Smaratungga: Journal of Education and Buddhist Studies
2025, Vol. 5, No. 2, 185-206
https://www.smaratungga.ac.id/journal/index.php/sjbse

Representation of Trauma and the Practice of Metta in Memoirs of Survivors of the People's War in Nepal

Badri Prasad Pokharel[1]*
[1]Tribhuvan University, Kathmandu, Nepal

ABSTRACT

This study aim to relationship between post-conflict trauma and the Buddhist practice of *metta* as represented in memoirs written by survivors of Nepal's People's War (1996–2006). The research aims to (1) describe how former combatants and civilians narrate their traumatic memories and (2) analyze the potential of *metta* as a culturally grounded mechanism for emotional and ethical healing in a society recovering from prolonged political violence. Employing qualitative textual analysis of six post-conflict memoirs, the study integrates trauma theory with Buddhist ethical teachings, particularly the Brahmavihāra, to identify narrative patterns and interpret survivor experiences. The findings reveal three central themes. First, traumatic experiences persist long after the end of armed conflict, manifesting through intrusive recollections, emotional fragmentation, and embodied fear. Second, individual trauma is closely intertwined with collective suffering, where disrupted social bonds and mistrust continue to shape everyday life in post-war Nepal. Third, *metta* emerges as an ethical counter-practice capable of moderating anger, grief, and moral disorientation produced by wartime ideologies. In several memoirs, *metta*-oriented reflections appear to reframe painful memories, facilitate forgiveness, and re-establish empathetic relations within fractured communities. The study's implications extend to peacebuilding and culturally embedded psychosocial support. The originality of this study lies in its interdisciplinary integration of literary trauma analysis with Buddhist peace ethics, offering a novel interpretive framework for understanding trauma, moral repair, and reconciliation in Nepal's post-conflict landscape.

ARTICLE INFO[1]

Keywords:
Post-conflict trauma; metta practice; Nepali conflict memoirs; Buddhist peace ethics; trauma narrative.

Article History:
Received 26th Sep, 2025
Revised 29th Oct 2025
Accepted 27th Nov, 2025
Published 30th Dec, 2025

How to Cite in APA Style:
Badri, P. P. (2025). Representation of Trauma and the Practice of Metta in Memoirs of Survivors of the People's War in Nepal. *Smaratungga: Journal of Education and Buddhist Studies, 5*(2), 185-206. doi: 10.53417/sjebs.v5i2.152

*Corresponding author: Badri Prasad Pokharel email address: badri.pokhrel@smc.tu.edu.np
Published by Center of Research and Publication of Smaratungga Buddhist Collage

https://doi.org/10.53417/sjebs.v5i2.152

Introduction

Trauma resulting from political violence is a global phenomenon that leaves long-lasting marks on human life. World history demonstrates how events such as slavery in the United States, Apartheid in South Africa, colonialism in Asia and Africa, and the Stolen Generation in Australia produced psychological wounds that continue to be transmitted across generations. These forms of collective trauma do not reside only in the bodies of survivors but also become embedded in cultural narratives, social memory, and interpersonal relations. This phenomenon shows that political violence does not cease at the moment of truce; it continues to live through the memories and everyday experiences of victims.

A similar context appears in South Asia, particularly Nepal, through the *People's War* that took place between 1996 and 2006. This armed conflict killed more than 17,000 people, caused over 1,000 disappearances, and forced millions of civilians to leave their homes and live in uncertainty (Reuters, 2025; Trial, 2025; UN, 2011). Its psychosocial impact was even broader: arbitrary detention, torture, enforced disappearance, and the loss of family members without legal accountability (Human Rights Watch, 2020). Women, children, and rural communities became the most vulnerable groups, while former combatants lived under the constant threat of violence even after the conflict formally ended. In such circumstances, trauma did not occur as a single event but as a recurring experience that re-emerged through nightmares, intrusive memories, and emotional tension that remained difficult to regulate.

Many of these traumatic experiences were later mediated through literary works such as memoirs, testimonial narratives, and post-conflict novels. Writers such as Lama, Shrestha, Subedi, Rai, Jirel, and Ghimire articulated their experiences through narratives that depict fear, loss, and moral confusion. Their writing highlights the distinction between *the experiencing I*, who lived through violence, and *the narrating I*, who attempts to understand the past through language and symbols. Yet these narrative patterns also show that even nearly two decades after the war, many survivors continue to confront unresolved residues of trauma—indicating that psychological recovery does not occur automatically once armed conflict ends.

Research on the *People's War*, trauma, and its representation in literature has developed along three main trajectories. First, a number of studies examine the social, political, and psychological impacts of the conflict. Shakya (2011) describes the recurring cycles of violence that continued after the war; Acharya (2013) analyzes how trauma must be situated within Nepal's social history; while Caruth (1995) and Hunt (2010) provide theoretical foundations for understanding trauma as a recurring phenomenon expressed through intrusive memories, hyperarousal, and emotional fragmentation. This body of research underscores that trauma is multidimensional and closely tied to historical and social contexts.

Second, scholars such as Pokharel (Pokharel, 2022a, 2022b), Dongol and Neumann (2021), and Gyawali and Selim (2024) have examined representations of trauma in Nepali post-conflict memoirs and narratives. These studies show how experiences of violence are transformed into narrative structures, symbols, or metaphors that shape memory and identity. This approach allows an understanding of how survivors use language to process extreme experiences. However, most of these works focus on the aesthetics of trauma and the construction of memory, and they do not address the healing dimensions of these narratives.

Third, a growing body of scholarship discusses Buddhist principles in peacebuilding, inner development (*bhavana*), and spiritual healing. Authors such as Dhammahaso et al. (2013) and Dhammasami (Dhammasami, 2010) highlight the potential of *karuna* (compassion), *bhavana*, and contemplative practices to reduce anger, cultivate empathy, and foster moral orientations that move away from violence. However, these studies remain largely conceptual and have not been applied specifically to trauma arising from the *People's War* or to its representation in literary narratives.

