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On the Social Constructionist Approach to Traumatized Selves in Post-disaster Settings: State-Induced Violence in Nandigram, India

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Abstract   Through the use of concepts such as traumatization and posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), the distressing experiences of survivors are understood in psychology and psychiatry primarily as the behavioural symptoms resulting supposedly from an incomplete emotional and cognitive processing of traumatic events. Due to such an exclusive focus on the intra-psychic processes, besides the survivors' healing facilitated by cultural beliefs and symbols, their trauma-related distress associated with the cultural interpretation of loss is also generally ignored. This paper illustrates the utility of the social constructionist paradigm in understanding the survivors' experiences of suffering and healing within the cultural and socio-political context of violence through an ethnographic study among the poor farmers of Nandigram, India, inflicted by violence from the state government as it tried to forcibly acquire their land to build a chemical factory. How the traumatized selves experience intense distress resulting from disruptions to a sense of wholeness and how this wholeness may be reformulated through culturally valued beliefs are highlighted in the themes of suffering ('experience of PTSD symptoms', 'betrayed self', 'overwhelmed by loss', and 'biographical disruption') and healing ('moral re-affirmation', 'sense of togetherness', 'sense of security due to change in political environment') presented in the vignettes.

Keywords   Ethnography · Healing · Social constructionism · Suffering · Traumatized self

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Why a Social Constructionist Approach to Study Trauma?

The intense distress or suffering of disaster survivors may not be confined to the symptoms of psychiatric disorders, such as posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) as reflected predominantly in the psychological or psychiatric literature (Breslau 2004, 2005; Young 2004). Multidisciplinary approaches to subjective experiences of trauma have indicated that an exclusive focus on PTSD may be ontologically irrelevant in cultures that do not value the notions of individualistic self or agency (Weiss et al. 2003) or traumatic memory (Bracken et al. 1995; Young 1995). Summerfield (1999, p. 1455) noted,

> Many ethnomedical systems have taxonomies which range across the physical, supernatural and moral realms, and do not conceive of illness as situated in body or mind alone… Western trauma theory, which likens the brain to a machine and sees PTSD as the result of incomplete emotional and cognitive processing within that machine, cannot make sense in such settings (Bracken et al. 1995).

It is not just the burgeoning critique of the intra-psychic model of traumatization or traumatic stress but also a holistic and humanitarian view of the survivors' experiences that necessitates a focus on the survivors' experiences in the post-disaster context using a scientific paradigm that transcends an exclusive focus on the intra-psychic processes.

Unlike the positivist tradition of research within mainstream psychology and psychiatry, the social constructionist paradigm opens up the scope for psychological understanding of human experiences in their socio-cultural and historical contexts from a multidisciplinary approach (Gergen 2009; Sampson 1993) through an ethnography of the experiences of healing and suffering that may include those of PTSD symptoms. As Sampson (1993) pointed out, the social constructionist paradigm entails knowledge-creation about human experiences through a process of co-construction, that is, dialogic partnership developed between the researcher and the participant, where the role of researcher's motivation and theoretical perspectives in shaping the research relationships and outcomes is foregrounded (Breslau 2005).

While applying this process of co-construction in the research on the impact of traumatic events, Bracken et al. (1995), and Lewis-Fernandez and Kleinman (1994) emphasized that the survivors' suffering is intricately associated with shared notions of selfhood or personhood in the respective cultures. Supporting this view, Bracken (2001) noted the relevance of PTSD in the Western world where the notions of agency and control may be central in defining selfhood. But within other societies, such as Uganda, Bracken, Giller and Summerfield (1995) found out that the civil war-affected people of that country were actually distressed due to destruction of harmony in their relationships rather than the symptoms of PTSD.

A Relativist Approach to Self in the Context of Trauma

What follows from above is that an alternative conceptualization of psychological impact of trauma must incorporate the cultural notions of self and how its coherence

is threatened and re-negotiated amidst the traumatic events and their socio-political consequences. Paranjpe (1998), through a review of theories and perspectives on the concept of self, noted that it could be understood as "a particular person in contrast with, in relation to, or as different from others". Also, the 'boundary' separating self from other is understood in literature as subjective and socially or culturally constructed (Baumeister 1997; Misra 2010; Paranjpe 1998).

In a similar vein, Shweder and Bourne (1984) outlined a relativist approach to self in which they posited that the worldview or meaning systems shared within a culture may pivotally shape the experiences of its members. According to them, "the metaphors by which people live and the world views to which they subscribe" (p. 189) are the forms of cultural discourse or "creations of collective imagination" (p. 193). For example, the worldview or metaphors of a culture may be associated with a socio-centric view of self that "subordinates individual interests to the good of collectivity" (p. 190). Citing their observations of such socio-centric view in Oriya (associated with Odisha, a state in India) and Balinese culture, they point out that people there "live by a metaphor and subscribe to a world-premise that directs their attention and passions to particular systems, *relationally conceived and contextually appraised*" (p. 193, emphasis added). Similarly, culturally shared egocentric view may orient a person to take society to be "created to serve the interests of some idealized autonomous, abstract individual existing free of society yet living in society" (p. 193).

