



Commemorating the Glorious Past of Guerillas: An Analysis of Memoirs of Maoist Guerillas



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ABSTRACT

This article aims to analyze Tara Rai Anmol's memoir work *Chapamar Yuvatiko Dayari* (Diary of a Guerrilla Girl) and Nabin Jirel's *Bhishan Dinharu* (Rigorous Days) with the perspective of trauma theorists like Duncan Bell and Nigel Hunt. Past events related to war and conflicts always bring a horrible consequence to the survivors who, if anything can, remember these historical events as a psychological need and a social duty to reminisce those who died in the battle. Focusing on the historical role in understanding the psychological response to war trauma, this write up elucidates the social factors which play in psychological understanding and building together to develop the concept of the personal narrative – the memoir of an ex-Maoist combatant, Tara Rai and Nabin Jirel who fought in the ten-years long People's War instigated by the then Nepal Communist Party (Maoist) as members of cultural troupe and militant, arrested by the security personnel and spent a long time in jails. This article has tried to illuminate those facts which have made the traumatic past a meaningful one for memorialization and commemoration.

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Introduction

I am concerned with the issues presented in the memoir on the historical facts of the decade-long Maoist insurgency which caused the death of more than seventeen thousand people and thousands others displaced from their own homes. The impact of this insurgency imposed upon was on women, children, political cadres, teachers, students, clan and caste has been interlinked with ethnic relatives who were inclined to be in destitute and retaliated to the “worst backlash to be noticed due to this rigorous” (Aryal

Khanal, 2009, p.32) in the motives of taking revenge against the atrocities imposed upon them in the name of decapitating the rebellion in different remote areas. Tara Rai Anmol, being related to such group is the one who strongly participated in the insurgency as a cultural troupe and arrested and put in jail one after another has brought the traumatic memories which were full of trauma, but looking back those memories, she tries to illuminate the events by writing the book as in the words of Nigel O. Hunt (2004) “The important wars at any given time are those where there are living veterans, or where there

are people living who remember the veterans – their children and grandchildren” (p.180). Past events always brings a fore new experiences in human life which cannot diluted easily from the mind. The time it happened was very rigorous but when time elapses, it recreates something new aspiration in human mind which evokes a new dimension to create a new work of art. Radha Poudel, for example, the winner of Madan Puraskar 2071 working at Jumla hospital as a development officer, went through the whole night awake waiting for death while the Maoists were attacking the headquarter of the district including the adjacent house where she was residing. How she underwent this horrible night is imbibed in her memoir *Khalanga ma Hamala*, (Attacks on Khalanga). “After sometime a bomb seemed to have been exploded in the mid part of the town. District Police Office and District Development Office were also guessed to have been demolished. The time it had happened, it was beyond the toleration for her, but later when she printed her experiences in the book form as a memoir, it has created a history for those who would like to know what had happened in the headquarter of Jumla district of western Nepal.

People commemorate the past even if it is ‘grief-stricken’ to those who survived it because it is the nostalgic dimension of these devotional institutions about which Duncan Bell (2006) further explains, “The ethics of memory can refer to the ethical impulse to commemorate the dead, most often those killed in wars, and commemorative practices are now the subject of a huge literature (p.20). There remains a renewed attention in society to relationship between memory,

commemoration and identity and also a passion for recovery and discovery of collective and individual ‘pasts’, which are brought into “the service of constructing and mentioned identities in a new memory politics (Ray, 2006, p. 135). Remembering the past one gets emotionally attached and mentally detached from the present and physically inactive in the works because the past in the present time has become an iconic as a valuable activity in or of itself which would be an account of the psychosocial impact of the conflict in its broadest sense– that of understanding memory not just as individual memory, but also as the ways in which other people, society and culture, and history, all affect how one remembers. It considers the relationship between memory, war and traumatic stress which one knows that the majority of people who go through these experiences do not have serious long-term problems, and that they are able to handle their memories and emotions and get on with their lives, more or less successfully in creating the work of art; for example, writing their memoir to rekindle the past in the present form. Many still experience intense emotion when they think of what they have been through, but that does not mean they are traumatized now at the present time. There is “ample evidence to show that many of the psychosocial responses that we observe within a culture are not universal, that in some historical periods more people are likely to have problems” (Hutt, 2010, p. 2), and in different cultures and historical periods they have different kinds of problems.