Despite the valuable insights offered by these three research trajectories, no study has directly connected trauma narratives in *People's War* memoirs with the Buddhist practice of *metta* as a framework for psychosocial healing. No prior research has integrated literary trauma analysis with Buddhist ethics in a simultaneous manner. This is the gap that the present study aims to address.

Based on this gap, the study pursues two objectives. First, it analyzes how survivors of the *People's War* represent their traumatic experiences in six post-conflict memoirs from Nepal. Second, it examines how the Buddhist principle of *metta* may serve as a foundation for emotional healing and social reconciliation among survivors. By doing so, the research combines literary trauma analysis with Buddhist ethics to propose a culturally grounded and contextually relevant framework for post-conflict recovery in Nepal.

This study argues that the practice of *metta*, as part of the *Brahmavihāra* oriented toward the cultivation of universal loving-kindness, has the potential to moderate the effects of post-conflict trauma among survivors of the *People's War*. In a society marked by emotional residues such as hatred, fear, and aggression, *metta* can function as a contemplative framework that allows survivors to reposition their traumatic experiences. The internalization of *metta* can foster acceptance, reduce emotional tension, and help reconstruct empathy among citizens, thereby opening pathways toward more authentic and sustainable social reconciliation. The study also hypothesizes that post-conflict narratives containing elements of *metta* possess reflective functions that help reshape the meaning of traumatic experience.

Method

The unit of analysis in this study consists of six post-conflict narratives and memoirs written by survivors or direct witnesses of the *People's War* in Nepal. These texts include *Das Barse Janayuddha Smritika Dobharu* (Lama, 2007), *Gadidarbar dekhi Singhdarbarsamma* Shreshtha (2010), *Bhishan Dinharu* (Jirel, 2013), *Sayadin Maobadi Kabjama* (Subidi, 2012), *Chapamar Yuwatiko Diary* (Rai, 2010), and *Sakas* (Ghimire, 2012). Each work was selected because it contains direct representations of violence, loss, torture, and suffering experienced during the 1996–2006 conflict. The analysis focuses on examining how trauma is represented, reconstructed, and interpreted through narrative language, as well as how the Buddhist practice of *metta* holds relevance as a framework for emotional healing in post-conflict Nepal.

This study employs a qualitative research design using an interpretive textual analysis approach. This methodological choice aligns with the research objective, which centers on the subjective experiences of survivors as represented in literary texts. The qualitative approach enables an in-depth examination of traumatic memory, emotional expression, and inner psychological dynamics that cannot be reduced to quantitative variables. The interpretive approach is appropriate because the study does not aim to test statistical hypotheses but to interpret the meanings of trauma, suffering, and potential healing through the values of *metta*. This design is also consistent with the traditions of literary and trauma studies, which emphasize contextual interpretation of language, symbols, and narrative structures.

The study relies on two categories of data: primary and secondary sources. The primary data consist of six Nepali post-conflict memoirs that contain firsthand testimonies of violence, loss, and reflective processes following the war. The secondary data include trauma literature (Caruth, 1995; Hunt, 2010), theories of memory and narrative (Marder, 2006), and Buddhist teachings concerning *metta* and *metta bhavana* (Dhammarakkhita, 2001; Dhammasami, 2010). These two types of data are used complementarily to explain the relationship between representations of trauma and the potential for healing through Buddhist ethical values.

Data collection was conducted through documentary study, which included identifying, gathering, and closely reading the narrative texts and supporting literature. The six primary texts were selected based on the following inclusion criteria: (1) the author is a survivor or direct witness of the *People's War*, (2) the text was published during the post-conflict period, and (3) the narrative contains explicit or implicit elements of traumatic experience. The secondary data were collected through searches of academic databases, trauma theory publications, and Buddhist literature. All data were then organized into units of meaning, coded, and prepared for in-depth examination through close reading.

Data analysis proceeded in four stages. First, close reading was conducted to identify descriptions of traumatic experiences such as violence, fear, memory fragmentation, and post-traumatic symptoms. Second, thematic analysis was applied to categorize the main themes that emerged regarding trauma, suffering, and survivors' emotional dynamics. Third, narrative analysis was used to examine the construction of the relationship between *the experiencing I* and *the narrating I*, including how traumatic memories are reconstructed within narrative structure. Fourth, the ethical lens of Buddhist *metta* was applied to interpret the possibilities of emotional healing and reconciliation implied in the narratives, whether through symbolism, contemplation, or affective transformation. The final stage involved synthesizing all findings to explain how trauma, narrative, and the practice of *metta* intersect within the broader context of post-conflict recovery in Nepal.

Result

Representation of Trauma: Violence, Fear, and Memory Fragmentation

Analysis of the six post-conflict narratives—*Chapamar Yuwatiko Diary* (Rai, 2010), *Das Barse Janayuddha Smritika Dobharu* (Lama, 2007), *Bhishan Dinharu* (Jirel, 2013), *Saya Din Maobadi Kabjama* (Subidi, 2012), *Gadidarbar dekhi Singhdarbarsamma* (Shreshtha, 2010), and *Sakas* (Ghimire, 2012)—shows that the traumatic experiences of survivors of the *People's War* appear in complex, layered, and persistent forms within their memories. At the most basic level, trauma is represented through direct exposure to physical violence and torture. Several writers describe their bodies as living witnesses of war—gunshot wounds, loss of limbs, repeated beatings, and situations in which they were caught between state forces and Maoist combatants. For example, Lama (2007) recounts how he "lost [his] leg and faith in the party," a statement that indicates how physical injury intersects with the collapse of moral trust and political identity.

Beyond direct violence, trauma also emerges through recurring fear and persistent nightmares that dominate the daily lives of survivors. Rai (2010) writes, "My heart turned into stone… The nights I spent weeping and crying troubled me continuously," illustrating how psychological distress rooted in the conflict continues to disrupt emotional stability and sleep many years after the war ended. Intrusive memories, the sound of soldiers' footsteps, or the imagined presence of military raids reappear suddenly even in seemingly safe situations. Lama (2007) describes this vividly: "Every night I heard the footsteps of soldiers, even though the camp had long been empty." Such fear does not merely reflect past memories; it manifests as an ongoing experience that disrupts survivors' emotional and social functioning.