The egocentric view of self has also been implicitly taken to be universal nature of human beings within biomedicine and psychiatry and psychiatrists and social scientists have voiced their concern for incorporating a culturally contextualized understanding of self (such as the one offered by Shweder and Bourne 1984) in order to explore meaningfully the mental health problems, trauma, or distress (Gaines 1982a, b; Kirmayer 2004; Kirmayer et al. 2010; Kleinman et al. 1978). Thus, the social constructionist approach to trauma-related distress closely follows the relativist approach to self and a potential threat to its coherence caused by the traumatic event.

Social Construction of Traumatized Selves: A Focus on Suffering and Healing

The concepts of suffering and healing that have been utilized to study experiences of health and mental health in their cultural and socio-historical contexts (Cassell 2004; Kleinman 1988a, b; Lewis-Fernandez and Kleinman 1994; Priya 2012) are focussed on selfhood or personhood in constructing the experiences of trauma or distress. According to Cassell (2004, p. 38),

> People can suffer from what they have lost of themselves in relation to the world of objects, events, and relationships. Such suffering occurs because our intactness as persons, our coherence and integrity, come not only from intactness of the body but also from the wholeness of the web of relationships with self and others.

Cassell, in his book, *The Nature of Suffering and the Goals of Medicine,* concurs that the wholeness that a person experiences may be threatened as he/she is not able

to uphold the culturally valued aspects of self-definition. Many studies conducted on the impact of trauma, irrespective of the usage of the term suffering, have highlighted suffering as demoralization or the distress associated with one's failure to abide by the cultural values (Bracken et al. 1995; Priya 2010; Summerfield 1999). Besides, several studies in the non-Western societies have also indicated the survivors' distress as disaggregation of relationships caused by political violence and atrocious events (Abramowitz 2005; Han 2004). Furthermore, the concept of suffering does not exclude a study of symptoms of disorders but what is emphasized are the meanings those symptoms have for the sufferer (Marsella and Christopher 2004).

As Summerfield (1999) points out, it is the social world, however mutilated in war or violent events, that holds the key to recovery or healing. Healing, to Cassell (2004, 2013), is the process of restoring the experience of wholeness by reformulating aspects of person in a new manner. Developing an enabling meaning in life through "culturally authorized interpretations" (Kleinman 1988b, p. 134) may be taken to be the core of the process of restoring the intactness of the person.

This paper highlights the significance of exploring through a social constructionist inquiry how the coherence of selfhood is threatened or reformulated within the socio-political and cultural contexts generating the experiences of suffering and healing for the survivors. This is done through an ethnographic study conducted among the survivors of political violence in Nandigram, India with its goals of studying the experiences of suffering and healing among the traumatized selves. Let us first try to understand the context and the unfolding of the traumatic events.

The Context of Political Violence at Nandigram

In a review of the impact of special economic zones (SEZs) in India, Sharma (2009) noted that besides reducing employment, creating job-crisis for the rural population (which majorly comprises non-skilled and semi-skilled workers), land is often acquired from the unwilling farmers. The farmers of Nandigram faced a similar plight.

Nandigram, a rural area in East Medinipur district of West Bengal state in India located about 150 km south of Kolkata (capital city of the state of West Bengal), comprises of three administrative blocks—Block 1, Block 2, and Block 3. Its literacy rate is 70 %. The commercial crop of the region is betel leaves. The average annual income of the resident is about Rs. 18,000 (equivalent to USD 300 approximately). Besides agriculture and fishing, the people of Nandigram also work as labourers in garment industries and brick kilns. Block 1 was under the severest threat of land acquisition potentially affecting 95,000 people (Nandigram 2007) as the state government wanted to build a chemical hub under SEZ guidelines.

