

Remembering the Holocaust: A Reading of Howard Jacobson's *Kalooki Nights*

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ABSTRACT

Journey of the Jews have never been so smooth. Since medieval period till today they have been facing maltreatment. However, holocaust displays the height of inhumanity with mass-extermination of the Jews. Jews need to suffer enormous brutality during the reign of Hitler. Though, it has been assumed that holocaust ends with Nazis yet it still persists in the minds of Jews. Howard Jacobson documents a contemporary outlook to the whole idea of holocaust by comparing with Jewishness. Jacobson portrays the dreadful journey of Jews who needs to carry the burden of both holocaust, their culture and religion. Current study aims to explore this journey of Jews which seizes their concord, existence and their personal life. The study will also analyse the traumas of holocaust and their impact on modern day Jewish life.

Keywords: *Antisemitism, Holocaust, Memory, Terror, Trauma*

INTRODUCTION

Ever since the traditional antisemitic period or medieval era Jews are often maltreated and discarded from society. They are also convicted for blood-libel and also considered as the Christ killer. It is often difficult for Jews to assimilate and acculturate in various countries even after getting the residencies. Due to their vilified history, the horror and fear are created against Jews not only by Hitler but also by the other antisemites. Therefore, excluded from the main-stream of the society. Socio-economic factors play an important role in the extermination of Jews. They are often hated for their strength. It is the fear for Jews which leads to heinous action like holocaust. [1] The holocaust is a dreadful event for civilization, which instigated enormous fatalities and annihilation. Holocaust is an endeavour of mass execution of a whole category. The consequences of it are still apparent in several divisions of life, such as culture and politics. Therefore, this paper aims to understand such contemporaneous consequences of holocaust by analysing the book *Kalooki Nights* by Howard Jacobson.

Holocaust is the mass extermination of Jews during World War II in which Nazi officers murders nearly six millions Jews. [1] During the Holocaust Nazi leaders create the ghettos in order to brutally separate, persecute, and to destroy European Jews. Ghettos are made living conditions of Jews miserable by secluding Jews from the non-Jewish populace and from other Jewish people. Holocaust in the most heinous antisemitic act in the history. The death of 6 million Jews failed to bring the sense of unity in the world. They are rather pitied and often discarded even after holocaust. Jews are considered as burden in other countries. The causes and

effects of holocaust are never going to go away. People comprehend evidences of it in many countries today where people do not accept Jews considering them as different. People study holocaust not just to gather historical information but also to sense the trauma of survivors[2]. Various studies available on holocaust. Numerous writers wrote about the dreadful actions not just to prevent reoccurrence of Holocaust but to pay respect to the sufferers. Holocaust can be measured as contemporary ex post facto of the anti-Jewish vehemence. Moreover, the Holocaust not only surfaces in psyche of Jews but also in current events. Though, mode of violence is different yet, sufferings remain the same.

Howard Jacobson is a promising writer who has contributed several interesting books in English literature. The book *Kalooki Nights* focuses on historical memories of holocaust and Jews' responses to it. *Kalooki Nights* carries scenario of 1950's in Manchester. Max Glickman is the narrator and the protagonist of the novel. His influential work "Five thousand years of bitterness" is the remembrance of his childhood. Max's father is boxer who wants delink himself from Judaism. However, mother is an escapist who passes her days engrossing with the game 'Kalooki'. The novel explores the uncanny [3] lives of Jews and also discourses the problem of identity. It also focuses on the enduring effect of memories of Holocaust. Díaz Bild (2018), in "Kalooki Nights or the sacred duty to remember the Holocaust" also discusses about the Jewish duty to remember the holocaust. Enormous pain of holocaust often tormented not the initial victims but also their predecessors.[4]

In the novel Jacobson projects the traumas of the Jews who are neither the direct observer of holocaust nor the sufferer of it. However, their pain is no less than those of the direct victims of the holocaust. The victims of the holocaust witnessed the complete scenario of Nazi propaganda and also experienced the endless tragedy created by the perpetrators similarly, Jews in the novel dwell between the memories of holocaust and rigidity of their religious orthodoxy. Jacobson indicates the unfortunate fate of Jews who are bound to carry the burden of the past including the memory of holocaust. "Jewishness 'Jew, Jew, Jew. Why, why, why, as my father asked until the asking killed him, does everything always have to come back to Jew, Jew, Jew? (Jacobson, 07)"[5]

Current society where Max lives doesn't have Nazi regime nor any incidents of concentration camps. However, inner prejudice for Jews remains the similar. Therefore, Jews carry collective trauma[6], and fear for holocaust. Although, Max Manny and Erol don't experience the holocaust yet, the written document like *The Scourage of the Swastika: A Short History of Nazi War Crimes*[5] by Liverpool provides enough information to sense the horror of Shoah which deeply influence their psyche.