Other writers portray trauma as a form of moral disintegration that arises from their involvement in violent acts. Jirel (2013) recounts how corpses became an

ordinary sight to him, and he spent his days "counting how many we killed." This statement reflects an extreme form of desensitization, in which empathy deteriorates because violence becomes normalized during war. This type of trauma reveals a deep moral struggle that burdens individuals not only as victims but also as participants who must confront the ethical consequences of their actions.

Existential trauma also appears strongly in narratives by survivors who lived under constant threat of death. Subidi (2012) writes, "Each moment I anticipated I would be killed… If the gun shot me, then what?" This captures a psychological state in which life holds no certainty. Shreshtha (2010) expresses a profound loss of meaning through the statement, "What we fought for, we have not found yet… what we lost never comes back." The deaths of comrades, the collapse of ideological conviction, and the disintegration of previously held beliefs illustrate the erosion of meaning that once shaped their identities during the war.

At the social level, Ghimire (2012) portrays trauma as the destruction of familial and communal safety. He writes, "We lived counting the days, waiting for the next loss… the war swallowed our home and our certainty." Trauma is thus not confined to individual psychological wounds but extends to the loss of homes, villages, communities, and stability. This illustrates how armed conflict erodes the social foundations that sustain security and interpersonal connection.

The following table summarizes the patterns of trauma represented in the six narratives, including the main types, key quotations, and trauma categories.

Table 1. Classification of Trauma Representation in Six *People's War* Memoirs

Memoir	Main Type of Trauma	Key Quotation	Trauma Category
Rai (2010)	Psychological torture, loss of dignity, recurring fear	"My heart turned into stone… The nights I spent weeping and crying troubled me continuously." (p.148)	Psychological & emotional trauma
Lama (2007)	Loss of leg, betrayal by the party, alienation	"I lost my leg and faith in the party… my life is still in chaos." (p.97)	Physical trauma & moral trauma
Jirel (2013)	Exposure to corpses, normalization of violence, loss of empathy	"Heaps of corpses seemed simple to my innocent eyes… I spent my days counting how many we killed."	Moral trauma & desensitization
Subedi (2012)	Hostage-taking, psychological	"Each moment I anticipated I would be	Existential trauma

	torture, threat of execution	killed… If the gun shot me, then what?" (p.126)	
Shrestha (2010)	Death of comrades, collapse of ideological meaning	"What we fought for, we have not found yet… what we lost never comes back."	Trauma of meaning (existential void)
Ghimire (2012)	Family suffering, social disintegration, loss of home	"The war swallowed our home and our certainty."	Social trauma & loss of safety

Taken together, these six memoirs reveal that trauma in the *People's War* is not merely a past event but an ongoing lived reality that penetrates the body, emotions, morality, and social relationships. Trauma appears in the form of physical wounds, chronic fear, moral disorientation, loss of meaning, and the erosion of personal and communal safety.

Analysis of the six *People's War* narratives reveals four dominant patterns that consistently appear in the survivors' experiences. The first pattern is chronic fear and hypervigilance. Nearly all writers describe how the threat of violence remains palpable even after the war has ended. The sound of soldiers' footsteps, images of military raids, or the echo of gunfire repeatedly surface in their memories, creating a constant state of alertness that never fully subsides. This fear does not function merely as a recollection but as a bodily response that continues to react to threats that no longer exist physically. The survivors remain in a prolonged survival mode, as if danger waits around every corner.

The second pattern is memory fragmentation, which appears in the survivors' difficulty reconstructing the chronology of events during the war. Many narratives move in disjointed fragments—visual flashes, bodily sensations, and disconnected scenes that do not easily form a linear story. This fragmentation indicates that traumatic experiences are not recorded as coherent narratives but as shards of memory that emerge without logical sequence. The writers often pause mid-story, shift abruptly to unrelated events, or revisit the same episode from different perspectives without a clear chronological explanation.

The third emerging pattern is the presence of intrusive memories—sudden, uncontrollable flashes of violence. The survivors describe the sudden appearance of corpses, gunshots, screams, or the gaze of dying individuals intruding into their daily activities. These intrusive images arise while they are alone, working, or even when the external environment appears entirely safe. Some refer to them as shadows or echoes of the past that they cannot escape. This pattern shows that traumatic memory never fully resolves but continually penetrates conscious awareness.

The fourth pattern is emotional instability, marked by feelings of anger, despair, guilt, and emotional numbness. Survivors frequently describe themselves as easily irritable, unable to find joy, or incapable of experiencing tenderness and

happiness as they once did. Some recount episodes of numbness—a complete inability to feel anything—as a protective response to extreme experiences. This emotional instability demonstrates how trauma disrupts affective balance, erodes the sense of safety, damages social relationships, and makes it difficult for survivors to regain stable emotional orientation.

Taken together, these four patterns show that trauma is not represented as an event that has passed but as an ongoing experience that shapes the survivors' emotional and social realities. Trauma appears as a continuous condition—a persistent suffering that does not end with the cessation of conflict but continues to resonate throughout their lives long after the war has ended.

Reconstruction of Self and the Reinterpretation of Traumatic Experience

Analysis of the six *People's War* memoirs shows that traumatic experiences are not only recorded as a series of violent events but are also reprocessed by survivors through a reflective narrative process. Each writer presents an inner struggle with what they endured, and through writing, they attempt to understand themselves, their suffering, and the meaning behind the chaos they experienced. This reflective work is evident in the relationship between *the experiencing I*—the self who lived through extreme events during the war—and *the narrating I*—the self who writes, interprets, and assigns new meaning to those experiences. This dynamic relationship becomes a space of psychological and moral restoration that enables survivors to reorganize fragments of traumatic memory that were previously difficult to comprehend.