From January to December 2007, the farmers had been resisting through a local forum of farmers against land acquisition, *Bhumi Uchchhed Pratirodh Committee* (BUPC) the violent methods of the cadres of the Communist Party of India (Maxist) or CPI(M), a major political party of the Leftist coalition state government, and the state police. More than 29 deaths, hundreds of cases of minor and major injuries,

and several cases of sexual assault and torture on women had been reported (Nandigram 2007). *Panchayat* (village administration) elections in May 2008 and the *Lok Sabha* (Parliamentary) elections in April 2009 brought some respite to the farmers as the CPI(M)'s loss in these weakened the assault of its cadres but the fear of violence persisted because the farmers were divided in pro-CPI(M) and anti-CPI(M) factions. The pro-CPI(M) farmers left the village after the 2009 parliamentary elections but the threat of their violent return and fresh conflicts were not ruled out. Particularly during the *Vidhan Sabha* (State Assembly) elections in 2011, there were signs of violent conflicts and social boycott of returnees in the region (Banerjee 2011; Gupta 2011). In Summerfield's (1999) terms, Nandigram also faced a destruction of its social world. In line with the above-mentioned conceptualization of suffering and healing, following were the objectives of the study:

1. To understand the survivors' experiences of suffering in the context of violence and atrocities.
   (a) To explore the experiences and meanings of posttraumatic stress symptoms.
   (b) To explore the experiences of distress associated with the death of or torture faced by family member(s).
   (c) To explore the experiences of distress associated with ideological and social divide in the villages.
2. To understand the process of healing facilitated by cultural beliefs and symbols.

Methodology

As Geertz (1988) and Hammersley and Atkinson (2007) have contended, ethnographic methodology facilitates a researcher's understanding of the worldview of the people from their own perspective. Ethnography, thus, was a suitable choice as a qualitative methodology to address the objectives of the research that were centred on reconstructing the survivors' experiences in post-disaster context.

The Fieldwork

In the first week of June 2009, I came across an organization in Kolkata that was making attempts to help the survivors seeking legal justice for atrocities faced by them. It provided me with some useful information about the violence and the resistance shown by the farmers. This organization and another senior colleague of mine at Calcutta University informed me about a physician who provided medical help to the injured farmers during violence. He helped me in getting in touch with some farmers in Sonachura village. My 20-day fieldwork thus began in mid-June 2009.

During the fieldwork, I often feared the loss of my own life and being tortured as I thought that I too could be the target of the perpetrators of violence for being seen as a sympathizer of villagers' movement. These feelings were coming to me when

the village was relatively 'quiet' after the Panchayat and Lok Sabha polls of May 2008 and April 2009, respectively, in which CPI(M) lost most of its seats in Nandigram. This was my first clue about the trauma people at the village or in Nandigram, in general, might have undergone since January 2007. The positive contributions of my fear was that it could help me empathize to some extent with farmers' consistent fear and agony of constant threat to life and dignity that they had being going through for months together.

Participants

I decided to have people who had undergone physical injuries or deaths in their families as participants. Two key informants, who were members of BUPC, helped me in arranging an interview with such survivors. Out of the 12 such people (all men) contacted by them in Sonachura and the neighbouring villages, only seven could agree to give time for an interview. I could not find one of them at his home as he had to go to the city for an urgent work. Therefore, finally, I could conduct semi-structured interviews with six participants. For ethical reasons, I have used pseudonyms for them, their family members, and the key informants. The preliminary information about these participants is given in Table 1.

Data Collection

A large chunk of my time was spent in observing the social lives of people at my key informant's house and in the marketplace of Sonachura village and in having informal interactions with my key informants and their acquaintances at Sonachura. The semi-structured interviews were interspersed in between these observations and interactions as and when my key informants informed me about the readiness of the participants for that.

Semi-structured Interviews

I prepared the items of the semi-structured interviews in view of addressing the objectives of the study. The flow of the interviews involved moving ahead from

Table 1 Preliminary information about the participants (all male)

S. no.	Name	Age (years)	Atrocities faced
1.	Ramesh	24	Father missing since November 2007
2.	Suman	35	Survived a bullet injury on 14 March 2007, and he and his mother suffered bone fractures
3.	Shekhar	45	Received bullet injuries near his lower back on 10 November 2007
4.	Aman	36	His 14-year-old son was killed on 07 January 2007
5.	Lokesh	60	His son who was in his twenties was killed on 14 March 2007
6.	Yaksh	60	His son who was in his thirties was killed on 07 January 2007

general probes related to the participants' daily routine (e.g. "Please tell me about the activities you generally involve in throughout the day") to the sources of strength during violent events (e.g. "Please tell me about the sources of strength that helped you see through the difficult time during violent events") and then finally to specific ones related to their experiences of suffering (e.g. "How has the social divide created by political violence affected you?"). Similarly, suitable items were developed to explore the role of social supports networks (family, relatives, and social activists) in shaping the experiences of suffering and healing. Other important probes about suffering included symptoms of posttraumatic stress such as re-experiencing of the traumatic event, persistent avoidance of stimuli associated with the trauma, numbing of general responsiveness, and persistent symptoms of increased arousal (American Psychiatric Association [*DSM-IV-TR*] 2000).

