maintain law and order in the country. The life of security personnel is always at stake that anytime they may be killed. The life they are living is not easy in itself. But the curfew during the emergency period to impose law and order against the threats caused by the Maoists and the order by their seniors are some great challenges to them. The writer is successful in bringing out these painful facts. But, he has shown the only

dark sides of the Maoists who were also devoting themselves for the betterment of the society. Subsequently, the writer seems to be one-sided in maintaining the balance in bringing out the facts of the insurgency, which would not help establish peace and stability in the society.

Conclusion

There are many things the storytellers can manipulate to bring out the truth. The situation in which different symbols and metaphors are used in the story is very meaningful and bears truth for the readers. This story is written to bring out the traumatic experiences during the People's War when it was in climax or when the emergency period was going on and all provisions of human right were at stake. It clearly shows how much traumatized ordinary people like the soldier and the villager have been while bearing their responsibility whether for the nation or the family. They suffer physically and mentally without any serious crimes or mistakes they have committed. However, Dhakal has written this story to intensify the tension of the Maoists because it has othered them by villianizing as terrorists. It is not able to bring both sides' sentiments in a balance and the rebels cannot accept it as a testimony of their struggle to bring change in the country; which would not subsequently help establish peace and stability in society. The story is written about the pain and suffering of the ordinary people bearing their responsibilities focusing on their traumatic experience. While narrativising the traumatic experiences in the story, Dhakal remains confined himself to narrativization of the difficulties caused by the People's War. The traumatic impact on ordinary

Symbolical and Metaphorical Representation of People's Movement and Quest for Peace

citizens without lapsing into a language of feud is seen to fail in achieving authentic balance between victimization

and villainization (a case of social or cultural trauma).

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