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Representation of Maoist War in Wagle's *Palpasa Cafe*

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Abstract

This thesis explores the representation of the Maoist war in Narayan Wagle's Palpasa Cafe from the perspective of trauma studies. The research studies the process and the effect of the trauma in different social/cultural groups caused by the Maoist insurgency and the subsequent death and terror. The research uses the notion of cultural trauma discussed by Jeffrey C. Alexander. This study points out that the novel depicts the consequences of the war without trying to dig out the reasons for the conflict itself. Drishya's trauma is depicted through several layers of his experiences and reflections, which bring profound change regarding his survivors' guilt. The loss of Palpasa and the constant threat of violence lead to a sense of disillusionment in Drishya. His trauma is a complex interplay of personal loss, survivor guilt, allied dreams, and the broader context of political and social turmoil. So, it has strategically employed resourceful characters as carrier groups to create a discourse about the victim and the perpetrators, but it fails to present a balanced portrayal of the armed conflict in Nepal.

Keywords: Insurgency, Trauma, Representation, Maoists, War, Crisis

This research paper aims to explore how Narayan Wagle strategically represents characters in his novel *Palpasa Café* in representing Maoist insurgency to present his version of collective suffering and creative narratives of victims and perpetrators. The novel is written against the backdrop of a decade-long armed conflict in Nepal, but he fictionalizes the war. His writing is lucid and entices the reader through the love story of Palpasa. It ends in tragedy with the death of Palpasa in a tragic event when the bus she was traveling is bombarded in an ambush, and Maoists are responsible for this destruction.

The novel deals with the cultural trauma that emerged in different people of different social categories in Nepalese society. Trauma is not the result of a group experiencing pain. It results from an acute discomfort entering the core of the collectivity's sense of its own identity. The novel renders the conflict between two groups, Maoists and the state force. It shows the extreme collective trauma through the representative characters like Palpasa, Drishya, Siddhartha, and other minor characters. In the prologue, Wagle says he plans to write a book inspired by his friend Drishya, who gets kidnapped. Drishya's story begins with his meeting with a girl named Palpasa, who is on a trip to India. Drishya has a chance to meet Palpasa, and their meetings develop into a romantic bond. After some time, he has a fortuitous meeting with Siddhartha, his college friend, who says that he is a Maoist in hiding and asks for shelter. They start talking about the situation of the country. They both disagree on many points, and finally, Siddhartha challenges Drishya to visit the world they have created. He accepts and treks the hilly regions under Maoist control.

Throughout the novel, we see the rise of the Maoist war on one side and the royal family massacre at the same time, which gives a huge shock to the whole country. Drishya, the protagonist of the story, goes through the disturbances of a traumatized country. After the deadly royal massacre, many people, especially the upper class, are concerned about their safety. If the royal family is insecure, then what would the situation be like for the normal people in society? This psychology expands to create trauma in the people with the increasing armed "actions" by the Maoist insurgents. So, a huge population was deeply concerned about their families and the country's future. On the other hand, Maoist rebels were taking hold of the country. Many people from both sides— the State and the Maoists— were abducted and killed. There was a dilemma in the people about taking sides. There were many problems

related to the delivery of services, social equity, and justice that Maoists had taken as a justification to raise arms. But in the meantime, their actions were brutal, leading to killing, kidnapping, and torture. But this was only one side of the story. The State had mobilized its security forces to counter the Maoist insurgency. There are reports that they had indiscriminately killed people, disappeared, and tortured them as well. The question is about Wagle's intention in the novel. Since he was critical of the Maoist war, his selection of characters and portrayal of the consequences of war is carefully designed to serve his view. The major character of the novel Drishya gets into trouble whether to let his friend Siddhartha give shelter or not. Remembering our college days, I felt concerned for him, of course, but I was afraid of him and turned to violence. Giving him shelter was inviting trouble from the security forces if denied shelter, I'd be inviting trouble from his people. (85)

Here, we see clear trouble in that he feels invited. Drishya tries to counsel his friend Siddhartha, and they have a long discussion, though it seems he is totally convinced to die or do something being Maoist. Through their discussion, Drishya is convinced to travel to the village where they both belong and there, he sees many characters and evidence that allow us to observe another unseen picture of the traumatized countryside. People of the village were trying to reconstruct their identity as a rebellion, and most villagers were forced to join the Maoists. There's no hospital, but there's no doctor anyway. The primary school has only one teacher so, how can he give a good education to the students. If we continue like this, we'll maintain nothing but more peasants for generations to come.

This is how the gap appears in Siddhartha's mind, where he identifies himself as common, marginalized, poor, or in the minority, misidentifies himself from those, and suppresses those at the low level. He even uses the terms "we" and "our" to

associate with those common people. Then, they take shelter in an old man's house from where they were convincing the old man to send their daughter with them. When the old man asks, "Why did you boys join the war replies to people like your 'Ba' calling his war People's War. He and his friends collect young girls and boys from remote villages by identifying himself as a representative of the marginalized and poor people in villages. Considering that they are fighting to upgrade those poor villagers, In this way, he goes on claiming that only through war and by destroying the old culture can he create something new. When this information reaches the people, they become the carrier group, as seen utterly when the picking girl argues.