The interviews were conducted at the participants' homes or work place. Balram Da, a key informant helped me as a translator, who could translate the statements of Bangla language spoken by the participants into Hindi for my understanding, and my probes in Hindi language into Bangla for the participants. The interviews were conducted after taking the consent of participants regarding audio-tape recording of the interviews, and utilizing their responses in research manuscripts and publications. Each interview session was of the duration between one and one and a half hour. Two interview sessions were conducted with each participant except Lokesh who I could not meet after the first interview. These interviews were then transcribed verbatim for analysis after I returned home from the field.

Participant Observation

My several informal interactions with the villagers and observing them around the market place (where most of the interactions took place among the villagers) helped me understand the social relationships they generally shared with each other and with me. In my initial informal interactions with them, they used to be suspicious about my identity. However, after knowing from me my research goals and acquaintance with Balram Da, my key informant, they grew comfortable interacting with me. During the interviews, I could also observe and take a note of their nonverbal expressions of anger, sadness or distress, and a sense of satisfaction in life.

Constructionist Grounded Theory Analysis of Data

Hammersley and Atkinson (2007, p. 159) asserted that ethnographic data analysis involves "grounded theorizing" for fulfilling the concerns of preserving in the process of data analysis the context-embeddedness of the narratives and of acknowledging their co-construction. Constructivist grounded theory (CGT) approach, with its aim of doing a rich conceptual analysis of lived experiences of people in the socio-historical context while recognizing the co-constructed nature of data and their analysis (Charmaz 1995, 2006), thus suited the requirements of analysing ethnographic data. The CGT analysis proceeds with the assumptions that the epistemological stance and metatheoretical frameworks adopted by the

researcher inevitably shapes the nature of analysis. I adhered to the epistemology of social constructionism and utilized the broad analytic frameworks of biopsycho-social model of health and illness (Engel 1977; Kleinman 1988a) that focuses on how the socio-historical context shapes the experiences of suffering and healing (Cassell 2004; Kleinman 1988b).

The CGT approach to analysis enabled me to code the narratives and field notes using the procedures of initial, focused, and axial coding through the method of constant comparison as per the guidelines given in Charmaz (2006). Initial coding involved line-by-line and incident-to-incident coding of the qualitative data. Through the method of constant comparison, the data associated with various aspects of or incidents related to the experiences were compared for the same participants and then among all the participants. Some of the initial codes including 'an intense feeling of being betrayed by fellow villagers' and 'an intense feeling of being betrayed by the state government' were taken as the focused codes as these categorized the data incisively. Axial coding helps in comparing and reorganizing focused codes through inquiring whether one of some of these may be brought under (or as an aspect of) another focused code. Finally, the focused codes that "best represent what you see happening in your data" are taken as the categories (p. 91). The other focused codes that are grouped under a category are termed as their sub-categories. For example, the two focused codes mentioned above were developed as the sub-categories of the category, 'betrayed self'. Using the analytic processes of CGT, I developed four categories of suffering and three categories of healing process:

Categories of Suffering

1. *Experience of PTSD symptoms* Re-experiencing of the events of violence and related objects and people or the experience of numbing of responsiveness.
2. *Betrayed self* Feeling extremely distressed about the breaking of trust and harm caused by people who were trusted by the sufferer.
    (a) *An intense feeling of being betrayed by fellow villagers* Distress associated with trust broken by and harm caused by the fellow villagers.
    (b) *An intense feeling of being betrayed by the state government* Distress associated with the trust broken by the state government that had promised to listen to the villagers' voice.
3. *Overwhelmed by loss* A distressing experience of shattering of will or an enabling meaning in life resulting from the death of a family member.
4. *Biographical disruption* Distress due to sudden and drastic changes in the perceived nature or demands of familial roles and responsibilities (such as earning the livelihood for the family or consoling the grief of a family member).

Categories of Healing

1. *Moral re-affirmation* An experience of high self-esteem associated with the actions of oneself or one's family members (as a response to atrocities) that are either culturally valued or recognized and supported by the outside world.

2. *Sense of togetherness* A strong identification with the community in which the decisions about ways to face or respond to the atrocities is taken as a collective.
3. *Sense of security due to change in political environment* A hope that the new political set up would not bring apathy or atrocities for the people.

I have chosen to present these findings in a series of four vignette's to gain insights in a coherent way into the experiences of suffering and healing as unfolded into the lives of the participants.

Vignette One

Ramesh, a 24-year-old man, used to assist his father in farming. His father went missing since his participation in the peaceful procession against land acquisition on 10 November 2007 but as per Ramesh, he was killed by the goons of the Left parties. Besides sharing his anguish over that, he also shared several times during our interaction, his concern about his mother's distress over her physical health problems and death of her husband.