Many people as supporters and whole time workers participated in this war and thousands of them lost their lives, relatives got physically maimed and have been

impaired and at present living a ‘helpless’ life; as a result, these ‘past’ events have been an issue to remind them again and again even if they try to forget them. Memory exists along with a “continuum of experience, with one end being individual and private memories kept alive in part by the development of individual narratives, and the other end being the collective cultural and public memories, which are kept alive at least in part through memorialization” (Hunt, 2004, p.143). These memories have become a heritage to them as a means of preserving a fixed idea of the past. These horrible past events – sites of battles, deaths, burials of dead bodies etc. have been a part of their memorialization and paying an unalienable tribute to them is a part of commemoration. When one remembers the war, he or she doesn’t think of a particular individual or events, rather he or she remembers the whole event and its consequences that have brought so many changes in their present lives. These fatal and grief-stricken events are no longer a horrible, rather they have become a property which can neither be looked nor be thrown but shared time and again be writing in the printed form as testimony.

Maoist Guerillas and Commemorating Their Past: A Source of Creativity

Among many Maoist guerillas, Nabin Jirel, a resident of Dolakha district from an indigenous tribal group took up a gun for the country and faced many unexpected and rigorous days in his early young age. Many a time, he was about to lose his life from the security forces, but he continued to fight in many battles as he remembers “after involving in the People’s War, everything in

my life started moving differently. Piles of corpses to my innocent eyes seemed normal” (Jirel, 2013, p.i); later he wrote a book *Bhishan dinharu* (Rigorous Days) which became a matter of memorialization and commemoration at present time. He is more known as a writer than a Maoist guerilla. Tara Rai ‘Anmol’, another Maoist guerilla who worked for the party as a member of cultural group and was arrested by the army and put in the detention for many days. To quote her how she reminisces those events – “whether I was carrying a grenade in my waist or doing PT while carrying a rifle, my mother always there inside me” (Rai, 2010, p.54), finally, she was sent to jails one after another. When she came out of jail, she came to realize how it was nonsense to fight for the liberation of the marginalized people in spite of frail health – heart disease (p.57) she is still missing the situation which might be intolerable that time longing for her mother, but at present time the nostalgic experience longing for mother has become an icon to lead her life ahead. At the moment, she is seen living a humble life by writing books with new name and designation in her own place.

In his chapter “Memorialization and Commemoration” from his *book Memory, War and Trauma*, Nigel O. Hunt (2004) points out how “memory, narratives, social discourse and history are interlinked via the remembrance of war, and how people have a psychological need and a social duty to remember those who died in past wars” (p.172). The moment when Tara Rai was detained in the army camp spending the night with them having the food given to her with hands tied from backside was very troublesome to her at that time which is described like this, “In barrack how people

were targeted whether they are cow grazers, innocent girls or even peddlers, they are the real victims” (Rai, 2010, p. 37). On the other hand, Nabin Jirel’s condition: “My feelings started stiffening like the cliffs of Gourishankar mountains. Each of my paces seemed to have habituated with the explosion of bombs and bullets of guns” (Jirel, 2013, p.i) can be taken the moment of extreme risk for his life. Each step, he moved forward, he seemed to be approaching his death and annihilation from his early youth. He was leading the life of danger ahead for the country’s better future, which he now realizes by writing book by cleansing the malpractices happening those days. At present time, Tara Rai while speaking on a media program *Karabasaka Samjhana*, a radio program being broadcasted from Ilam, shares her experience with her audience as part of memorialization and is commemorating the past which has enabled to pursue the career of writing memoirs.

There is a transition from memory to a sense of the past (the term ‘history’ does not refer to the past, but to an interpretation of the past by historians) over about three generations. This is a “normal psychological process, with the experiencing generation having a memory of what they have experienced, their children taking on those memories in a weaker but nevertheless still memoric sense, and their children perhaps still having a sense of memory from listening to their grandparents” (Hunt,2004,103). After this generation, the events fade into the past as there is no-one left who experienced the event and can impart it directly or indirectly into the following generations. The memory, as it is transmitted through the children and grandchildren, may become a collective

memory if it relates to a major societal event, or it may remain a familial memory if related specifically to the family.