If we had studied in boarding schools, we could have become doctors or engineers the revolutionary voice continued. We could have learned something. We wouldn't have to spend our lives picking oranges, cutting grass and looking after the mustered fields! Our lives are wasted. Those daises telling us the truth if we take part in their struggle, at least our younger sisters and brothers might be able to get a proper education (103).

The novel explores the situations in which the community, in general, and the people involved in the war, in particular, suffered during the insurgency period. The trauma is due to fear of the death of their children in war. The old man sent her young girl with the Maoists, and she also went with the Maoists to reform her country's and village's condition and to bring about a bright future for her brother and sisters. Through this novel, the author illustrates the trauma and fear of the civil war in the people of ruler hilly areas of Nepal. That war in the people traumatized the poor Nepalese. Many civilians were killed and forced to fight from the Maoist side against the State. The author depicted the real trauma and suffering of Nepalese people during wartime. The incidents of war threatened the life and identity of a large number of

people of people in wartime. The battle between Maoist insurgents and security personnel had traumatized the Nepalese and poor, uneducated villagers. The murder of teachers and security personnel in their own houses in front of their family members had become a common incident during the Civil War time.

The trauma experienced by Nepalese people during the civil war period is depicted through the experiences of Drishya and Palpasa. As we read the novel, the writer describes every minute detail of the psychological and emotional trauma experienced by Nepalese people during the war based on the descriptions mentioned here. The problems to be discussed in the novel are concerned with the following questions: How do the characters exhibit signs of trauma due to the Maoist insurgency? In what ways do Palpasa and Drishya's experiences reflect the psychological impact of the conflict? How does the novel depict the broader social impact of the Maoist insurgency on Nepalese society? In what ways does the novel explore collective trauma experienced by the community? What does the novel suggest about the long-term effects of trauma on personal and cultural identity?

Since the novel was published, it has received a great deal of praise and criticism from numerous forums for critical analysis. Diverse commentators have seen the work from various angles. A few of them are listed below:

Hardev Kaur and Abdalhadi Nimer Abu Jweid, in their article "War Allegory in Narayan Wagle's *Palpasa Cafe*," talk about meta-fictional representations in *Palpasa Cafe*. They assume that this novel critiques the negative impact of the civil war on this land, which they believe is a land of peace. This war has torn the social fabric and opened the unending turmoil in the country. They write:

...the novel serves as an emblematic documentation of the Nepalese Civil War, which disrupted the traditional socio-political balance in the country.

Among the critical assessments on this matter is the humanistic propagation of the novel as a genre. It represents real human catastrophic visions and their negative consequences upon the Nepalese society. Nepal has always been a peaceful country and rich in diverse cultures as it has so many ethnic people.... (2)

The problem with their views is that they have only taken note of the negative aspects of the civil war. However, they have failed to critique how the civil war has contributed to a greater representation of marginalized social groups, and has compelled the advancement of the democratic process. Though Kaur and Jweid believe "that the novel calls for peace and stability within the national demarcations," they have not touched upon how eulogizing a group and demonizing another leads to peace in the country. However, I agree with their conclusion that this novel is filled with authorial interferences, where he imposes his political views upon the characters and the events that unfold. This idea is clearly articulated in the following lines:

"Most significantly, authorial self-reflexivity reveals the latent authorial nuances and relative perspective on the Civil War and its catastrophic consequences on the Nepalese people. Correspondingly, the discussion has exposed the authorial intervention within the narrative structure, which accentuates his viewpoint on the ongoing events" (11).

Similarly, Khagendra Acharya, in his article "Trauma of Maoist insurgency in literature: Reading *Palpasa Cafe*, *Forget Kathmandu*, and *Chhapamar ko Chhoro*," discusses the trauma of moist insurgency in the novel. His conclusion suggests that though Narayan Wagle has omitted the atrocities of the army it is still successful in portraying the healing process of the protagonist's trauma. He writes, "Paplasa Café presents vicarious trauma filtered through the politics of peace when the country was

in the hands of the army. Consequently, the content elides the atrocities of the army, approximates traumatic experience of the victims and presents Drishya's trauma in the frame of working through" (107). But, Acharya applies George Gerbner's communication model to study *Palpasa Café* as a trauma fiction. So, he tries to fit the plot of the novel into the communication model of structure, context, and content. In his study he has tried to converge theories of trauma in this framework to incorporate the elements pertaining to both structural level (availability, context and selection) and content level (the rendition) (Acharya 84). So, it does not adequately deal with the issues of representation of trauma from social and cultural perspectives.