Experience of PTSD Symptoms

Ramesh talked about his experiences of re-experiencing the togetherness with his father and that of numbing,

> My family members usually cry at night. Sometimes, I am not able to fall asleep. My father comes in my dreams and asks me to open the door of our house. Sometimes, I become *sunn* (numb) and keep looking at an object for a long time.

Betrayed Self

He shared his anguish over the betrayal of trust by the state government,

> The biggest cheating was done by the state government as it proclaimed that it cared for farmers but it began to kill us.

He also narrated how he suffered as his own villagers broke the trust and the relationship shared with the community,

> "The people who were threatening me of abduction are still living in this village. They have not left their homes. After my father was abducted, they were telling me, 'We will abduct you too. We will cut you into pieces, pack you in a box and throw it in the river.'"

Overwhelmed by Loss

While narrating his experiences related to the violent events, he spoke of how his will to live and resurrect his life had been damaged considerably,

"My six-year old daughter asks me where her grandfather has gone. What do I tell that child? Tell me, how can we have peace of mind? My brother (*pisto da*) died of a bullet injury. My wife was injured by a bullet. My brother and father are no more. Tell me, how will I live now?"

Biographical Disruption

He shared his distress over his inability to carry out his new responsibilities towards his surviving family members,

"When my father was there, I didn't have any responsibility of earning the livelihood for the family. Now, all his family responsibilities are to be carried out by me. Therefore, I feel tensed… I should comfort my mother but she is still distressed. Sometimes, she becomes extremely inconsolable."

Moral Re-affirmation

Besides his agonies, he also shared a sense of pride over his own and the villagers' resolve not to leave their land under pressure of the administration,

"We are ready to sacrifice anything but are not going to leave our land. The only reason to feel good is our 'movement' to protect our village and its fruitful outcomes that we are witnessing."

Sense of Togetherness

He also expressed his satisfaction over how his villagers remained united in their resolve to protect their land,

"In the moments of sadness and fear of assault, I do not feel left alone. We villagers live as a family. All of us are here together. Nobody left this place **[despite threat of forced displacement**]"

Sense of Security due to Change in Political Environment

He also narrated his positive feelings associated with changed political scenario,

"Now, situation is a bit better as we have come in 'power'. Now, they [the perpetrators of violence] won't be able to do anything."

Vignette Two

Shekhar, a 45-year-old farmer, was shot at near his waist during the procession against land acquisition on 10 November 2007. His right leg had become less functional due to numbness in the thigh muscles. During the semi-structured interviews, tears came to his eyes while narrating the near-death experience that he had. But he also felt pride in sharing how his sacrifice had changed the lives of villagers for good.

Experience of PTSD Symptoms

Shekhar shared his experiences of getting reminded of the incidents of violence,

> "My family members and I, at times, get reminded of the shocking attack on me and the shocking physical pain in the hospital. But, we were concerned about saving our land people from the government."

Betrayed Self

He shared his agony that the man who had shot at him belonged to the same village,

> "The man who shot at me, has fled to Gujarat with his entire family… The villagers, in general, have peace of mind but, they still fear that the villagers affiliated to CPM party may attack them once again."

He also shared how the trust was broken by the destructive policies of the government,

> "Our way of life is entirely different from urban people in that we are entirely dependent on agriculture. While planning the 'chemical hub', the government cared little about our agriculture-based life."

Overwhelmed by Loss

He narrated his family members' distress over his life-threatening injury and the uncertainty over his recovery when he was hospitalized in Kolkata,

> "My family members were deeply agonized and didn't know what to do. There were contrasting news about my being dead or alive. Some local television news channels had announced my death."

Biographical Disruption

He narrated his anguish over his inability to earn the livelihood for the family,

> "I have become disabled now [right leg partially paralyzed]. I am not able do anything. I have become completely immobile… I used to work as a contractor for constructing building besides doing farming. But, after being injured by a bullet, my body is no longer capable for any work or farming. This is agonizing."

Moral Re-affirmation

Despite undergoing distressing experiences, he also shared how his morale was boosted up by the villagers' determination in protecting their land,

> "All the people who were participating in the procession [on 10 November, 2007] had taken a resolve of fighting till the end. We had conveyed it to the

Government that they might take away as many dead bodies from our villages as they wanted but we would not leave our land. This was our determination."

The recognition of and the support to their movement was the other source of courage,

"Our source of courage was the urban people, educated people, organizations, doctors, lawyers who not only bore the brunt of police action but kept supporting our movement and servicing us with clothes, food material etc."

Sense of Togetherness

He expressed his sense of satisfaction as he spoke about villagers' uniting for the movement,

"All my family members were participating in that procession. That day [10 November, 2007], only one or two women might have stayed back in their houses. Rest all the people—men, women and children—were a part of the procession."

