

“Now You Can Return Home”: a Narrativized Account of an Insurgency and Pursuit of Peace and Solidarity

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Abstract

This paper analyzes the painful plight and longing for peace and solidarity among the war affected people during the decade long Maoist insurgency which escalated the conflict for a long time confiscating the lives of thousands of people from both fighting groups and other sandwiched innocent denizens. During this insurgency, the state's functional bodies were not working, common people were on the dilemma of either living or leaving their places and were longing for a lasting peace and solidarity so that they could return home and live once again in the same way. In this paper, I have analyzed some fundamental questions based on the different grounds from Madhuban Paudel's story "Now You can Return Home": Why are the people like Sarad and Mukunda victimized during the conflict? Why is peace important factor for the sustainable development of the country? How would peace and solidarity be prevailed in the war affected society? I have discussed these questions in this article with the reference with historical background of Nepal's sociopolitical scenario, peace and trauma theory.

Keywords: *insurgency, narrativization, peace, solidarity, war*

Introduction

In this article, I am concerned with the issues of common people who are on the verge of living and leaving their birthplaces in search of safety and economic facilities for their families and themselves. Being concerned about such burning issue during and after the insurgency, many writers have written different stories based on the suffering and sorrows of the people either those who involved in the conflict – rebels and security personnel and those who remained sandwiched between both fighting groups – common populace. Stories of Conflict and War, an anthology of twenty five Nepali short stories written about the insurgency translated and edited by Govind Raj Bhattarai, reveals some tenuous facets of The People's War's violence: detaining innocent people, abducting and forcing them to pay a huge amount of money as donation and meeting with various arbitrary punishments. Likewise, arresting innocent people while having meal or lying in bed after the whole day's hard labor or returning home "tended to resort to extreme tactics to spread fear"

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(Baral, 2006, p.270) those days. The life of such people was badly crippled in the violence. Moreover, the panic did not end here, they were beaten to death on the charge of being spied or informers. The victims had “nowhere to go and question, sue or appeal for justice” (Bhattarai, 2007, p. 10). Mostly male were the target, however, their wives, mothers and small children, being desperately helpless, were all exploited and harassed mentally and physically. These innocent people undergoing with traumatic experiences and being terror stricken became “insane, lost memory or went mad” (p.10). But these grief-stricken people still anticipated for better life in future in spite of several troubles they were facing in their life which some Nepali writers have tried to narrativize in the form of stories which would better delineate the predicament.

Sometimes, the horrific and terrific events can be creative after some time. They would be a part of historical phenomena. Many political, cultural and social upheavals that have left a lot of victims in trauma can be good resources for writing narratives. Their painful traumatic experience of violence would be an instrument and purpose of the narration 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). It is in the engagement with writing that “the unspeakable emerges from the aporia in consciousness and releases its repressive energy” (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 in establishing a peaceful society and help escalate the full scale of violence. By reading and analyzing such narratives, one would feel contented with the narration and could internalize the events, hence forget the previous enmity.

In this context, Madhuban Paudel’s “Now You can Return Home” though written about unspeakable pain, arbitrary abduction, murder, rape, molestation, and trauma of innocent people due to the People’s War inflicted by the then Nepal Communist Party, Maoist for about ten years mostly in the hinterlands of Nepal, shows the bitter pictures of Nepali society. The writer has narrativized the unspeakable trauma of the victims very distinctly by bringing the horrific pictures of the insurgency. However, Paudel is able to depict the story very objectively neither aligning nor opposing any conflicting forces. Being neutral witness of horrific past events that once engulfed the whole Nepali citizenry, he seems to succeed in making an authentic balance in the narrativization which makes the undertone of peace and harmony sound genuine. Weaving the plot on the periphery of the War and its impact on the lives of innocent people, he has not brought a fore the very traumatic situation of these working class people by othering one group, rather he does not seem to be aggravating the situation and anticipating for peace and harmony in the war-affected societies.

Decade-long Insurgency and Its Impacts

In less than a decade, the Maoist insurgency instigated by the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) has affected the socio-economy and culture of Nepali society. It spread armed conflict across the country with severe consequences among the people, which consequently reshaped Nepal's political environment irrevocably. But their political aims are still questioned, and not enough is known about their structure and strategy. The background of the Maoist insurgency was "the rural communities where the state presence was very nominal or absent. They gradually expanded their numbers by attracting the people who were excluded from the mainstream development process" (Aryal, 2008, p. 10). After understanding the sentiment, they led a rebellion known as "People's War" which was later named as the Maoist Movement that began in 1996 with a political purpose to throw out the feudal socio-economic structure of Nepali society and establish a republic state.