But in the long grass I didn't scruple to be inducted by him into the illustrated Scourage of the Swastika. He must have made a good job of it, because not only am I able to remember in considerable detail all the photographs I saw, I am able to remember the order in which I saw them... The photographs of a mass execution found on a German prisoner. Birkenau before the crematorium was built, the naked bodies smoking in pits. Patriots hanged at Tulle, the German officers smiling. *Arbeit Mscht Frei-* the gateway to Auschwitz. A crematorium oven at

Buchenwald, with a charred skull inside. The disfigured limbs of human guinea pigs at Auschwitz. (Jacobson, 80) [5]

Jacobson depicts incidents of antisemitic prejudice and memory of holocaust paralleling it with Jewish orthodoxy. Max's father is aware of concealed troubles of Jewish life and religion. Therefore, he often avoids the discussions on Shoah in his family.

He was a boxer whose nose bled easily, an atheist who railed at God, and a communist who liked to buy his wife expensive shoes. In appearance he resembled without the hair. He had that globe-eyed, hangdog, otherwise preoccupied Jewish look. Einstein, presumably, is thinking $E=mc^2$ when he stares into the camera. My father was thinking up ways to make Jewishness less of a burden to the Jews. J%J= j. (Jacobson, 07) [5]

Howard Jacobson discusses holocaust with the use of symbols such as, 'Shtetl' which brings the significant history of pogroms as well as mass extermination of Jews during holocaust; Max's father identically links it with Kalooki games. Even, the symbol of train has a significant relation with holocaust. "I am the one for whom a train can never again be just a train. First I have to enquire whom the train, please, is carrying. Then who commissioned it. Then where its ultimate destination is. Jew Jew, Jew Jew... The Auschwitz Express. (Jacobson, 17)." [5] Additional example is of senior SS supervisor at Auschwitz and Belsen called as "The Grey Mouse. (Jacobson 101)" [5] who has executed "On average thirty people a day. (101)" [5] Another account of extermination of Jews during holocaust is done by "Ilse Koch, the wife of the commandant of Buchenwald" who has done erotic violence to Jews.

Ilse Koch. The Bitch of Buchenwald. My Ilse. All our Ilse. Was it a camp injunction, on pain of a beating or a bullet, never to look, never to see her, never to notice the shadow she cast, high in the saddle of her subjugated horse? Or was the prohibition biblical, all in Mendel's head? It didn't matter. He who looked was lost... On his first day, Mendel had crossed the yard naked, to be deloused and disinfected-filthy Jew- shaven of every hair on his body, and they had seen him then... (Jacobson, 105-06) [5]

There is no 'why' (question) to the occurrence of holocaust. Neither do Jews have any answers to all the 'Warums' related to their life. Even in the Holocaust people are allowed not to ask questions from the extremists, but blindly follow them, fearing retaliation or vengeance. Freewill of Jews are devastated prevailing the cultural and political beliefs. "Warum? You are not... the ones to ask that question. Just you go about the business of building Holocaust memorials and making reparation to your victims and leave the whys to us. Jew, Jew, Jew, Joke, joke, joke. Warum, warum, warum?... Why do I wake each day as though I am in mourning? Who or what am I in mourning for? (Jacobson, 10-11)" [5]

Even, the terrific memory of holocaust has an enduring effect on the psyche of Manny therefore, when his orthodox Jewish parents prevents his brother from getting married to a German girl Dorothy, Manny fails to differentiate between the behaviour of his parents and the Nazis. He finds Jewish orthodoxy is identical to cruelties of Nazis. Since both Nazis and orthodox Jewish parents deprive the Jews from getting married to an Aryan lady. Therefore, he kills his parents by gassing them like the way Nazis killed Jews in concentration camp. "You don't say 'gassed' to Jews if you can help it. One of those words. They should be struck out of the human vocabulary for a while, while we regroup, not for ever, just for a thousand years or so – gassed, camp, extermination, concentration, experiment, march, train, rally, German...Gassed, they had joined the sacred millions, photographs of whose piled-up bodies I had first seen in Lord Russell of Liverpool's *The Scourage of Swastika*, the righteous by virtue of victimisation, and no one stood judgement on *their* domestic surroundings(Jacobson, 49)."[5]

Memory of holocaust significantly influences the psyche of Jews and *Kalooki Nights* displays the analogous mental conflicts of Jews. Anxiety of historical memory often generates agony and leads to act the way Manny does with his parents i.e. killing his parents by gassing them. In an interview with *The Jewish Chronicle* Jacobson mentions: "It was very important to me in *Kalooki Nights* to try and broach the whole business of the Holocaust. Not to re- evoke the Holocaust, but to think about the way we talk about it. Not because I think it's funny. Not because I feel we need to 'lighten up' - if anything, I felt we needed to go on darkening down (Jacobson, 2008)."[7]

CONCLUSION

Jacobson presents a contemporaneous Jewish journey which carries the affliction tragic memory of holocaust. It consequences the loss of peace, family and relatives as Manny has lost in the book. It also challenges one's existence as a Jew. Even after several years of holocaust [8] Jews need to struggle with traumas of it along with issues of assimilation and acculturation. The enormity has deeply affected the psyche [9] of the victims. Though, holocaust is over yet Jews are suffering it, being paralysed culturally. Moreover, memory of holocaust continues to sustain in the minds of people as long as one reads about it and will also try to understand the conditions of Jews which can be done with meaningful and informative discussions on holocaust and antisemitism (Halpern 1981).[10]

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