Sense of Security Due to Change in Political Environment

He expressed his hope that the new political regime would continue to act against any oppression on them,

"A political party exists only if there is people's support for it. People's support is not with CPI(M). People's trust on the leaders of CPI(M), who had become very greedy and wealthy, is over… I feel much more peace of mind nowadays. We do not have sufficient food material but we do have peace of mind."

Vignette Three

Yaksh, a 60-year-old farmer, lost his son on 07 January 2007 as he was killed during a procession against land acquisition. His voice often got choked while narrating his bereavement and the struggle for survival of his family in the absence of his deceased son.

Experience of PTSD Symptoms

He shared the distress associated with re-experiencing the incident,

I am more worried at night as I am reminded of what the violence has done to me and my family. Then, I am not able to fall asleep. My son is no more. What will happen to his family? What will happen to myself? How will we live, how will we survive? These worries increase at night. Therefore, I am not able to fall asleep. These are the tensions… My tension increases when I talk about this incident."

Betrayed Self

He expressed his agony over being betrayed by the villagers and the state government,

> "It is really been shocking that our own villagers and the government created all this adversity."

Overwhelmed by Loss

He shared how his wife's and his morale was deeply affected by the loss of their son,

> "Mother has been seriously ill because her elder son is no more. Sometimes, she cries. Sometimes, she is *ajnana* (unconscious)… When I am too much tensed, I do not talk to anyone. I just sit silently. I talk to people only after my tension is gone."

Moral Re-affirmation

He expressed a sense of fulfilment over the fact that many outsiders like me acknowledged their suffering and his son's sacrifice,

> "I felt *anand* (joy) while talking to you. It is so because my son died but people from all parts of our country came and talked about us and our movement. I feel honoured by that… [silence]… It was one thing if my son had after illness but he died to protect our motherland, he cannot be called 'dead'."

Sense of Togetherness

He also expressed how the participation of the entire community in the movement gave strength to the members,

> "We all lost many lives in the violent aggression against us but our unity in the villages saw us through."

Vignette Four

Aman, a 36-year-old man worked as a daily-wage labourer. He lost his teenaged son in the attack on a procession he was participating in on 07 January 2007. His account often reflected his distress due to bereavement and his inability to comfort his inconsolable wife.

Experience of PTSD Symptoms

He shared his feelings of re-experiencing the traumatic incident,

"At 12 midnight or 1 A.M., I am reminded of my [deceased] child, I start crying. I do not know when I fall asleep while crying."

Betrayed Self

He narrated how he was betrayed by the ruling political party that he used to support,

"Before this 'movement', I used to work for the CPI(M) party but after the party created *gondogol* (violence and carnage) for the villagers, I left it as it cheated us."

Overwhelmed by Loss

He also shared his distress about his wife's lack of will to engage in family life,

"He, who is no more and has become immortal, is not going to be alive again... I calm myself down by talking to my friends but my wife stays at home only. She is more distressed. When we are talking about it right now, she is crying. We will carry this agony throughout our life."

Biographical Disruption

He also narrated his inability to console his wife who is deeply distressed by the loss of her son,

"This is our new house [he indicates towards it]. But, this remains closed. My wife starts crying right since the morning. Therefore, we are not able to cook our food regularly. How will we live if I also start crying? [his eyes becomes moist]" It is difficult to console my wife.

Moral Re-affirmation

Despite being overwhelmed, he also shared a sense of fulfilment over the martyrdom of his son,

"My family and I are in the midst of agony and joy... My son is a *shahid* (martyr). When some meeting or procession is held and people raise the slogan, "*Shaurya amar rahe!*" ("Long live Shaurya!"), I have a sense of fulfilment."

He also shared a new enabling meaning in life through culturally valued beliefs of taking care of one's family.

"The agony of Shaurya's death will remain with us throughout our lives but to live our lives, we need to do our work and earn our livelihood. This is our *kartavya* (duty) towards them."

Sense of Togetherness

He narrated how he derived mental strength out of the community's participation in their movement,

"I feel happy that all of us are still involved in our 'movement'. Here, I get everything that I want [work as per our skills]. We won't get it anywhere else. This is the reason why we are involved in this 'movement'."

Sense of Security due to Change in Political Environment

He expressed a sense of solace and confidence that the changing political scenario had protected them from further atrocities,

"Currently, we have the support of our MP (Member of Parliament from Nandigram constituency). We trust him. He is like our guardian. He will also help us take the decision about what vocation my children should go for after their basic education."

