

Posttraumatic Growth through Quran and Sunna: Islamic Perspective

Sadaf Anjum Masoodi^{1*}, Prof. Shahina Maqbool²

ABSTRACT

There has been a worrying trend in Kashmir i.e. the growth of posttraumatic stress disorder, a mental condition which is affecting people for more than two decades. The continuous political uncertainty, insecurity from armed forces; natural calamities are the contributory factors. And it is found that Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) is on the rise in Kashmir Valley after the worst ever floods hit the state few months back. Psychiatrists in Srinagar opine that there has been a remarkable increase in the number of patients who were suffering from "early symptoms" of PTSD. Post Traumatic Stress Disorder is a condition that develops after an individual expose through a terrifying ordeal that involves physical harm or the threat of a physical harm. The condition develops amongst the people who may have gone through some physical harm or might have witnessed their loved ones or the people around them being harmed. The trauma affects people in three ways: negative, neutral and positive. Under the positive category, the affected person somehow gets encouraged and takes up challenges. Their condition does not make any difference to them. Highly stressful events or major life traumas (such as serious illness, road traffic accident, death of a relative or loved one, unemployment, divorce, etc.) can lead to a variety of behavioral, psychological and emotional negative outcomes to the disruptive and aversive conditions (Taku, Cann, Tedeschi, & Calhoun, 2009). The positive side of the trauma is that it also leads to growth. This phenomenon has been recognized as a distinct construct – posttraumatic growth (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 1996), implying “positive psychological change experienced as a result of the struggle with highly challenging life circumstances” (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004, p. 1). Positive change has been noted in the literature by various authors and referred to in diverse terms – among others, benefit-finding (Affleck & Tennen, 1996), stress-related growth (Park, Cohen, & Murch, 1996), adversarial growth (Linley & Joseph, 2004), flourishing (Ryff & Singer, 1998), and thriving (O’Leary & Ickovics, 1995). The main objective of the paper is to discuss the role of Islam with special reference to Qur’an and Sunna in posttraumatic Growth among violence victims in Kashmir valley India. Islamic

¹ Research Scholar, Department of Psychology Aligarh Muslim University, Aligarh, U.P. India

² Professor, Department of Psychology Aligarh Muslim University, Aligarh, U.P. India

*Responding Author

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practices such as prayer and listening Qur'an plays important role in coping with traumatic disorders. Islamic values and beliefs can be beneficial in overcoming traumatic life events and seeking posttraumatic Growth. The Holy Qur'an teaches us "The truly righteous -- are those who endure with fortitude misfortune, hardship and peril. That is, who are patient in poverty and affliction, and in time of war" (2:178).

Keywords: *Posttraumatic Growth, Sunnah, Trauma, Posttraumatic Stress Disorder.*

There has been a worrying trend in Kashmir i.e. the growth of posttraumatic stress disorder, a mental condition which is affecting people for more than two decades. The continuous political uncertainty, insecurity from armed forces; natural calamities are the contributory factors. And it is found that Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) is on the rise in Kashmir Valley after the worst ever floods hit the state few months back. Psychiatrists in Srinagar opine that there has been a remarkable increase in the number of patients who were suffering from "early symptoms" of PTSD. Post Traumatic Stress Disorder is a condition that develops after an individual expose through a terrifying ordeal that involves physical harm or the threat of a physical harm. The condition develops amongst the people who may have gone through some physical harm or might have witnessed their loved ones or the people around them being harmed. The trauma affects people in three ways: negative, neutral and positive. Under negative state, people get depressed and then opt to extreme steps such as suicide. These people lose hope and are not encouraged to take forward steps in life. Then, there are people who, despite falling prey to mental disorders, are not affected in the real sense and they take each and everything in their stride. Under the positive category, the affected person somehow gets encouraged and takes up challenges. Their condition does not make any difference to them. Highly stressful events or major life traumas (such as serious illness, road traffic accident, death of a relative or loved one, unemployment, divorce, etc.) can lead to a variety of behavioral, psychological and emotional negative outcomes to the disruptive and aversive conditions (Taku, Cann, Tedeschi, & Calhoun, 2009). The positive side of the trauma is that it also leads to growth. This phenomenon has been recognized as a distinct construct – posttraumatic growth (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 1996), implying “positive psychological change experienced as a result of the struggle with highly challenging life circumstances” (Tedeschi & Calhoun, 2004, p. 1). Positive change has been noted in the literature by various authors and referred to in diverse terms – among others, benefit-finding (Affleck & Tennen, 1996), stress-related growth (Park, Cohen, & Murch, 1996), adversarial growth (Linley & Joseph, 2004), flourishing (Ryff & Singer, 1998), and thriving (O’Leary & Ickovics, 1995). Underlying these descriptions is the common theme expressing the paradox that profound personal value can arise out of profound personal tragedy. This can be readily recognized as ancient wisdom, to be found in the religious and philosophical traditions of the ancient Hebrews, Greeks, Christians, Buddhists, Hindus, and Muslims. These traditions speak of the potential for transcending suffering, transforming it into a resource for internal power and meaning. More recently, in psychology, this approach is reminiscent of the works of Viktor Frankl (e.g., 1985) and also of humanistic psychology (e.g., Rogers, 1951). The notion of growth

