

Memorializing the Holocaust in the Present Century

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Abstract : As we pause to observe the Holocaust Remembrance Day each year on 27 January, it becomes important to consider how the Holocaust is witnessed, and its education is perceived across the globe. The dissemination of knowledge of the Holocaust becomes more pertinent in the countries that were not directly affected by it. The Holocaust education is not widespread in Asian countries and is thus not mandatory as an academic discipline for school and university students. One such Asian country that often considers Holocaust as an isolated event is India. Though the struggle for freedom began with the 1857 mutiny (the first war of Indian independence) but the freedom revolts gained momentum specifically during the years 1944-1947, when India was steeped in a battery of rebellions. However, freedom for the Indian subcontinent from the domination of British Raj came at the cost of partition of India that resulted in widespread bloodshed and immigration. For India, it is this backdrop of her freedom struggle that always outweighs the incidents of the Second World War, including the catastrophic event of the Holocaust. As a result, the knowledge about the Holocaust is available through secondary sources such as Holocaust documentaries and movies. Besides Anne Frank's diary, the knowledge about the Holocaust is disseminated through the course readings in the universities. The most common literary acquaintances with the Jewish faith for university students are when they come across the Jewish characters in their course readings. The Prioress's Tale in Geoffrey Chaucer's Canterbury Tales, the character of Shylock in William Shakespeare's The Merchant of Venice, and the Jewish protagonist, Barabas, in Christopher Marlow's Jew of Malta. Apart from this, the school textbooks mention a detailed chapter on Holocaust and Hitler, which is an encouraging turn. However, there still exists a yawning gap between dissemination and sensitization of Holocaust education owing to different geographical locales. My paper presentation aims to trace the intersectional elements between India and the Holocaust that can serve as the required pivotal stand-board to foster sensitization towards Holocaust education in the Indian subcontinent. For instance, Maharaja Jam Saheb Digvijaysinhji Ranjitsinhji, the ruler of Nawanagar, a princely state in British India, helped save thousand Polish Jewish children in 1945 at the time when India herself was steeped in its struggle for freedom. Famously known as the 'Indian Oskar Schindler' Polish government has named a street after him in Krakow, Poland. Another example that deserves mention is the spy princess, Noor Inayat Khan, a descendent of Tipu Sultan, who became the most celebrated British spy and fought against the Nazis. Additionally, by offering refuge to Jews, India has proved to be a distant haven for them. Researching further the domain of Jewish refugees in India will not only illuminate a dull/gray zone of investigation but also enable the educators to provide appropriate entry points for introducing the subject of Shoah/Holocaust in India, a subject which unfortunately hitherto is either seldom discussed or is equated with the Partition of India.

Keywords : awareness, dissemination, holocaust, India

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