Discussion

As highlighted in the beginning of this paper, social constructionist paradigm when adopted for research on mental health of trauma survivors has the potential to explore their experiences of suffering and healing. Let us begin with understanding how the experiences of suffering among the traumatized selves are associated with the threats to the intactness of selfhood.

Suffering Among the Traumatized Selves

Experiences of suffering are linked to a threat to the intactness of selfhood or having an enabling meaning in life based not only on a sense of personal space for growth but also on the experience of wholeness one may derive out relating within the social world (Cassell 1991, 2004; Kleinman 1988a, b). The categories of suffering point out to their intense distress caused by the threats to the coherence of their selfhood within the socio-political context.

Experience of PTSD Symptoms

Among various aspects of suffering experiences among the survivors were those associated with the re-experiencing and numbing symptoms of PTSD. The symptoms of PTSD may be prevalent across cultures where the survivors are faced with intense and prolonged exposure to traumatic events (Kienzler 2008). Mehta et al. (2005) also noted the symptoms of PTSD (re-experiencing predominantly) among the women survivors of communal riots near Godhra in 2002 in Gujarat, India. However, Marsella and Christopher (2004) noted, PTSD "cannot be decontextualized from the cultural milieu in which it occurs, because this isolates it from its etiological roots, experiential referents, and its methods of mediation"(p. 527). In this regard, it is important to note that in the vignettes, the survivors shared the re-experiencing events that either reminded them of the loved ones they had lost (Vignette One, Three, and Four), the violence that took the lives of the loved ones

(Vignette Three), or the threat to life of the loved ones (Vignette Two). Apparently, the experiential referents for the PTSD symptoms were centred on their relationships.

Overwhelmed by Loss

The survivors shared their agony over the loss of the loved ones and the resulting shattering of will as represented in his sharing, "How will I live now?" (Vignette One). Furthermore, the survivors shared their loss of meaning in life due to a serious injury to a family member and the uncertainty about his survival and recovery (Vignette Two) and the same as represented in frequent crying and a lack of any interest in familial and social roles among the female members of the family (Vignettes Three and Four). Kleinman et al. (1998) posited that the socio-politically induced miseries include the damage to inter-subjective connections or relationships that shape a person's meaning in life. Such an experience of loss of relationship may have an overpowering or overwhelming impact that may render the past and immediate future difficult to be comprehended by the survivors (Charmaz 2002). Das (1990) in her study of anti-Sikh riots in Delhi, India in 1984, noted a lack of interest in familial and social roles among bereaved women similar to those in the vignettes Three and Four.

Betrayed Self

In the vignettes, the survivors shared the feeling of betrayal of the promise to care for the farmers by the government. As Das and Kleinman (2001) put it, when faced with the state-generated violence marked by the destruction of the conducive relationship between the state and the people, there is more at stake (in terms of safety, security, and care) for the people than the ruling few. This breach of trust by the government may also often coincide with state-generated violence that may destroy the community relationships besides causing personal loss.

In Vignettes One, Two, and Three, the survivors shared their intense distress associated with being betrayed their own fellow villagers. The ruining of trust in one's known social world as an experience of distress is a common fallout of state-generated violence in the modern world (Ramphele 2001). Das (1990) noted among the survivors of anti-Sikh riots in Delhi, India in 1984, a similar feeling of being betrayed by kinsmen in not saving the lives of relatives and by the murderers who constantly taunted them.

Biographical Disruption

Survivors' suffering was also associated with being made to rethink their biography in terms of the changes in the nature and demands of the culturally valued familial roles and obligations that resulted from the loss of the loved ones or injury to oneself. They shared such experiences of suffering in terms of the difficulty in carrying out the new responsibility of consoling the grieving mother or wife (Vignettes Two and Four), and earning the livelihood for the family (Vignette One),

and inability to work and earn the livelihood due to paralysis in one leg (Vignette Two). Similar to what Bury (1982) and Charmaz (1983) noted in case of chronic illness, traumatic events may also change the relational and social context of survivors' lives and generate suffering by making them rethink their present and future roles within the family or community settings as observed in all the vignettes. The suffering associated with a restricted life has been observed among the women survivors of anti-Sikh riots or 1984 in Delhi where the widows were forcibly married to a male family member of the deceased husband (Das 1990). Similarly, the mothers who lost their sons in the Marathwada earthquake in India were forcibly subjected to surgical operations so that they might regain fertility and the potential to bear a male child that was desirable as per the cultural norms (Acharya 2000).

Healing Among the Traumatized Selves

In the face of traumatic situations which are often accompanied by adverse socio-political events, as per Das and Kleinman (2002), there may be "no definitive crossing over to safety and renewal" (p. 24). But, "there usually is no complete defeat, no ultimate breakdown and dissolution" either (p. 24). Let us discuss the process of survivors' healing or reformulation of selfhood.