In *Chapamar Yuwatiko Diary*, Rai (2010) describes a process of self-clarification that occurs through writing. He states, "Saat menulis ini aku baru menyadari, kemarahan yang kupelihara justru melukai diriku sendiri," revealing a shift from being consumed by anger and pain to being able to critically reassess his emotional responses. This process marks an early stage of reinterpreting trauma, where the survivor begins to recognize that past suffering is not merely a passive wound but can become material for self-understanding.

Lama (2007) illustrates self-reconstruction grounded in acceptance of physical and moral injury. After losing his leg and feeling betrayed by the party, he writes, "My life is still in chaos… I was not aware of the party's treachery." This narrative shows how moral trauma prompts him to reevaluate his political commitments and ideological identity. The writer transforms anger and disappointment into a broader reflection on the structures of violence that extend beyond his individual experience.

Jirel (2013) presents reinterpretation through an acknowledgment of the moral injury produced by participation in collective violence. He recounts that the heaps of corpses he once considered "ordinary" have become sources of deep inner

turmoil. When he reflects, "I questioned whether I was cowardly or foolish," it becomes evident that he is reexamining moral values previously subordinated to the logic of war. The moral distortions formed during the conflict gradually begin to be corrected through the reflective space provided by narrative writing.

Subidi (2012) approaches reinterpretation from the perspective of existential trauma. Living under the constant threat of execution kept him in a state of extreme vigilance. However, through narrative, he transforms this fear into an awareness of the fragility of human life. His sentence, "Each moment I anticipated I would be killed," which initially expresses daily horror, becomes a reflection on life's unpredictability and human vulnerability in the face of violence.

The reinterpretation of lost meaning appears clearly in Shreshtha (2010), who experiences profound emptiness after the death of his comrades. He writes, "What we lost never comes back again," acknowledging that the loss is not only personal but also signals the collapse of the ideological foundations that once supported the armed struggle. His narrative moves from grief toward a philosophical contemplation of life's meaning after the conflict.

Finally, Ghimire (2012) demonstrates self-reconstruction rooted in family-based collective trauma. The loss of home and safety forces him to speak not only as an individual but as part of a community shattered by war. When he writes, "The war swallowed our home and our certainty," it becomes apparent that he seeks to repair his fragmented social identity by narrating his family's experiences.

To clarify the psychological responses and narrative strategies present across the six texts, the following table provides a summary:

Table 2. Psychological Responses and Narrative Strategies of *People's War* Survivors

Author	Psychological Symptoms	Narrative Response	Key Quotation
Rai (2010)	Dissociation, emotional instability	Metaphorical narrative of self-destruction	"I fell down, shattered and splintered seeing my own shadow."
Lama (2007)	Depression, alienation, moral trauma	Reflective and remorseful narrative	"My life is still in chaos…"
Jirel (2013)	Desensitization, moral injury	Repetitive narrative of violence	"Heaps of corpses seemed simple…"
Subedi (2012)	Hypervigilance, existential fear	Narrative centered on the threat of death	"Each moment I anticipated I would be killed."

Shrestha (2010)	Emptiness, grief	Contemplative narrative	"What we lost never comes back."
Ghimire (2012)	Social trauma, loss of safety	Collective family narrative	"The war swallowed our home."

Taken together, these six texts demonstrate that survivors do not respond passively to trauma; rather, they actively reorganize their experiences through reflection, moral contemplation, and reinterpretation of suffering. Writing becomes a space in which fractured identities may be repaired and new meanings assigned to losses that were previously difficult to articulate.

Analysis of the six *People's War* memoirs reveals four major patterns that illustrate how survivors attempt to reconstruct the self and reinterpret their traumatic experiences. The first pattern is the movement from chaotic memory toward narrative reflection. At the experiential level, the survivors' memories appear in fragmented form—disconnected pieces of fear, violence, and loss. Through the act of writing, however, these fragments begin to take shape as coherent narrative sequences. Writing functions as an integrative medium that allows survivors to connect events, place emotions within specific contexts, and give structure to experiences that were previously vague or unspeakable. In this sense, narrative becomes a bridge between scattered memories and a clearer reflective understanding of the self and the past.

The second pattern is the acknowledgment of vulnerability and loss. The survivors openly express their fragility—whether in the form of physical injury, the loss of family members, or the loss of control over their lives. This acknowledgment appears in statements of devastation, emptiness, or emotional instability. When Rai, Lama, or Shrestha write about fear, grief, or profound confusion, they reveal themselves as wounded human beings rather than heroic figures of war. Such acknowledgment of vulnerability represents a crucial step in self-reconstruction because it enables survivors to confront emotional realities that were often suppressed or denied during the conflict.

The third pattern involves the effort to understand the structural causes of the conflict. As their narratives unfold, many survivors move beyond recounting personal experiences of violence and begin to question the social, political, and ideological forces underlying the war. Several writers come to recognize that their suffering did not stem solely from individual actions but was embedded in broader structures of power, ideological manipulation, and military dynamics. By understanding these structural contexts, survivors develop a new framework for interpreting their suffering. Trauma that was once seen as purely personal becomes part of a larger collective history with identifiable causes and consequences.

The fourth pattern is the shift from a victim identity to a survivor identity. Through narrative, the writers no longer position themselves merely as victims of

power or violence but as subjects capable of processing their experiences and taking new positions toward the past. They demonstrate a transformation from helplessness toward the ability to reinterpret experience, forgive, or at least accept unchangeable realities. This survivor identity does not erase the wounds but indicates that they are no longer fully controlled by trauma. Writing becomes the space through which they reclaim agency that was lost during the war.

Collectively, these four patterns show that the act of storytelling plays a crucial role in the psychological recovery of *People's War* survivors. Writing narratives serves not only as a means to express traumatic memories but also as a medium to reorganize experiences, negotiate meaning, and rebuild fractured identities. In this way, narrative operates as a mechanism of reinterpretation that enables survivors to move from disorientation toward a more coherent and empowered sense of self.