Posttraumatic Growth through Quran and Sunna: Islamic Perspective

in the face of adversity has therefore been acknowledged in previous works, yet it is only recently that it has formed the basis of systematic empirical study (e.g., Tedeschi & Calhoun, 1996). In Kashmir, Islamic practices play the most important role for the occurrence of posttraumatic growth among victims of violence.

The word Islam in Arabic means “submission,” reflecting the central core of Islam, which is the submission to the will of God. This religion provides its followers with proper code of behavior, ethics, and social values, which helps them in tolerating and developing adaptive, coping strategies in adverse situations. According to the statistics from new population projections by the *Pew Research Center's Forum on Religion and Public Life*, there are 1.65 billion Muslims worldwide and it is expected to increase by about 35% in the next 20 years, to reach 2.2 billion by 2030; making Islam the second largest religion in the world after Christianity (the future of global Muslim population, 2012). Islam teaches how to live in harmony with others “Seek the life to come by means of what God granted you, but do not neglect your rightful share in this world. Do good to others as God has done good to you. *Do not seek to spread corruption in the land, for God does not love those who do this*” (*Quran, 28:77*). The Quran describes the way in which Allah should be worshipped. The *Sunna* includes all the known sayings, advices, and actions of Prophet Mohammed, his decisions, and his responses to life situations, which usually derived from what's called Hadith. God would also be linked to better psychological functioning: “... And whosoever puts his trust in Allah, and then He will suffice him...” [Qur'an, 65:3].

The main objective of the paper is to discuss the role of Islam with special reference to Qur'an and Sunna in posttraumatic Growth among violence victims.

Traumatic experiences may result in beneficial transformations in survivor's appraisals of the self, others and life in general, which is conceptualized as posttraumatic growth (Tedeschi, Park, & Calhoun, 1998). Survivors may feel stronger, wiser and find new altruistic characteristics in themselves. There are a number of stories in Islam which are a true depiction of posttraumatic Growth. Islamic traditions view suffering, for some circumstances, as a means for better preparing oneself for the “journey heavenward”. The essential component of good health is psychological and mental, *sihat nafsyyat / rahat nafsyyat*. Psychological health is being aware of and at peace with the self as well as the social environment around. Health in the social sense means harmonious functioning in the social milieu involving give and take relations. (kasule, 2008). Several studies have noted relationships between Post Traumatic Growth and personal resources, such as religiousness (Park & Fenster, 2004), coping strategies (Aldwin, Sutton, & Lachman, 1996; Bellizzi & Blank, 2006; Kesimci, Go'ral, & Genc,o' z, 2005), self-efficacy (Carver, 1998), and social support (Carver, 1998). Some socio-demographic characteristics have also been found to be related to PTG. Generally, females report more PTG than males (Park, Cohen, & Murch, 1996; Tedeschi & Calhoun, 1996). Other variables such as age (Polatinsky & Esprey, 2000), education (Bellizzi & Blank, 2006; Updergraff, Taylor, Kemeny, & Wyatt, 2002),