In a book review titled "Fiction more real than fact" in *Nepali Times*, Kunda Dixit claims that Wagle makes an authentic representation of the reality of war torn Nepali society. He backs his claim by arguing that this authenticity comes from his firsthand experience travelling to different places far from Kathmandu "bringing stories of neglect and apathy to the notice of a government." Dixit writes:

In all countries in the throes of a messy conflict, facts are often more dramatic than fiction. As journalists in Nepal, we feel that every story of a landmine killing children, abduction of students, young women disappeared by security forces is a heart-rending family tragedy. Unfortunately, by the time the deaths are reported the manner of their reporting turns them into statistics. We rarely see, hear or share the pain and personal loss of someone's loved one. ("Fiction more real")

Dixit's also hints at the author's ideological position of representing the war. He cites a dialogue between Drishya and his Maoist friend Siddhartha where he argues that they are carrying injustices to people in the name of justice. He then further claims the authenticity of the lives and society: "Drishya travels to his home village to meet

Siddhartha and finds it torn apart by war. They are all there in these pages: the atrocities, executions, disappearances and people caught in the crossfire that we read about every day in the newspapers. But because they happen to characters we now know intimately the incidents seem more real than the factual headlines” (“Fiction more real”). It is clear that either Dixit subscribes to Wagle’s viewpoints or he finds his position reflected in Wagle’s representation. And he, too, fails to critique both the war and the novel with references to other contesting views.

Dadhi Ram Panthi, in his article “Biopolitics in Palpasa Café by Narayan Wagle," depicts Palpasa Café as a novel of trauma and biopolitics. He views bodily force as being used by both the warring parties in order to gain power over the other. In a way, he suggests that the body became an instrument for taking over political power. And he tries to connect this process to the trauma process. However, his study concludes with a generalized claim that it is wrong to traumatize people in the name of war. Panthi neither analyzes it from a cultural trauma theory nor does he makes any remarkable argument about biopolitics in this study.

Michael Hutt, in his article “Writers, readers, and the Sharing of Consciousness," discusses five different novels, including *Palpasa Café*, from the perspective of changing consciousness among readers and writers after the initiation of the civil war in Nepal. Hutt quotes Iser in his article to show the nature of the hero:

Each novel has as its central protagonist an ‘enlightened hero’ whose passions and sufferings are described at length: in this respect they have much in common with the ‘sentimental novel’ of late eighteenth-century Europe. Each protagonist reveals a new reality to the reader, which is in some measure different from the world he or she is used to. (11)

Making a specific comment about Palpasa Café, Hutt talks about the gap in the understanding between the rural people and the urbanites. He writes, “[I]n Palpasa Café, Drishya’s journey is a rediscovery of his own village roots and an education in the mortal dilemmas facing the people of the conflict-torn hills” (27). Hutt’s discussion is not adequate and his ideas do not add much to the debate of representation from trauma perspectives.

This study tries to analyze Wagle’s novel using the theoretical framework of cultural trauma developed by Jeffery Alexander. The question of whether Wagle’s representation of Nepali society and the trauma it underwent is authentic or not is the major concern of the study. Cultural trauma theory has emphasized how we can lead social trauma towards a healing process. Some theorists have suggested that trauma is itself a construction. So, social healing heavily depends on the balanced representation of victims and perpetrators. Below, I will discuss some of the theoretical propositions used to study the novel.

Alexander states, “Cultural trauma occurs when members of a collectivity feel they have been subjected to a horrendous event that leaves indelible marks upon their group consciousness, marking their memories forever and changing their future identity in fundamental and irrevocable ways” (6). He believes that people become anxious about their future because of dreadful events, and their unforgettable mark upon their group collectively gives birth to cultural trauma.

Unlike individual trauma, cultural trauma is not inherent in the events itself but is constructed through social processes. This construction involves narrating and interpreting the events, often through media, literature, and political discourse. The social groups, elites, intellectuals, journalists, and politicians articulate and spread the trauma narrative. They play a crucial role in framing the events as cultural trauma and

ensuring they are recognized and remembered by the wider community. Trauma is represented through symbols, rituals, and public commemoration that help to embed the events into the collective memory. These representations serve to unify the group and reaffirm their identity in the face of the trauma. The experience and processing of cultural trauma can lead to significant changes in the group's identity, values, and social practices. It can result in a redefinition of the group's self-conception and its place in the world. Cultural trauma often involves a group's moral responsibility and justice. This can manifest in calls for acknowledgment, apologies, reparations, and other forms of redress for the suffering endured. Alexander's framework helps analyze how societies process and integrate traumatic events into their collective memory, affecting their identity and future. This theory can be applied to understand historical events like genocides, wars, and social upheavals and their representation in literature and media.

Alexander outlines stages in the trauma process, including the initial shock, the struggle to make sense of the events, the contestation over its meaning, and the eventual integration into the collective memory. Overall, Alexander's theory highlights that cultural trauma is a dynamic process shaped by social actors and cultural contexts that profoundly affects collective identity and memory. The process of narrating trauma involves framing the events in a particular way, assigning blame, and identifying victims and perpetrators. This process can shape public perception and policy responses. Alexander's theory highlights the moral dimensions of trauma, emphasizing how societies assign responsibility and transformation to the group's identity. Not all painful events lead to cultural trauma. An event becomes traumatic when it threatens a group's foundational self-understanding and identity. This narrative often involves identifying perpetrators and victims and moral responsibility

and blame. Groups within a society claim that they have been traumatized by a particular event. These claims involve constructing a narrative that explains the nature of the trauma, its causes, and its consequences. Cultural trauma can either strengthen social cohesion by uniting the group against common adversity or lead to fragmentation if the trauma divides the community.