Metta Practice as a Potential Source of Healing and Reconciliation

The analysis of the six *People's War* memoirs shows that although traumatic experiences dominate the narratives, there are also layers of meaning that indicate the presence of an inner space for healing. This space emerges through various expressions of compassion, acceptance, and the release of anger reflected in the survivors' introspective accounts. The values of *metta*—which encompass loving-kindness, empathy, emotional spaciousness, and the willingness to recognize the humanity of the other—appear not as doctrinal teachings but as emotional and moral responses that arise naturally as the survivors attempt to reinterpret their lived experiences. In this sense, *metta* functions as an initial foundation for psychosocial healing and postwar reconciliation.

In *Chapamar Yuwatiko Diary*, Rai (2010) describes how small acts of kindness by security personnel transformed his perception of the enemy. He recounts that the unexpected humanity shown by the guards "opened a space to see another side of them," an experience that softened the rigid friend–enemy dichotomy established during the war. For Rai, this moment became crucial in loosening the grip of anger and fear that had dominated him. Recognizing goodness in the opposing side represents the emergence of empathy—a fundamental quality of *metta*—which enables him to view the enemy as human beings rather than mere threats.

Lama (2007) presents a more complex process of internal healing. Despite suffering permanent physical injury and feeling betrayed by the party, he expresses a willingness to forgive. When he writes, "I lost my leg… but anger only deepens the wound," he demonstrates an awareness that anger prolongs suffering rather than alleviating it. His narrative contains elements of equanimity, a core aspect of *metta* practice. This recognition—that forgiveness does not require forgetting but allows

one to release emotional burdens—constitutes a significant step toward reconciling with the past.

Jirel (2013) conveys aspects of *metta* through his moral awareness of the value of life. After experiencing the normalization of violence during the war, he writes that the only way to honor what was lost is to "respect the humanity of all sides." This statement signals a profound inner transformation—from someone immersed in violence to someone capable of recognizing the sanctity of life. Such a shift embodies loving-kindness as the conviction that every life, including that of former enemies, possesses non-negotiable moral worth.

Subidi's (2012) narrative underscores the role of familial affection as an emotional resource that sustained him through one hundred days of captivity. He acknowledges that "only thoughts of my daughters kept my spirit alive." This familial bond represents the most basic form of *metta*—loving-kindness toward loved ones—which later expands into a refusal to allow hatred to dominate his life after the war. This process illustrates how healing can emerge from intimate and personal relationships grounded in care.

Shreshtha (2010) presents equanimity through his reflection on revisiting the past "with calmness." Although overwhelmed by grief due to the loss of comrades, he recognizes that extreme emotional reactions can obstruct recovery. By encouraging himself to view the struggle with greater serenity and breadth, he demonstrates his capacity to resist cycles of anger—an essential step toward cultivating inner peace.

Meanwhile, Ghimire (2012) demonstrates compassion and altruistic joy by emphasizing the importance of family and community solidarity in the aftermath of the war. His assertion that "the war destroyed our home, but community held us together" highlights how social relationships play a crucial role in healing collective wounds. This communal solidarity broadens the scope of *metta* beyond individual relationships to encompass community-based healing, indicating that postconflict recovery unfolds not only on personal but also on social levels.

To clarify the dimensions of *metta* that emerge across the six memoirs, the following table summarizes the evidence of healing identified in the texts.

Table 3. Metta and Healing Potentials in People's War Narratives

Author	Evidence of Metta	Dimension of Metta	Key Quotation
Rai (2010)	Recognizing small acts of goodness from the opposing side	Empathy and goodwill	"The security personnel treated me with unexpected humanity."

Lama (2007)	Openness to forgiveness despite severe injury	Compassion and equanimity	"Anger only deepens the wound."
Jirel (2013)	Moral awareness of the value of life	Loving-kindness	"Respecting all lives honors what we lost."
Subedi (2012)	Familial affection as the anchor of survival	Loving-kindness and compassion	"Only thoughts of my daughters kept my spirit alive."
Shrestha (2010)	Calm reflection to reconcile with the past	Equanimity	"We must look at our past with calmness."
Ghimire (2012)	Community solidarity as collective healing	Altruistic joy and compassion	"Community held us together."

These findings indicate that elements of *metta* appear in the form of empathy, acceptance, the release of resentment, and the recognition of the humanity of others. These values form the emotional foundation for trauma healing and open pathways to reconciliation at both individual and social levels.

The analysis of the six *People's War* memoirs demonstrates that *metta* values emerge through various emotional and moral patterns that indicate an ongoing process of inner healing. The first pattern is the loosening of negative emotions, particularly anger, resentment, and fear. The survivors show that although anger initially arises as a response to violence and betrayal, this emotion gradually subsides through deep reflection on their wartime experiences. Statements such as "anger only deepens the wound" (Lama, 2007) illustrate an awareness that holding on to anger prolongs suffering rather than alleviating it. The release of these negative emotions creates an inner space that allows survivors to gain distance from their trauma and begin the process of recovery.

The second pattern is the growth of empathy, both toward fellow victims and toward those formerly regarded as enemies. In several narratives, survivors acknowledge that small acts of humanity from the opposing side subtly altered how they understood the conflict. Rai (2010), for example, describes how the warm treatment he received from security personnel led him to question the rigid boundary between "friend" and "enemy." Similarly, Jirel (2013) emphasizes the importance of respecting the lives of all parties, demonstrating the emergence of universal empathy. This expanding empathy signals a shift away from wartime modes of suspicion toward more humanized and open forms of interaction.

The third pattern is the acceptance of oneself and one's past. The survivors no longer reject or suppress painful memories but begin to acknowledge them as integral parts of their life journey. This acceptance is not resignation but a form of inner courage that allows them to confront traumatic experiences without being

overwhelmed by them. Shreshtha (2010), for instance, encourages himself to revisit the past "with calmness," suggesting an emerging reconciliation with irreversible loss. A similar form of self-acceptance appears in Subidi's (2012) account, in which he recognizes that love for his family became a bridge for accepting past wounds without allowing them to define his entire life.