income (Updergraff Taylor, Kemeny, & Wyatt, 2002), marital status and employment (Bellizzi & Blank, 2006) have also been found to be significant predictors of growth. In regards to illness related variables, research has showed that the perceived intensity of the disease (Bellizzi & Blank, 2006) and the time since diagnosis (Cordova, M. J., Cunningham, L. L. C., Carlson, C. R., & Andrykowski, M. A. (2001) appear related to PTG. In this study the role of Holy Quran and Sunna will be discussed in context of Posttraumatic Growth.

QURAN AND POSTTRAUMATIC GROWTH

Islam's great emphasis on mental health can be traced in Quran's verses and the traditions of the prophet's family (Nasrollahi 2010). Various verses in the Holy Quran directly or indirectly address aspects of mental health (Hamidi, F., Bagherzadeh, Z., & Gafarzadeh, S. (2010)). For instance, the Quran contains many verses about achieving tranquility (Mottaghi, M. E., Esmaili, R., & Rohani, Z. (2011).): Allah says in the Quran, "*Be aware that the remembrance of Allah calms the hearts*" (Verse 28, AL-Rad 1996). A study was conducted in Iran to determine the effect of Quran listening without its musical tone (Tartil) on the mental health of personnel in Zahedan University of Medical Sciences, southeast of Iran. The results showed significant differences between the test and control groups in their mean mental health scores after Quran listening ($P = 0.037$). No significant gender differences in the test group before and after intervention were found ($P = 0.806$). These results suggest that Quran listening could be recommended by psychologists for improving mental health and achieving greater calm. This can be a healing therapy for victims in order to cope up with the adversities. Indeed, the World Health Organization (WHO) recommended that Islamic countries provide booklet containing Quran verses connected to mental health. This decision was made during the Regional Mental Health Summit held in 1998 in the Eastern Mediterranean region (Mottaghi, M. E., Esmaili, R., & Rohani, Z. (2011). During the past two decades, various studies have been conducted on the Quran and medical sciences, especially psychology, in Iran (Jamilian 2012; Sadeghi & Ebrahimi, 2011; Siahpoosh, 2012).

A study conducted on nursing students showed that the mean mental health score significantly increased in the test group after Quran listening (Kazemi, M., Ansari, A., Alah, T. M., & Karimi, S. (2004).). Another investigation confirmed that Quran recitation can reduce the level of anxiety in athletes (Mottaghi, M. E., Esmaili, R., & Rohani, Z. (2011). In addition, the benefits of Quran memorization on mental health have been indicated by research showing that Quran memorizers had better mental health, particularly in the areas of anxiety, sleep disorders, depression, and social function (Kimiaee, S. A., Khademian, H., & Farhadi, H. (2012).

Role of sunna in determining posttraumatic growth

It is only through suffering and difficulties that one can attain true happiness and prosperity. The Qur'an says:

".....But Lo, with hardship goes ease; Lo, with hardship goes ease; so when you are relieved, still toil, And strive to please your Lord " (94:5-8).

Imam Ja'far as-Sadiq said: "When Allah loves His slave He drowns him in the sea of suffering. "Like a swimming tutor who throws his new student into the water and makes him struggle and learn swimming, Allah does the same to perfect his beloved slaves. If one reads a whole lifetime about swimming, one will not learn how to swim. We have to go into the water and struggle with the danger of drowning, and then we will learn swimming. "The most difficult lives are possessed first by the prophets, then those who come after them in virtue." (Majlisi,Bihar al-anwar,vol. 67,p.208.)

It is also a matter recorded in history that the Prophet of Islam, Muhammad (pbuh) was the most successful man both in the realms of religions as well as in social and worldly affairs. He has been acknowledged as the most influential man in history. His main task was, on the one hand, to establish the Kingdom of God on earth, to establish firm faith in the existence of ONE GOD - and to establish perpetual worship of the Most-Loving and Most Merciful God; and, on the other hand, his mission was to establish a just and benevolent social order. And he achieved an unparalleled success in both the domains despite tremendous personal pain and anguish that he was made to suffer through his life on this earth.