Alexander's theory provides a framework for understanding how collective experiences of trauma shape social and cultural narratives and public policies. Signs of cultural trauma due to Maoist insurgency can be shown in several ways. As the protagonist Drishya embodies the psychological and emotional scars of the insurgency. He experiences deep sorrow and guilt over Palpasa's death, which he perceives as senseless and absurd. His art reflects the chaos and destruction of the conflict, symbolizing his internal turmoil and the collective trauma of his society. Although Palpasa's character is killed in the novel, her death becomes a focal point for exploring trauma. Her dreams and aspirations cut short by the violence represent the loss of potential and hope for an entire generation affected by the bus ambush serves as a powerful reminder of the random and brutal nature of conflict. Throughout the novel, minor characters also reflect the pervasive cultural trauma. Villagers, displaced families, and combatants all exhibit signs of distress, fear, and loss.

In the novel, psychological and emotional trauma in the protagonist is caused by the effects of the Maoist insurgency. Palpasa's experiences during the conflict still have a pervasive sense of fear and anxiety in her. The violence and instability around her contribute to a constant state of unease. As an artist, Palpasa grapples with the conflict of life and her moral responsibility to depict and respond to the harsh realities of war. Palpasa harbors hope for positive change but gradually becomes disillusioned by the persistence and suffering around her. Similarly, Drishya experiences intense

guilt after Palpasa's death, struggling with the absurdity of why he survived while she did not. This guilt profoundly affects his psychology. The memories of violence, loss, and death of loved ones hunt Drishya, causing persistent psychological distress and impacting his ability to find peace. Drishya becomes disillusioned by the ongoing violence and the seemingly endless cycle of suffering, leading to feelings of despair and hopelessness. Both characters experience the broader psychological impact of conflict on individuals, showcasing how trauma, loss, and disillusionment permute their lives and artistic expressions. Novels often illustrate the long-term effects of trauma on personal and cultural identity through various narrative techniques. Characters may exhibit signs of (PTSD) anxiety, depression, or other mental health issues. Flashbacks, nightmares, and heightened vigilance are common representations. Traumatic experiences can change how a character interacts with others, leading to isolation, distrust, or difficulties in forming new relationships. Trauma can lead to a shift in a character's beliefs and values, often resulting in a more cynical or fatalistic outlook on life. The novel depicts how a community collectively remembers and processes traumatic events, influencing cultural narratives and shared history. Trauma can be passed down through generations, affecting the cultural identity of subsequent generations, often referred to as trans-generational trauma.

The events in the *Palpasa Cafe* also show the disastrous stuck of the royal massacre. The phone call awakens Drishya, and a panicky voice says, "Stupid you haven't heard? The voice says angrily. The country's been plunged into darkness. Everything's finished, and you are still sleeping." (78).

According to Jeffery C. Alexander, "Cultural trauma occurs when members of a society collectively feel that they have been subjected to a horrendous event that leaves incredible marks upon their group consciousness" (2). The trauma of the royal

massacre in Nepal is subtly woven into the narrative, impacting the characters and society they live in. The novel, set against the backdrop of the civil war, captures the sense of loss, confusion, and the search for meaning in the aftermath of the royal massacre. The character, particularly Drishya, deals with the trauma of the massacre. Their reaction and coping mechanisms can provide insights into the collective grief and anxiety experienced by Nepalese society.

Similarly, another event also gives us the same glimpse of uncertainty and trauma that morning. There was no space in the street, and men with saved needs were everywhere in the crowds. A thick fog of uncertainty hung over us all (80). The above phrase sets a vivid picture of the Mooring royal family's death. The density of people gathering for the king's funeral and there we can see the uncertainty and confusion in Nepalese. There is also an atmosphere of anxiety and apprehension; people are unsure of what has happened and what will happen next, indicating a period of instability or crisis. These lines also capture the essence of the human condition at the time of the royal massacre. Where ordinary routines are disrupted, collective expressions of emotion or solidarity become visible, and a general sense of uncertainty looms over everyone.

We found the devastating effects of the civil war on ordinary lives. Villages are destroyed, families are passed like young boys and girls are taken away from their houses for the guerrilla war. Young girls like Sanu were taken in war. "Siddhartha was explaining to the old man why his daughter should participate in people's war. He and his comrades had already recruited a dozen girls from the village" (97). Cathy Caruth's trauma theory, particularly her exploration of the unclaimed experience and the way trauma is often transmitted through narrative and memory, emphasizes the importance of listening to the voice of trauma and understanding the way it is

transmitted through stories and testimonies. Many people in wartime face displacement, having to leave their homes and communities due to the ongoing conflicts. The loss of home and stability is a significant source of trauma. They have to experience psychological trauma, such as anxiety and depression, as they depart from their parents at a young age. There is also a fear of uncertainty for their lives at any movement of war they may be killed.