The fourth pattern is the development of a new moral orientation that rejects violence. After witnessing and experiencing the brutality of war, the survivors show a tendency to resist reproducing violence in any form. They cultivate a more inclusive moral outlook grounded in solidarity, empathy, and the equal worth of all human beings. Ghimire (2012) underscores the importance of community as a stabilizing force after the war, while Jirel (2013) asserts that the best way to honor what was lost is to value all forms of life. Such attitudes reflect an ethical transformation rooted in *metta*, which places peace, emotional wisdom, and reverence for life at the foundation of the future.

Taken together, these patterns indicate that *metta* functions as an ethical–emotional framework that enables survivors to ease their inner wounds, broaden their capacity for empathy, accept their past, and develop a nonviolent moral orientation. The values of *metta* thus create a space of possibility for both personal healing and social reconciliation in postconflict Nepal.

Discussion

The findings of this study indicate that postconflict trauma in the six *People's War* memoirs is represented as a multidimensional experience encompassing physical injury, existential fear, moral disintegration, loss of meaning, and fragmented identity. The survivors experience trauma not only in their bodies but also in the form of intrusive memories, emotional instability, and fractured social relations. These dimensions appear in narrative structures that are disjointed, repetitive, and saturated with metaphors of wounding and loss. In addition, the study shows that the survivors do not merely record traumatic experiences but reinterpret them through reflective narrative processes, resulting in a transformation from chaotic memory toward a more integrated sense of self. The third subfinding demonstrates that, within this process of reinterpretation, emotional and moral tendencies emerge that align with Buddhist *metta*—including empathy, compassion, the release of resentment, and inner equilibrium—which function as potential pathways for healing.

Conceptually, the relationship between trauma and *metta* can be understood through the survivors' inner dynamics. Trauma operates through mechanisms such as hypervigilance, chronic fear, memory fragmentation, and derealization, all of which generate emotional tension and disconnection from oneself and others. In contrast, *metta* works as a softening practice that cultivates acceptance, kindness,

and relational connectedness. In narrative terms, trauma disrupts the structure of storytelling and produces non-linear accounts, yet the act of rewriting experience enables survivors to reconstruct memory more reflectively. At this point, the *narrating I* takes precedence, and *metta* provides an emotional framework for revisiting painful experiences without becoming trapped in cycles of anger and resentment. Thus, while traumatic narratives "open the wound," *metta* offers ethical and spiritual principles that assist in tending to that wound.

Compared with previous research, these findings offer a significant contribution to studies of *People's War* trauma and locally grounded models of healing. Earlier studies on the *People's War* developed along three main trajectories. The first includes research on sociopolitical and psychological impacts of conflict—such as Shakya (Shakya, 2009, 2011), Acharya (2013), and foundational trauma theorists like Caruth (1995), and Hunt (2010)—which describes trauma as a recurring experience manifested through intrusive memory, hyperarousal, and emotional fragmentation. Although these studies explain trauma's multidimensional nature, they do not outline healing models rooted in Nepal's cultural context. The second trajectory includes studies on the representation of trauma in Nepali postconflict memoirs and narratives—such as Pokharel (Pokharel, 2022b, 2022a), Dongol and Neumann (2021), and Gyawali and Selim (2024)—which focus on how violence becomes narrative structure, metaphor, and identity formation. However, these works largely remain within the realm of trauma aesthetics and memory construction without addressing emotional or spiritual possibilities for healing through literary texts. The third trajectory involves contemporary Buddhist scholarship such as Dhammahaso (2013), Priyadarshana et al. (2023), and Vuddhivaṁso et al. (2024), which highlights the potential of compassion (*karuṇā*), mental cultivation (*bhāvanā*), and Buddhist moral principles in peacebuilding practices. Yet these studies have not been applied to the specific trauma of the *People's War* or to literary analysis.

This study bridges the gap among these three trajectories by showing that *metta* need not be understood solely as a formal meditative practice but can appear implicitly in the ways survivors reinterpret their experiences: through empathy toward former enemies, the release of resentment, recognition of the value of life, and the pursuit of inner balance. The integration of narrative trauma analysis and Buddhist ethics allows this study to propose a new perspective demonstrating that the inner healing of *People's War* survivors can emerge from longstanding local spiritual traditions within Nepali society. The novelty of this research lies in combining two fields that have previously developed separately—narrative trauma studies and Buddhist peace ethics—resulting in a significant theoretical contribution to understanding how trauma, narrative, and local spirituality intersect to shape processes of healing and postconflict reconciliation.

The interpretation of this study operates on three levels: historical, social, and ideological. Historically, the findings demonstrate that the trauma of the *People's War* did not end with the cessation of armed conflict in 2006 but continues to shape Nepal's emotional history today. The experiences of violence, loss, and insecurity recorded in the six memoirs reflect a broader pattern of collective trauma observed globally, as noted by Abramowitz (2005) and Hirschberger (2018), who argue that postconflict societies carry historical wounds that persist across generations. The survivors' narratives show that the *People's War* was not merely an episode of political violence but a formative moment that produced a new collective identity grounded in loss, moral rupture, and the search for meaning after war. Thus, the trauma of the *People's War* has become part of Nepal's national memory, continuously influencing intergroup relations, institutional recovery, and the political orientations of postconflict society.

On the social level, the study reveals that individual trauma cannot be separated from communal trauma. The loss of homes, the collapse of social networks, and the erosion of interpersonal trust represent forms of social trauma consistently found across all narratives. These findings align with research by Gutlove and Thompson (2004), Schmitt (2012), and Sanaullah (2024), which demonstrates that social reconstruction after armed conflict can only succeed when collective trauma is recognized and addressed through communal processes. Nepal's situation mirrors global patterns: postwar societies require the restoration of human relationships, the rebuilding of social capital, and the reestablishment of lost spaces of safety. In other words, the *People's War* damaged not only individual bodies but also the social foundations that sustain community cohesion.