This decade-long insurgency and counterinsurgency claimed "more than sixteen thousand lives, approximately forty thousand families displaced internally, and thousands were crossing over to India" (Joshi, 2014, p.1). The insurgency costs not only the death of guerrillas but also the destruction of approximately four thousand police stations and government offices. The opportunity costs of lost output "counted more than 3 percent of current GDP (p.1). It is the cause of unexpected death tolls a great mass of ordinary denizen as Aryal (2008) claims, "It has adversely affected the social organizations and cultural life. The networks and neighborhood relationships that bound communities are disintegrating because of fear, distrust, and loss of self-confidence (p.11). The consequences of this insurgency was basically on women, children, political cadres, teachers, students, clan and caste. It was also on ethnic relatives who were inclined to be in destitute.

Adversely, many of them were retaliated to the Maoist Movement in the motives of taking revenge against the atrocities imposed upon them in the name of decapitating the rebellion in different remote areas. The plight and predicament of survivors who were voiceless due to the Maoists or the state security force, varied from district to district and village to village. This forced resettlement "dispersed and fragmented communities, dismantled patterns of social organizations and interpersonal ties; kinship groups became scattered as well" (p.12). The displacement of people from their own places is another worst issue that they had to strand along the streets of Indian cities or the district headquarters facing very spiteful and secluded position. The higher the populace "worries about the war, the fewer security forces they have to maintain in the operation" (Joshi, 2014, p.55). On the consequence of such horrible situation, thousands of people with constant fear and threats left villages in the pursuits of safety and better economic prospects. Aryal (2008) further explains, "There are also the cases where Maoists themselves have campaigned against traditional cultural ceremonies as economically wasteful and socially unprogressive. Furthermore, there are many incidences where ethnic and indigenous people have been

treated as impure, drunkards and unclean by the Maoists” (p.13). As the time was getting on, the predicament of their life was worsening. They were forced to either live in the shadow of the terror from both fighting forces or to leave their own places for some unknown destination which may be delineated to the abroad migration for sustaining their internal and external pathos imposed upon them due to the ongoing conflict.

Peace as a Way Out

Peace is always taken as a broad and elusive concept because everybody thinks about it and takes it in his or her own way, hence it is a “subjective or intersubjective concept as different individual actors or groups of individuals define it in distinctive ways” (Tanebe, 2016, p.1). As far as inner peace is concerned to uplift one’s sorrow, it is inherently important to notice how it works on a disturbed mind. It serves “as a means of obtaining verbal consensus-it is hard to be all-out against peace” (Galtung, 1969, p.167). So it remains as “a non-dualistic peace based on the practice of multiple functions of mind–contemplative mind, a deep cognitive transformation framed by an interdependent, interpenetrating understanding of reality (Tanebe, 2016, p.2). Having such condition, one may lead his or her life to an ultimate inseparability between one’s own well-being and happiness and that of others, which would ultimately to inspire an effort to “gratify the basic needs of all and promote the freedom and justice and that of others equally” (p.1). It can motivate all conflict affected people to the path of peace and solidarity among all. The most important to explore the factors for the survivors is to notice “the political and economic discrimination against the group that was involved in the war on the opposition side that would diminish chances for peace” (Gurses and Rost, 2013, p.469). The intensity of the war and its humanitarian causes i.e. deaths, displacement, and assassination may significantly to influence the duration of post-war peace. Taken together as a consequence, it shows that the way fighting groups should interact with each other after a war is a more important factor than the level of violence during the war. Peace and co-existence are possible in the aftermath of conflicts.

Narrativization of Pathos of the Victims and their Integrity to Solidarity

Paudel’s “Now You can Return Home”, written on the background of time when the People’s War was in peak and people were forced to leave home on the charge of being spy or informer and to spend their life in foreign land remaining away from family for a long time, shows how such people would be in trauma and expect for peace as soon as possible. Weaving the plot in this situation, Paudel as a neutral observer of the conflict has tried to make a balance in bringing out the facts. He has not villainized any groups, rather has objectively described the situation because the victims as presented in the story are the victims of the war not of any particular groups, and always hope for the end, so they can return home and get united with their family members after a long time. People as victimized ones and their situation as presented in the stories are procured in a harmonious

way from which one can't escape the chances of peace and solidarity to live in the society once again after the end of the conflict.