This novel depicts the trauma of the Nepalese people because of the civil war. Many civilians were killed in the name of radical change in Nepal. The state army is killing Maoists, and Maoists are also not leaving the State army. Everything has been destroyed, and the Maoists had the mentality that only destruction can bring radical change in Nepal. The psychological and emotional effects of the Nepalese civil war on civilians. The novel vividly portrays the struggles and sufferings of ordinary people caught in the war. "The suffering and fear of civilians can be depicted when Drishya heard a girl telling the porters, "The policemen went up this trail. They died in an ambush half an hour later"(112).

In this novel, Wagle poignantly depicts trauma in children through various narratives, including the story of a small girl who talks about the death of her teacher and how it has impacted her life, leading her to become a shepherd. The girl's story is set against the backdrop of the Nepalese civil war, highlighting the widespread impact of the conflict and trauma on civilians, especially children. The girl's recounting of her teacher's death reflects the deep emotional trauma. The trauma is compounded by her forced change in lifestyle from a student to a shepherd, indicating a loss of childhood and innocence. Similarly, the arrival of Drishya in Kathmandu and the meeting of Palpasa's grandmother, who has a heavy heart and sorrow above, shows the trauma, and he remembers a phrase that someone in the hills had told him. " Were

the Buddha to be born today, even he'd raise a gun" (209). This phrase is a powerful depiction of trauma and the loss of peace in times of conflict. This statement reflects the deep sense of despair and the drastic transformation in the values and actions of individuals in a war-torn society.

The concept of Dominick LaCapra's distinction between historical trauma and structural trauma could be useful here. He explores how trauma can reshape cultural and individual identities. This might be relevant in understanding the paradox of a peace symbol (Buddha) resorting to violence, reflecting the pervasive impact of the insurgency. The Buddha symbolizes peace, compassion, and non-violence. By suggesting that even the Buddha would have to raise a gun, Drishya highlights the extent of violence and turmoil that has pervaded society. It indicates that the environment is so hostile that even a figure of ultimate peace would be compelled to take up arms? This phrase conveys a profound sense of desperation. The character feels that the situation is so dire that traditional ideals of non-violence and compassion are no longer viable. It signifies a loss of hope and a belief that violence is the only means of survival or resistance. The statement above encapsulates the moral conflict experienced by individuals in times of war. Drishya and, by extension, the society he represents, grapple with the contradiction between their ideals and the harsh reality they face. The trauma is not just physical but deeply psychological, as it forces people to reconsider their core beliefs.

Drishya's statement encapsulates the sense of hopelessness and moral erosion brought about by the civil war. It underscores how the ongoing violence distorts ideals and values, pushing even the most peaceful individuals toward drastic measures. This reflects a deep internal conflict and the trauma of living in a society where the effectiveness of non-violent principles in the face of relentless brutality and injustice.

Drishya's trauma following Palpasa's death is a poignant representation of the psychological and emotional toll of conflict's statement about Buddha signifies a deep-seated disillusionment and the struggle to reconcile idealism with harsh reality. This transformation highlights the profound impact of trauma on personal beliefs and the broader implications for society during times of upheaval. Walking ahead with Kaaka, he says, "I looked towards Subha Shankar's house. There was no sign of life; Subha Shankar had gone to heaven a few years earlier" (125). Upon arriving, Drishya finds that the house bears no sign of life, symbolizing the void left by Subha Shankar's absence. This scene underscores the pervasive impact of the conflict and the deep emotional scars it leaves on those who survive. Drishya's realization that Subha Shankar "has gone to heaven" further emphasizes the sense of loss and hopelessness. This phrase not only indicates Subha Shankar's death but also reflects the cruel reality that many lives are abruptly and violently ended due to the conflict. The desolate house stands as a stark reminder of the personal and collective trauma experienced by those affected by the war.

The emotional weight of the scene is communicated by Drishya's internal turmoil. The absence of life in Subha Shanker's house mirrors the emptiness and despair that Drishya feels. This moment captures the essence of trauma, the haunting presence of loss, an aching void where vibrancy once existed, and the painful acknowledgment of a loved one's tragic fate.

Drishya meets a small girl who is on the way to her mitini's house. His whole body started to tremble when he heard that the girl's mitini was dead. She pecked in her hands (163). The depiction of trauma is profound and multifaceted. Drishya, the protagonist, experiences significant emotional turmoil when he learns about the death of the girl's mitini. This trauma is compounded by the brutal nature of her death. She

packed up a bomb while playing, and it exploded in her hands. Drishya is initially shocked by the news of mitini's death. The sheer brutality and senselessness of the incident are difficult for him to process. This reaction highlights the sudden and unexpected nature of trauma, leaving individuals in a state of disbelief. The vivid and gruesome detail of Mitini's death, an innocent child playing and accidentally triggering a bomb, evokes a deep emotional response. Drishya is haunted by the imagery and the innocence lost in such a violent manner. There is an underlying sense of anger at the senseless violence and the circumstances that occur.