Ideologically, the study shows that *metta* provides a moral alternative that directly challenges the violence-based ideologies underpinning both the Maoist movement and state repression. *Metta*—encompassing compassion, empathy, and inner balance—confronts paradigms of retribution, militancy, and aggression deployed by both sides of the conflict. These findings align with Buddhist peacebuilding literature (Douglas, 2024; Kongkawai, 2025; Scott Appleby, 2009), which emphasizes that spiritual values such as the *Brahmavihāra* can redirect societies from conflict toward healing. In the Nepali context, *metta* emerges not merely as an ethical concept but as an ideological potential for building a more humanistic and egalitarian postwar society.

The reflection on the study's findings reveals several functions as well as limitations that require critical acknowledgment**.** Functionally, the study provides positive contributions by filling a research gap that previously left the connection between *People's War* trauma narratives and Buddhist *metta* ethics unexplored. The integration of these two domains produces a new conceptual model showing that traumatic narratives are not only containers of suffering but also potential mediums of inner healing when enriched by local values such as compassion, acceptance, and

emotional balance. The findings broaden understandings of postconflict reconciliation by demonstrating that recovery does not reside solely in legal or political mechanisms but also in the emotional and spiritual spaces offered by local cultural traditions. Thus, the study reinforces the argument that cultural resources—particularly Nepal's Buddhist heritage—play a significant role in facilitating psychosocial recovery, rebuilding social capital, and helping survivors regain moral orientation after war.

However, the study also contains several limitations that require consideration. Not all survivors possess the emotional readiness or capacity to practice *metta*, especially those who continue to carry deep anger or unresolved severe trauma. Moreover, *metta*-based approaches cannot operate effectively in isolation from structural mechanisms such as transitional justice, victim reparations, and truth-telling processes. Without these mechanisms, attempts at inner healing may be obstructed by unresolved systemic injustices. The study also recognizes potential cultural bias, as *metta* is rooted in Buddhist traditions that may be less accessible or inclusive for survivors from non-Buddhist backgrounds in Nepal. As peacebuilding studies in Guatemala, Africa, and South Asia have shown, value-based reconciliation frameworks can fail if they are not designed with cultural sensitivity and cross-group inclusivity. These reflections underscore that although *metta* offers a strong ethical framework, its implementation requires structural support and cultural adaptation in order to function effectively within Nepal's multireligious and multiethnic society.

Based on the identified limitations and the concrete needs of postconflict Nepali society, this study proposes several actionable strategies to support long-term reconciliation. First, *metta bhavana* practices can be integrated into community-based healing programs, particularly those involving former combatants, women survivors, and families of victims. This approach aligns with collective testimony models such as NETfacts, which have proven effective in reducing stigma, strengthening social relationships, and creating safe spaces for sharing traumatic experiences. Such integration enables healing to occur not only at the individual level but also within communities.

Second, *metta* values can be incorporated into peace education programs through educational institutions, community centers, and religious organizations. Embedding empathy, compassion, and nonviolence into curricula and social activities can prevent the intergenerational reproduction of hatred and cultivate peaceful mindsets among young people. Prior studies show that compassion-based peace education can enhance social cohesion and strengthen the foundations of resilient communities.

Third, the Nepali government should develop a dual-approach reconciliation policy that combines culturally grounded psychosocial healing with structural mechanisms such as restorative justice, victim compensation, and community

rehabilitation. This combined approach ensures that healing is not only emotional and spiritual but also addresses the roots of injustice and structural damage caused by war. Through the integration of *metta* and formal policy frameworks, reconciliation efforts can progress more comprehensively—restoring individual inner life, repairing social relationships, and rebuilding public trust in state institutions.

Conclusion

This study concludes that the six narratives written by survivors of the *People's War* represent trauma as a multidimensional and enduring experience. Trauma appears not only as physical injury or momentary emotional distress but also as existential fear, moral disintegration, loss of safety, and persistent memory disruption that continues to shape survivors' lives long after the war has ended. Through writing, the survivors demonstrate the capacity to reorganize these traumatic experiences, moving from fragmented recollections toward more coherent narrative reflection. Within this process of reinterpretation, the study identifies emotional and moral tendencies that align with the Buddhist principle of *metta*, manifested in empathy, compassion, the release of resentment, self-acceptance, and the emergence of a nonviolent moral orientation. These findings suggest that *metta* can function as an ethical–emotional framework that creates space for inner healing as well as social reconciliation in postconflict Nepal.

Scientifically, the study offers a new contribution to research on trauma, postconflict literature, and Buddhist ethics. The integration of narrative trauma analysis with the concept of *metta* presents an interdisciplinary approach that previous research has not explored explicitly. This study expands current understandings of how narrative can serve as a mechanism for psychological healing and demonstrates that local spiritual values constitute an important resource in postwar communal reconciliation. Thus, the study provides a new conceptual model that links trauma, narrative, spirituality, and peacebuilding, and opens pathways for further research on how ethics of compassion can be incorporated into community recovery processes in societies affected by violence.

However, this research also presents several limitations. First, not all survivors possess the emotional readiness to reinterpret trauma or to apply *metta*, which means that the findings cannot be generalized to all groups of victims. Second, because the study focuses on textual analysis, it cannot capture the psychosocial dynamics of survivors who do not articulate their experiences through written narratives. Third, since *metta* is rooted in Buddhist tradition, this framework may be less inclusive for survivors from non-Buddhist backgrounds. Future research may therefore examine trauma-healing experiences among non-Buddhist or minority groups and compare the effectiveness of value-based healing frameworks with structural mechanisms such as transitional justice. Empirical studies involving

direct interviews with survivors are also needed to complement the understanding of how trauma and compassion-based values operate in the daily lives of communities in postconflict Nepal.