Moral Re-affirmation

Survivors' experience of high morale was associated with their adherence to the culturally shared value of protecting one's land even at the cost of sacrificing anything that they could (Vignette One and Two), considering the family member who was killed while participating in the procession to be a 'martyr' (Vignette Four), and gaining the re-affirmation of their noble resolve to protect their land from the outsiders who supported their movement (Vignette Two and Three). As mentioned earlier, healing is understood as the experience of developing an enabling meaning in life derived from the cultural values (Kleinman 1988a, b; Frank 2000; deVries 1996). Adhering to cultural values of sacrifice and martyrdom in the face of a severe threat to entire community may be understood as re-affirmation of moral status (Charmaz 2002). Kleinman (1988a) also emphasized the necessity of having an experiential space, such as the recognition and support to the survivors' movement by the outsiders for facilitating the development of an enabling meaning in life. Also, in case of 1984 anti-Sikh riots similar to the survivors of Nandigram, seeking recognition by the survivors of their victimhood from the outside supporters also meant an action towards bringing the wrongs by the perpetrators to the collective consciousness (Das 1990).

Sense of Togetherness

Survivors' high morale was also associated with indentifying with the community resulting in responding to the atrocities as a collective. Survivors garnered strength from the fact that all of them faced the atrocities together (Vignette One), that all the villagers, irrespective of gender or caste participated in the movement together

(Vignette Two and Four) and that their unity saw them through their struggle to save their land (Vignette Three). Identifying with the community that resulted in collective action, according to deVries (1996), is a process that provides some solace as well as a positive direction to the battered community and he termed it as the cultural self-help strategy as a means of survival. Das (1990) also noted a similar process of self-help strategy—in terms of making a demand before the government to provide houses in a safer area and the resources to rebuild their means of livelihood—among the riot-affected Sikh community in Delhi.

Sense of Security Due to Change in Political Environment

Survivors expressed their satisfaction with the new political set up coupled with the hope that it would not bring apathy or atrocities for the people and provide a caring and more secure environment to the villagers afflicted by the state government's atrocities. As deVries (1996) noted, healing the trauma related to socio-political upheavals may require protecting and caring environment for the survivors. For example, the immediate concerns of the villagers of an African country affected by civil war was restoration of peace for going back to their village to engage in agriculture (Bracken et al. 1995). Pham et al. (2010) and Wessells (1999) also emphasized that the government and policy makers should ensure creation of a protective environment through social reconstruction and economic development in the post-disaster period to aid the healing process among the survivors.

Conclusion

It must be noted that because of the difficulty in approaching and living with the villagers facing the danger of violent attacks, only a brief ethnography of 20 days could be conducted for this study. More insights about the experiences of suffering and healing within the socio-cultural context might have been gained through an ethnography of longer duration. However, as Kleinman (1992) pointed out, brief ethnographic study such as this one might still be worthwhile because of its potential to explore the local worlds of illness or distress. The findings of this study, therefore, may be taken as the indicators of the value of employing a social constructionist approach to traumatized selves that allowed for a culturally contextualized understanding of survivors' suffering and healing.

The social constructionist study of the traumatized selves presented in this paper highlighted the need to transcend the exclusive focus of mainstream psychology and psychiatry on PTSD by illustrating how in the face of trauma, survivors' suffering or threat to the intactness of selfhood (gained form the web of relationships and culturally valued worldview) may also become an important focus of disaster mental health research. While the categories, 'experience of PTSD symptoms', 'betrayed self', and 'overwhelmed by loss' were associated with disaggregation of relationships, 'biographical disruption' was associated with restrictions on personal space within the context of the socio-political changes caused by violence. However, it has been the remnant of cultural values (such as protecting the

motherland even at the cost of ones's own life, and having a sense of togetherness amidst crisis) besides a change in the political environment that facilitated healing or the development of a new enabling meaning in life. The psychotherapies of Western origin that are assumed to be universally useful actually focus on the cognitive control of the person over situations. Rather than using such a potentially alien cultural discourse of cognitive control, Bracken et al. (1995), Kleinman (1988b), Marsella (2010), and Summerfield (1999) have recommended the study of cultural values and symbols that may shape survivors' healing in their specific socio-historical contexts.

Finally, it also must be noted that although this paper is based on a study of survivors' traumatized selves within the context of a human-made disaster, a social constructionist approach may also be meaningful in a context-sensitive study of traumatized selves within natural disaster settings. The reason is that any type of disaster, occurring in the Western or the non-Western world may not only inflict losses of lives and material resources but also damage the networks of relationships or the social world. Also, paradoxically, the remnants of the social world may constitute the resources for recovery or healing (Summerfield 1999; Kleinman et al. 1998).

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