Drishya feels helpless in the face of such indiscriminate destruction, emphasizing the broader context of societal trauma during times of conflict. This depiction serves as a poignant reminder of the personal and collective trauma that individuals endure in conflict zones, where even moments of play can turn deadly. The trauma of her mitini's death becomes a significant part of Drishya's internal landscape, shaping his actions, thoughts, and emotional responses throughout the novel. After the death of Siddhartha, Drishya feels so shocked and traumatized that he says, "I was still soaked in Siddhartha's blood" (183). The trauma experienced by the characters is vividly portrayed through their reaction to the violent events around them. Siddhartha's death profoundly impacts the protagonist, Drishya. When Drishya says, "I was still soaked in Siddhartha's blood," this vivid imagery reflects the deep psychological impact and guilt he carries. Siddhartha's death is not just a loss but a haunting presence that lingers, symbolizing the violent realities of conflict and its enduring effect on survivors. Drishya's words encapsulate memories of violence. Illustrating how trauma imprints on the psycho long after the event itself.

Dominick LaCapra's Trauma and Histography differentiates between 'acting out' and 'working through' trauma. Drishya's statement can be seen as an example of

'acting out,' where he is reliving the traumatic event and is unable to process it or move beyond it. LaCapra's theory helps to explore how trauma affects memory and identity, particularly historical and collective traumas like the Maoist insurgency.

This highlights the sudden and unexpected nature of violence in civil war, where civilians can be unintentionally caught in dangerous situations. Being caught in the crossfire would have significant psychological effects on civilians. Kaka's experience likely led to trauma, characterized by fear, anxiety, and possibly post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). The randomness and unpredictability of such violence exacerbate the sense of vulnerability and helplessness among civilians. This incident serves as a microcosm of the broader experiences of civilians during civil war. It reflects how everyday activities are overshadowed by the omnipresence of violence and fear.

Further, walking with fear and anxiety in his village, he sees the trauma of war in many forms. Some were killed, some were disabled, and many old parents were waiting for the arrival of their young children who had forcefully joined the war. The trauma of old parents is shown through his conversation with an old father. He is in a hurry to claim his dead son, and he further says to him I just buried one son; Now I have to identify the body of another. He hobbled along, bereft of hope (174).

Cathy Caruth's views on trauma theory focus on the concept of unclaimed experiences, which examines how traumatic events are often experienced belatedly and can haunt individuals through repeated and intrusive memories. In the novel, the trauma of old people losing their children due to war is poignantly depicted through the character of an old man who has buried one son and is now faced with identifying the body of another. This scene illustrates the profound grief and suffering experienced by elderly parents in conflict zones. The portrayal of the old man's

trauma is both vivid and heart-wrenching. His physical state is hobbling along, symbolizing the heavy burden of his loss and the emotional toll it has taken on him. The act of burying one son and the impending task of identifying another's body underscores the relentless and brutal nature of war, leaving families shattered and parents in perpetual mourning.

The old man's repeated losses convey irreparable loss. Repeated exposure to death and violence can result in long-term psychological effects, anxiety, and depression. Older individuals might relive traumatic events, impacting their mental well-being. War disrupts community bonds and social structures. Older people might feel isolated, especially if they lose peers and family members who provide emotional support. Drishya was observing the situation of his village and his people's suffering during the war. He was witnessing the psychological and physical suffering of his villagers and relatives. He was traveling with his friend Siddhartha, who was separated or lost somewhere in the village. At the end of the journey, he also met his friend Siddhartha, who was lying in a pool of blood but still breathing. He moved his lips, and blood was pouring.

Drishya had experienced trauma due to the death of his friend Siddhartha, which is profound and deeply personal. This trauma is vividly illustrated in the scene where Drishya finds Siddhartha lying in a pool of blood with blood pouring from his lips as he tries to speak. The sight of Siddhartha in such a dire state creates a lasting visual and emotional impact on Drishya. The pool of blood and the attempt to speak despite his severe injuries convey a sense of desperation and helplessness. Drishya might feel a sense of guilt for not being able to save Siddhartha, coupled with helplessness in the face of his friend's suffering. This can lead to recurring thoughts and nightmares, which are common in trauma survivors. Such a traumatic event can

alter Drishya's perception of the world, making him more aware of the fragility of life's war-torn environment. It might lead to a more pessimistic or fatalistic outlook on life.