References

Abramowitz, S. A. (2005). The poor have become rich, and the rich have become poor: Collective trauma in the Guinean Languette. *Social Science and Medicine*, *61*(10), 2106–2118. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.socscimed.2005.03.023

Acharya, K. (2013). Trauma of Maoist insurgency in literature: Reading Palpasa Café, Forget Kathmandu and Chhapamar ko Chhoro. *Bodhi: An Interdisciplinary Journal*, *5*. https://doi.org/10.3126/bodhi. v5i1. 8046

Caruth, C. (1995). *Trauma*. Johns Hopkins University Press. https://doi.org/10.56021/9781421413525

Dhammahaso, P. H. (2013). Water War of the Mae Ta Chang Basin, Chiang Mai: Concept and Tools for Confict Management in Buddhist Perspective. *Journal of MCU Social Science Review*, *2*(1), 108–129.

Dhammarakkhita, P. (2001). *Metta Bhavana: Loving-kindness Meditation*. Dhammodaya Meditation Centre Ampur Muang.

Dhammasami, K. (2010). Global recovery: the Buddhist perspective. In *Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya University*. Thailand: Mahachulalongkornrajavidyalaya.

Dongol, Y., & Neumann, R. P. (2021). State making through conservation: The case of post-conflict Nepal. *Political Geography*, *85*, 102327. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.polgeo.2020.102327

Douglas, L. J. (2024). Ethical underpinnings and social work: a case study on the role of Buddhist compassion in Cambodian sustainable development. *Journal of Religion and Spirituality in Social Work*, *43*(3), 348–377. https://doi.org/10.1080/15426432.2024.2365803

Ghimire, J. (2012). *Sakas*. Nepal: Jagdish Prathisthan.

Gutlove, P., & Thompson, G. (2004). Psychosocial healing and post-conflict social reconstruction in the former Yugoslavia. *Medicine, Conflict and Survival*, *20*(2), 136–150. https://doi.org/10.1080/136236942000234726

Gyawali, V., & Selim, Y. (2024). "Going into the Field." *Conflict and Society*, *10*(1), 1–18. https://doi.org/10.3167/arcs.2024.100101

Hirschberger, G. (2018). Collective trauma and the social construction of meaning. *Frontiers in Psychology*, *9*(AUG). https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2018.01441

Human Rights Watch. (2020). No Law, No Justice, No State for Victims. Retrieved November 20, 2020, from Human Rights Watch website: https://www.hrw.org/report/2020/11/20/no-law-no-justice-no-state-victims/culture-impunity-post-conflict-nepal?

Hunt, N. C. (2010). *Memory, war and trauma*. Cambridge University Press.

Jirel, N. (2013). Bhishan Dinharu (Chapamarko Jeevanyatra). In *Publication Nepalaya*. Kathmandu.

Kongkawai, P. N. S. (2025). Guidelines For Applying Buddhist Principles To The Promotion Of The Justice System Within The Context Of The Law In The Tha Ruea Subdistrict Administrative Organization, Mueang Nakhon Si Thammarat District, Nakhon Si Thammarat Province. *Journal of Buddhist Anthropology*, *10*(1), 118–132. Retrieved from https://www.scopus.com/inward/record.uri?eid=2-s2.0-105002357341&partnerID=40&md5=7513ad260c50c9b4e7893777f31af8ad

Lama, G. B. (2007). Das Barse Janayuddha Smritika Dobharu. In *Jagaran Book House Pvt. Ltd*. Kathmandu.

Marder, E. (2006). Trauma and literary studies: Some enabling questions. *Reading On*, *1*(1), 1–6.

Pokharel, B. P. (2022a). From Conflict to Peace Building: Transforming Trauma in the Post-Conflict Nepali Narratives. *Prithvi Academic Journal*, 160–170. https://doi.org/10.3126/paj.v5i1.45050

Pokharel, B. P. (2022b). People's War, Trauma, and Its Consequences in Rebel. In *Narratives of Trauma in South Asian Literature* (pp. 159–167). London: Routledge India. https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003353539-18

Priyadarshan, C. (2023). Open Secrets of Trade in India (an Analytical Study of Trade Secrets in the Uncodified Legislative Regime in India). *Issue 2 Indian JL & Legal Rsch.*, *5*, 1.

Rai, T. (2010). Chhapamar Yuwatiko Diary. In *Ratna Pustak Bhandar*. Kathmandu.

Reuters. (2025). Nepal's history of political instability. Retrieved September 9, 2025, from Reuters website: https://www.reuters.com/business/media-telecom/nepals-history-political-instability-2025-09-09/

Sanaullah. (2024). Civilians' Strategies of Post-Conflict Social Revival in Northwestern Pakistan. *Ethnopolitics*, 1–24. https://doi.org/10.1080/17449057.2024.2404340

Schmitt, M. (2012). Classification of cyber conflict. *Journal of Conflict and Security Law*, *17*(2), 245–260.

Scott Appleby, R. (2009). Building Sustainable Peace: The Roles of Local and Transnational Religious Actors. In *Religious Pluralism, Globalization, and World Politics*. https://doi.org/10.1093/acprof:oso/9780195323405.003.0006

Shakya, A. (2009). Social impact of armed conflict in Nepal: Cause and impact. *Social Inclusion Research Fund*.

Shakya, A. (2011). Experiences of children in armed conflict in Nepal. *Children and Youth Services Review*, *33*(4), 557–563. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.childyouth.2010.08.018

Shreshtha, G. (2010). Gadidarbardekhi Singhdarbarsamma. In *United CPN (Maoist) Kochila Rajya Samiti, Prakasan Bibhag*. Kathmandu.

Subidi, N. (2012). Maobadi Kabjama Saya Din. In *Publications Pvt. Ltd*. Kathmandu.

Trial. (2025). Nepal. Retrieved from Trial International website: https://trialinternational.org/countries-post/nepal/

UN. (2011). UN releases report charting ten years of violations during Nepal conflict. Retrieved October 8, 2012, from United Nations website: https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2012/10/un-releases-report-charting-ten-years-violations-during-nepal-conflict

Vuddhivaṁso, P. S., Dhamvajarabanthid, P., & Wattanapradit, K. (2024). Scenarios for the Development of Buddhist International Organization Networks for the Sustainable Propagation of Buddhism. *วารสาร สันติ ศึกษา ปริทรรศน์ ม จร*, *12*(1), 24–36.

This page has been left blank