The story begins with Sarad, the protagonist of the story with his friend Mukunda who are in Saudi Arabia “working at first the loaders and then as the drivers of the light vehicles, and heavy drivers for the last five years” (Paudel, 2007, p.99) and have not gone back home because of the insurgency. Actually, Sarad was “an ordinary school teacher” (p.98) in his village and once he was abducted by Maoist guerillas led by a lady who was once his friend and working as a school supervisor. In an encounter with the security force, she died and he fled away from there. Sarad “hiding sometimes in the attic and sometimes by the granary” (p.98) of his home, not in the condition to stay home, “had been tagged both as a spy and a terrorist at the same time” (p.98), and finally decided to go abroad. Even his family could not live in the village and migrated to a safer place. For such a long time, remaining away from his family, he was grief-stricken as “his heart would brim with painful experience of separation from his family” (p.99). He is even panicked hearing “the selfsame strike, demonstration, curfew, vandalism and burning tyres” (p.99) and other extortions happening in the country. Ultimately, Sarad and Mukunda hear that the Second People's Movement started and “democracy restored in Nepal” (p.99). They feel very happy and think that now they can return home.

The story is able to bring out the true picture of Nepali society when Nepali society was sandwiched between government force and Maoist rebels, and neutral people like Sarad had to flee away from home and spend a long time in abroad away from his family. It has brought out the trauma of war victims “whose traces cannot be effaced and haunt like a ghost” (Caruth, *Unclaimed*, 1995, p.20). These people, having fled away from the country, always remain in trauma longing for better days to come, so they can return home safely. Aryal (2008) has further delineated the situation like this:

Maoist revolution of Nepal is viewed as an achievement by many with regard to women's participation in the public spheres including the Army. It identifies women as a specific interest group and aims to incorporate them into the epic post-revolutionary development efforts. In the Maoist movement emancipation of women was linked to the idea of liberating women from the constraints of the patriarchal social order. Women's emancipation constituted one of the ideological issues and the women's units both in the political and military wings had a legitimate role in promoting this principle. One can clearly notice that participation of women in the public sphere including the politics was a significant change in the history of Nepal that happened after the revolution. (p.34)

Trauma of such people can have relief of some “wounding experience in daydreams and nightmares, flashbacks and hallucination, and in a compulsive seeking out of similar

circumstances” (Erikson, 1995, p.184) and they would withdraw “into a kind of protective envelope, a place of mute, aching loneliness” (p.186). Being traumatized from the situation, Sarad settles in the attic and granary and could not cough loudly “for the fear that his daughter would hear that” (Paudel, 2007, p.98). The outside world for him would become “the breach in the mind’s experience of time, self and the world” (Caruth, Unclaimed, 1995, p. 4). His fleeing away from the village and reaching abroad would be a relief for sometimes, not a solution because he remains feeling “giddy at the very thought of gruesome past” (Paudel, 2007, p.98), and his past gruesome traumatic life would always come back “repeatedly in the nightmares and repetitive actions” (Caruth, Unclaimed, 1995, p. 4). Sarad has been going on with such condition.

The flashback of the “gruesome past” (Paudel, 2007, p.98), Sarad is going through, can give him “a form of recall that survives at the cost of willed memory or of the very continuity of conscious thought” (Caruth, “Trauma...”, 1995, p.152), which would help him get relief. Sharing painful past to others can help the people like Sarad and Mukunda “move away from the experience of shock by reintegrating it into a stable understanding of it” (p.154). Narrating it to someone or narrativizing it in written form would make the event “to be verbalized and communicated, to be integrated into one’s own, and others’ knowledge of the past” (p.153). And one would have capacity to elide the past and return to normalcy which will instigate the chances of living in peaceful way forgetting their past feud.

People living in the shadow of terror and horror in the hinterlands of Nepal have been in the expectation of peaceful life. Returning to normal life for peace and solidarity would always require some fundamental issues as Baidhawy (2007) put forward like this:

... emphasizing the fourth pillar of education (three others are how to learn, how to do, and how to be)—how to live together with others in the collective consciousness of religious diversity; encouraging sincere human relationships through a spirit of modesty, equality, mutual trust, and understanding; fostering respect for similarities, differences, and uniqueness; modeling close relationships and interdependence that value being open minded, listening to each other, practicing tolerance towards different religious perspectives, resolving conflict through creative inter-religious dialogue, promoting reconciliation through forgiveness, and espousing non-violent action. (p.1)

Once both warring groups would realize how the conflict happened and realize their past errors and hurdles they were once in, peace and solidarity can be possible and once again the normalcy would be prevailed.