Similarly, the loss of his loved one's trauma is also depicted in the novel. The death of Palpasa in the bus ambush and the condition of Drishya are also depicted in the novel as he says:

I heard an incredibly loud bang and found myself thrown to the ground. When I got up, the bus was on fire. I could hear the shrieking of the passengers trapped inside the bus. Only my whole body was shaking like a leaf. All my dreams and desires were suddenly gone. It was absurd the reason I had survived and the reason she had been killed. (205-206)

Drishya experiences significant trauma following the death of Palpasa in a bus ambush. When he reflects on the absurdity of his survival compared to her death, it reveals his deep sense of guilt and confusion. He struggles to understand why he lived while Palpasa was gone. A common reaction among survivors of traumatic events. This guilt can lead to intense emotional distress and a feeling of unworthiness. Drishya finds it absurd that he survived while Palpasa did not. This feeling of absurdity reflects his struggle to reconcile the unfairness of life and death, especially in a context where innocence and love are brutally cut short. The trauma of witnessing Palpasa's death affects Drishya's dreams and desires. Drishya's trauma in the novel is deeply rooted in the sudden and violent death of Palpasa during the bus ambush. This event shatters him emotionally and psychologically, leading to a profound sense of loss and confusion. His statement about his dreams and desires being gone reflects the depth of his despair. Drishya's survival feels absurd because it defies his sense of justice and meaning in the world. He grapples with survivor's guilt, questioning why

he lived while Palpasa, who was the source of his inspiration and hope, didn't. This guilt and the perceived randomness of life and death leave him disillusioned, stripping him of his motivation and aspirations.

To conclude, this paper has set out to present the trauma experienced by the Nepalese during the Civil War period. The exploration of trauma in Narayan Wagle's "*Palpasa Cafe*" reveals the profound and multifaceted impact of the Nepalese civil war on individuals and communities. Through the characters' experiences, especially Drishya's survival and *Palpasa's* untimely death, the novel poignantly captures the pervasive sense of loss, disillusionment, and the struggle to find meaning in the aftermath of violence. Palpasa's death is a representation of the collective trauma experienced by those who lived through the Maoist insurgency. The other characters who heard about her death also share in this grief, reflecting the widespread impact of violence in the community. The novel captures the collective memory of trauma experienced by the Nepalese society during the Maoist insurgency. Palpasa's death symbolizes the loss of innocence and the widespread grief that was reflected in countless families and communities. Cultural trauma is depicted through the sense of displacement and loss experienced by the characters. The insurgency disrupts their lives and displaces them from their homes. Palpasa's death is a pivotal moment in the novel, deeply affecting Drishya and other characters and also serving as a poignant depiction of a cultural trauma wrought by the Maoist insurgency. The novel was a personal loss to reflect the personal experience of a society grappling with the aftereffects of conflicts.

The novel *Palpasa Café* encapsulates the trauma experienced by the Maoist insurgency through the characters of Drishya. Drishya's journey is a profound experience of personal and collective trauma, revealing the deep scars left by the

conflict in individuals and society. Drishya's narrative provides a lens to examine the pervasive impact of war, highlighting the psychological foremost and existential dilemmas faced by survivors. His internal struggle and disillusionment mirror the broader societal upheaval, making this story a powerful representation of trauma. Drishya's journey is not just a personal story but a testament to the enduring impact of trauma on the human soul, making it a crucial narrative in understanding the complexities of the Maoist insurgency and its lasting agency. Drishya's journey is marked by a constant struggle to reconcile his memories and loss with the present, embodying the collective trauma faced by the individuals during the turbulent periods. His artistic expression becomes both a refusal and a form of resistance, symbolizing resilience and enduring hope amidst pervasive despair. Drishya's representation in *Palpasa Café* not only reflects the personal turmoil and societal upheaval caused by the insurgency but also prompts a broader contemplation on the impact of trauma on individual and collective identities.

The narrative vividly illustrates how personal losses and encounters with violence leave deep psychological scars. Drishya's guilt and confusion over surviving the bus ambush while *Palpasa* perished highlights the randomness of death and survival in war, echoing the real-life experiences of many Nepalese who faced similar fates. Beyond the individual suffering, the novel also underscores the collective trauma experienced by communities torn apart by conflict. The destruction of the social fabric and the pervasive atmosphere of fear and uncertainty are recurring themes, reflecting the broader societal impacts of the war. The depiction of trauma in *Palpasa Café* serves as a microcosm of the broader experiences of the Nepalese population during the Civil War. By bringing personal and collective suffering to the forefront, the novel affects but also serves as a powerful reminder of the enduring

consequences of conflict. The novel further serves as a poignant exploration of the traumatic representation of the Maoist insurgency. Wagle's masterful storytelling perfectly captures the essence of a nation scarred by conflict, offering a profound reflection on the enduring impacts of trauma on individuals and communities. Though it is a multifaceted portrayal of grief, loss, and survival, the novel stands out as a testament to the resilience of the human spirit in the face of overwhelming adversity.

The novel's protagonist, Drishya, embodies the paradox of survival and loss, grappling with the absurdity of living on while others, like Palpasa, perish. This existential struggle is a potent illustration of survivor's guilt and the lingering effects of witnessing violence and death. The bush ambush scene, where Palpasa meets her untimely end, acts as a stark reminder of the fragility of life amidst conflict and the random nature of death in war. *Palpasa Cafe* presents the Maoist insurgency as a dreadful event that causes violence, murder, and dilemma in society. All characters suffered due to the conflict between Maoist insurgents and the national security forces of the government side. They have the feeling of uncertainty and the fear of an unsecured future. The novel reflects Nepalese society during a decade-long Maoist insurgency and highlights how the event left an unforgettable mark on society. This horrendous event changed the future identity of the Nepalese people irrevocably. Drishya lost his friend and Palpasa in front of his eyes and also faced threats in his lifetime to time. During the battle between Maoists and police personnel, the whole society faced insecurity.