The psychosocial impact of the conflict in its broadest sense – that of understanding memory of an individual as the way in which other people, society and culture, and history, all affect how one remembers has been considered the relationship between memory, war and traumatic stress and many people have “psychological problems as a direct consequence of war; many have terrible memories of these experiences that they find difficult to deal with; and many never do learn to deal with these memories”(Hunt, 2004, p. 2). Likewise, when Rai was arrested and detained by the army, her comrades were also arrested along with her and later killed and buried in front of her with a threat that they would bury her too if she would not tell them about her other comrades’ whereabouts.

Memory can become a focus of “cultural life to preserve and disseminate stories about their past and to locate them within what we have come to term identity politics” (Winter, 2006, p.72); that the incidents remain in her memory as long as she remains alive. These comrades are remembered as an icon of ‘wellbeing’ unlike those who killed them. She spent short time in army detention and had to sign a confession and was handed over to police, who later delivered her to the first of a series of jails – Ilam, Dolakha, Singhupalchowk Jhapa and Morang. As young guerillas of slightly built, suffering from a heart complaint and needing medication every moment, both are also subjected to physical brutality, but still known for numerous acts of kindness from her fellow prisoners.

Remembering the incidents as Rai has done in

her memoir is enabling her to grieve in public, and perhaps to “escape from melancholia into a kind of mourning that could be circumscribed and transcended” (p.72). Both Rai and Jirel, ordinary people whose family background is unsettled: their fathers deserted the family when they were only small. With some difficulties, both quit school and remained in disgrace for some time, which they had to spend time grazing cattle, and had to leave the village to live in a Maoist camp with other children. Jenny Edkins (2006) has once said memories of trauma are “a mode of resistance to a language that forgets the essential vulnerability of flesh in its reification of state, nation and ideology” (p.100), which eludes one to ignore the events happened in life, but there would be other events which were beyond the toleration for her but she didn't have other options except that, on the contrary, these traumatic experiences after imprinting in the form of books have become a matter of memorialization and commemoration for her life till now and onwards. She wrote the book *Chapamar Yuvatiko Dayari* and Jirel wrote *Bhishan Dinharu* and become famous as writers. Memories of traumatic events can be seen as “a thread thrown between the dead and those who survive: to hold the dead in our arms is an impossible gesture of solidarity and compassion in the face of the wit of eternity” (p.99); remembering one after another event would be “relationality, that radical interconnectedness that has been so shockingly betrayed in and through the violence of trauma” (p.99). Writing and bringing out the horrific experiences to the readers and other common people so the people from the future Michael Hutt (2012)

has elaborated the situation of bringing out the books, “The launch and coverage it (the book) received in Kathmandu Media ensured that the book continued to sell and the only two weeks later Tara Rai had to discontinue signing the copies at the National Booksellers and Publishers annual book exhibition in Kathmandu because the second edition had sold out (p.135). The People's War, as it had such a major impact on both the individuals who fought and on society as a whole, was remembered deeply by the combatants who had fought in the fronts and by their families at home which “became a central part of their narratives, their life stories” (Hunt, 2004, p.104). It was the way of memorializing the horrible past events as a form of commemoration which “has been a much bigger success than any other conflict memoirs” (Hutt, 2012, p.114). Unless both had used all her traumatic experiences as a process of memorialization, no one would have known them as individual figures for participating in the historical events bringing some fruitful outcomes.

Conclusion

Tara Rai and Nabin Jirel being harassed, disappointed, mentally and physically tortured except some occasions of consolations from some army staff, were able to succumb all these pangs as a reward for her involvement in People's War thinking that everyone had to go through it, but with the span of time these grief-stricken pains have become a fruitful denouement on the whole, which ultimately brought her a good identity, name, fame, respect, money and at last a way of living the rest of her life. Life is to spend in any way either happily or unhappily and

willingly or unwillingly along with those memories of the events which might be very horrible in the time when they happened, maybe intolerable and unexpected one for those who were involved in, but writing about such events would make them literary personality and a man of literature by honoring him or her for memorializing and commemorating the traumatic events.

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