After receiving an answer to his heart-rendering prayers concerning the moral depreciation, social injustice, lawlessness and mutual fights in the fragmented nation of his fellow countrymen in Arabia, when he started his mission as the Prophet of God to remove all the social, moral and spiritual ills around him, he suffered the most bitter persecution and oppression at the hands of his own people - those people that he wanted to help and guide. He was laughed at, scorned and derided, abused and tormented. Trash was thrown onto his way, and filth was laid on his head. The vagabonds beat him up most severely; throwing stones and rocks, making him bleed almost to death. Some of his followers were brutally murdered. Some of his dear ones were split apart alive by tying their legs to two strong camels and made them run into opposite directions. Some of the women, who believed in him, were butchered shamelessly by his enemies. Even when he and his followers were forced to leave their hometown Mecca and they settled in Medina - a town more than 200 miles away from Mecca, the enemy did not allow them to live in peace, and initiated armed attacks and made them suffer the horrors of war. The brutal enemy mutilated the dead bodies of his dear ones. They cut their noses and ears, and in one instance even took out the liver and chewed it raw. He himself received severe injuries on his face in one of such battles.

Not only that, he suffered many personal domestic tragedies in his life. He lost some his children while they were young, and some died in his lifetime as grown up. He had four sons, but all of them passed away in their infancy. But despite all the enormous human suffering throughout his life, Holy Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) always had a warm smile on face. Throughout his life, he remained cheerful and a tremendous source of peace of mind and comfort for all who got in

Posttraumatic Growth through Quran and Sunna: Islamic Perspective

touch with him. He succeeded in establishing a firm faith in the existence of God in the hearts of thousands upon thousands, and he successfully replaced injustice with equity, cruelty and Oppression with forgiveness and mercy. By studying his personal sufferings juxtaposed on his most successful life, and through his practical demonstration of compassion, peace, comfort, service to others, love for all and hatred for none, we find the most shining example in the person of the Most Noble Prophet Muhammad of reconciling the existence of a Compassionate and Loving God and human suffering. (May peace and blessings of God be on him?) It was not merely an intellectual reconciliation; it was a factual and most impressive reconciliation between God and human suffering. (Ahmad, 2002). What I perceived through this is that prophet Muhammad is an exemplary figure for those victims of violence and turmoil. The teachings, sayings and actions of Prophet Muhammad (peace is upon him) are the best ways of benefit finding or posttraumatic growth. If one follows his ideology of life and his determination for success, the sufferings will automatically lead to growth.

CONCLUSION

Islamic practices such as prayer and listening Qur'an plays important role in coping with traumatic disorders. Islamic values and beliefs can be beneficial in overcoming traumatic life events and seeking posttraumatic Growth. The Holy Qur'an teaches us "The truly righteous -- are those who endure with fortitude misfortune, hardship and peril. That is, who are patient in poverty and affliction, and in time of war" (2:178).

Again, in the Holy Quran we read: "O you who believe! Seek (God's) help with perfect patience and prayer; for surely God is with the patiently persevering (Sabireen). And do not count as dead those who are killed in the cause of God. Rather they are living; only you perceive not (their life). And we will certainly reward you after trying you with something of fear and hunger and some loss of substance and of lives, and fruits (of your toil). Give glad tidings to the patiently persevering; who, when a calamity befalls them, say, 'Surely to God we belong and to Him shall we return.' It is they on who descend the blessings and mercy (rahmah) from their Lord God; and it is they who are rightly guided." (Chapter 2, verses 154-157). What I concluded here is that religion plays a vital role in posttraumatic growth especially Islam, where we have a complete code of behavior, ethics and actions which guide us in our endeavor of making life a success. Even in the time of sufferings Islam provides a way out and helps in healing much faster.

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Posttraumatic Growth through Quran and Sunna: Islamic Perspective

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