Palpasa Cafe is a novel of cultural trauma as all the characters as members of society collectively feel the effects of horrendous events, which leave them permanently on their group consciousness. In *Palpasa Cafe* by Narayan Wagle, trauma impacts male and female characters in nuanced ways, reflecting their

individual experiences and societal roles during the Nepalese and how trauma affects the characters differently based on gender. Drishya experiences profound survivor's guilt following the death of Palpasa in the bus ambush. He struggles with the absurdity of surviving while she perishes, questioning the fairness and meaning of life. This guilt affects his ability to move forward and find peace. He feels burdened by the memory of the tragedy. The trauma leads Drishya to become disillusioned with the conflict and the violence surrounding it. His idealistic view of life and art is shattered. Drishya often appears emotionally numb and detached. His artistic vision and creativity are overshadowed by the horrors he has witnessed.

Despite witnessing and experiencing the brutality of conflict, Siddhartha remains resilient. He continues his work. Siddhartha is impacted by the pervasive violence and loss in the context of the Maoist insurgency. His trauma is more politically charged, driving him toward activism and a quest for social justice. This response highlights a tendency in male characters to channel trauma into action and external objectives. Although Palpasa's direct experiences of trauma are cut short by her death, her life and dreams symbolize the potential and aspiration shattered by the conflict. Her death serves as a catalyst for Drishya's trauma, underscoring the theme of lost potential and unfulfilled desires. The impact of her death on others, especially Drishya, highlights the relational aspect of trauma for female characters, emphasizing how their loss reverberates through the overall "Palpasa cafe" portrays male characters as internalizing and isolating in their trauma, reflecting resilience and a more subdued emotional response. Societal roles and expectations influence how trauma is processed and expressed. Male characters grapple with guilt and purpose, while female characters embody resilience and the guilt and endurance of pain. This novel presents a nuanced portrayal of trauma, highlighting the distinct ways male and

female characters cope with the profound impact of loss and conflict. During the Maoist insurgency, women were often targets of sexual violence by both the Maoist insurgents and the security forces. This included rape, sexual harassment, and other forms of sexual exploitation. The stigma associated with such violence further marginalized these women, making it difficult for them to seek justice or support. Many women lost family members during the conflicts, including husbands, sons, and fathers. This loss not only brought emotional and psychological trauma but also economic hardship, as women had to assume the role of primary breadwinners in a society where their opportunities were limited. The conflict led to significant internal displacement, forcing many women to leave their homes and communities. Displaced women faced a lack of security.

Inadequate living conditions and limited access to basic health care and education services. This displacement increased their vulnerability to exploitation and abuse. Some women were coerced or forcibly recruited into the Maoist insurgency, where they had to make up arms or perform supportive roles for the insurgents. This involvement often comes with its own set of risks and traumas. Women who were involved in the war or insurgents faced significant challenges in integrating into civilian life. They were often stigmatized and discriminated against, making it difficult to find employment, education, or social acceptance. Displacement disrupts women's sense of identity and belonging, causing cultural and psychological dislocation. Finding employment and stable income post-displacement is challenging, particularly for women lacking education or job skills. Post-insurgency periods can disrupt economic activities, and women often bear the brunt of these disruptions. With limited opportunities for employment and income generation, many women struggle to provide for their families. The cumulative stress of violence, loss, and displacement

can have profound impacts on women's mental health. Many women experience anxiety, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), often with limited access to mental health services. Survivors of sexual violence, widows, and displaced women often face social stigma and isolation. Cultural and societal norms may blame or ostracize these women, further exacerbating their difficulties.

Women from different countries are sexually exploited during the civil war. Many efforts are made to support them, such as trauma counseling and economic empowerment programs. By understanding these challenges and working towards comprehensive support systems, communities, and organizations can better aid women in rebuilding their lives after insurgencies. Investigate how trauma affects male and female characters differently in *Palpasa Café* by examining the specific challenges faced by women during and after the insurgency, such as sexual violence, loss of family members, and displacement. Compare the representation of trauma in *Palpasa Café* with other Nepalese literary works in Maoist insurgency. It explores how the trauma experienced during the Maoist insurgency is passed down to subsequent generations and investigates how the child or grandchild of those directly affected by the war show signs of trauma. The novel delves into the complexities of the Nepalese civil war, capturing its impacts on individuals and society. Through a blend of romance, political commentary, and personal introspection, the novel offers a rich tapestry of themes and emotion. The novel is set against the backdrop of the Maoist insurgency in Nepal. It provides a vivid portrayal of war's physical and psychological impacts on the people and the landscape.

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