The story has been written to not show the condition of supporting one and villainizing another. Characters in the story are not seen living in hatred with antagonistic feeling to

others or othering the opposite group. Expressions “like ‘violence’, ‘strife’, ‘exploitation’ or at least ‘conflict’, ‘revolution’ and war should gain much higher frequency to mirror semantically a basically non-harmonious world” (Galtung, 1969, p.167). In such condition, there would be some chance for one to live in peace; which may ultimately help all live in mutual solidarity and reconciliation. The writer is seen as a neutral observer keeping himself aloof from both warring groups. Here, in this story, Lacrapa’s (2014) concept of middle voice can be taken as way to make a balance while writing the story about the conflict. He further says, “. . . the middle voice does indeed harbor an affirmative or even utopian dimension” (p.31/2). Paudel, as a neutral observer of the conflict has brought out the fact of the Nepali society neither supporting the security forces nor opposing the Maoist rebels who have raised the weapons against the foundation.

While bringing out the traumatic facts of Nepali society, Paudel has not used the prose of otherness on the other alienating either group, it has become successful in better measuring the depth of human emotion to each other. The language of revenge and sacrifice has not been used and writing literary works about trauma neutrally has turned into factual narrative, which would not embark hostility and enmity in the society. Pandey (2009) is of the opinion that the politics of language of violence should not be chauvinistic; and the writers of trauma should employ the language which should neither reduce the specificity of the experience nor should nullify the possibilities of co-existence. It should rather develop a humanistic, critical consciousness in pacifying immemorial feuds, hatred; not the notion of separation and partition (p.136). This story is ultimately able to help establish a peaceful and co-existing society as “a major part of a scientific strategy” (Galtung, 1969, p.168) even after the blood-shedding rebellion in Nepali society at the end as the narrator mentions:

The headings and sub-headings such as “The End of People’s War, All have Made Themselves Public, The Weapons Are Yet to Be Laid Down, The Restoration of the Parliament” and so on had covered half of the page. In front of his eyes were reeling his brother, sister-in-law, their children, his wife and his daughter as well as the ancestral house in Dandagaun. (Paudel, 2007, p.100)

Despite several obstacles faced by Sarad throughout the narrative, the story ends with a very good message that the country prevails with peace and reconciliation and once again it would return to normalcy and those people like Sarad and Mukunda who had left their village for safety and economic resource can return their places and live harmoniously with each other forgetting the painful past.

“Now You can Return Home” is an account of the conflict-hit Nepali society of around 20 years ago, highlighting the bitter picture of youths’ compulsion whether to join the force or flee away to foreign land. It better illustrates the dilemma among the young people and their mentality. It is able to bring out the fact objectively without aligning

to any groups, but presenting the situation with the help of middle voice propagated by Lacrapa, the story teller is successful to establish a balance to keep both sides' principle of fighting. The story ends not mentioning who won or who lost, but simply illustrating some headlines of a newspaper. It would not be the loss or victory of any fighting group, rather of all Nepali people. Though written about the trauma of the conflict victims, it shows the ultimate outcome of the Nepali politics – restoration of democracy for peace and stability. It is possible for warring groups to live together in one place following the end of the war. Even after particularly violent bloody wars, peace between the groups is possible. What seems to matter more, in this analysis, is what happens after the war ends. Political and economic discrimination would be the most robust factor in influencing whether the peace will last. Discriminatory state policies against “aggrieved groups and exclusionary institutions would sharply increase the risk of conflict to recur once again” (Gurses and Rost, 2013, p. 483). Repressive state policies which are always vulnerable not only to enhance the risks of initial war in the society but also depress the chances for sustaining the peace afterwards. Everyone responsible for this would be conscious.

Conclusion

Paudel's “Now You can Return Home” written about the war, conflict and victims and their painful traumatic life: fleeing away from home, hiding from being kidnapped or shot, escaping from opposite groups and wandering here and there looking for their lost relatives and better life, has brought out the facts neutrally neither aligning one nor othering another group, which would definitely help both groups come together and live in peace and reconciliation forever. Such texts would always help each one related to the insurgency feel better and forget their traumatic past life which would make them feel sorry for themselves. Ultimately, they would help establish peace and harmony in the society. War and conflict can deepen the tensions and reinforce political crisis. The government should alleviate the fear of war affected people like Sarad and Mukunda with carefully targeted policies and institutions that lay the groundwork for peaceful coexistence. The results should show that avoiding discrimination and putting in place institutional guarantees for political, social and economic participation may contribute to reducing the risk of a new war. Such policies, in the long run, can help to de-politicize the targeted groups.

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