

Quest for Identity in Anne Frank's *The Diary of a Young Girl***C. Shanmuga Priya**

M.A., M.Phil., Assistant Professor

Department of English

Srimad Andavan Arts and Science College (Autonomous)

Trichy

Abstract

Diaspora begins with the dispersal of the Jews from their homeland and their hope to return to their motherland. The present venture tries to bring in the real persecution undergone by the Jewish writer, a sixteen year old Anne Frank, who through her diary had thrown light upon the torments inflicted upon the Jews by the Nazis during the II World war and who succumbed to them acclaiming posthumous fame to her writings. The paper strives to analyze the exploration of Identity by the author in the hiding place of alienation underlining 'Quest for Identity' as the diasporic event.

Key words: diaspora, Jews, alienation, quest, identity

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Introduction

Displacement of persons in an alien land is termed Diaspora which is highly discomfoting to lead life. The impact of dislocation gives room for invisibility and alienation to them driving them to the extent of madness. This terrible predicament of migrated and assimilated people catered to the modern writers to anchor their concentration on the concept of Diaspora substantiating it to be the recurrent theme of contemporary literature. It is noteworthy here to trace out the advent of Diaspora in the life of a little jewish girl, from where the element of Diaspora got its roots.

Advent of Diaspora

Diaspora begins with the dispersal of the Jews through persecution and expulsion, away from their homeland with the hope of returning to their motherland one day. Though the concept of Diaspora generally underlines the emigration and settlement of people beyond the boundaries of their homeland, the present paper tries to bring to light the predicament of the Jews from Amsterdam to the hiding place from the oppression by the Germans with the hope of returning to their homeland, Holland. Quest for Identity is one of the general characteristics of Diaspora which has been applied and analyzed in the present genre of work *The Diary of a Young Girl* by Anne Frank, one of the Jewish victims of the holocaust. She was born as a

German national in 1929 but lost her citizenship in 1941. She gained international fame posthumously after the publication of her diary.

The Diary

The Diary of a Young Girl also known as *The Diary of Anne Frank* was written originally in German during the Nazi occupation of the Netherlands in 1944. The diary with notes between 14 June 1942 and 1 August 1944 was written by Anne Frank, a thirteen year old girl while she was in hiding for two years with her family. She died of Typhus epidemic in the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp. The diary was retrieved by Miep Gies, one of her family well-wishers and handed over to her father Otto Frank who being the only survivor had it published in more than 60 different languages since now. Though there have been many claims that Anne's diary was fabricated, it has been equally considered historical comparable to other diaries such as those of Katherine Mansfield. The diary stands as a stark example of Jewish persecution under Adolf Hitler.

Persecution of the Jews

The Nazis gained control over Germany in 1933 and in May 1940, the Jews were trapped in Amsterdam by the German occupation of the Netherlands. The family went into hiding in the office of Anne's father in July 1942 due to increase in the persecutions of the Jewish population. After two years, the group was betrayed and transported to concentration camps. Anne and her sister Margot Frank were eventually transferred to the Bergen-Belsen camp where they died of Typhus in March 1945. The diary was saved and translated from its original into English in 1952.

Records of the diary

The Diary of a Young Girl has thrown light upon racial oppression of the Jews by the Germans during World War II which in turn highlights individual agonies which is one of the diasporic events. Anne's diary is a world classic that has inspired millions of people in the world. The readers are astonished to find the wonderful record of horrors of war and man's

cruelty to man presented by a thirteen year old girl before her death highlighting her sufferings, her joy, her courage and her thoughts during her life spent in hiding. The record gives an indellible impression upon the author as a keen observer and a deep thinker whose literary skill had taken her to great heights of glory. Her diary had been dramatized by the dramatist, Meyer Levin. Eleanor Roosevelt, the wife of the then American President had described the work as “one of the wisest and most moving commentaries on war and its impact on human beings that I have ever read.” John F Kennedy had praised as “no voice is more compelling than that of Anne Frank.” Nelson Mandela had acknowledged that he derived much encouragement from the novel relating his struggle against apartheid to that of Anne’s struggle against Nazism.

Hiding of Anne

Anne’s diary is a remarkable account of the last two years in the hiding place in Amsterdam spent by Anne Frank and her family when she was thirteen suffering under Hitler’s Anti-Jewish laws due to capitulation, that is, the surrender of the Dutch Queen to the Germans without fighting. In spite of the company of all her friends and relatives, she felt lonely but one of the presents she received on her 13th birthday on June 14, 1942 -- a diary named by her as ‘Kitty’ remained as her sole solace. The novel opens with her staunch belief,

*I hope I will be able to confide everything to you, as I have
never been able to confide in anyone, and
I hope you will be a great source of comfort and support*

(June 12, 1942)

Quest for identity as daughter

In the secret annex being trapped, Anne had explored her identity as daughter, sister, lover, friend, war reporter, historian, religious scholar, student and writer. When Anne received from her parents the gift of diary, she was excited to jot down all her daily events, her thoughts, school grades, boys and all other trivial things. But her entire life got changed within a month when her sister Margot was called for the concentration camp in the German-occupied Holland. Anne had been in search of her identity when she had to cope with the other inmates of the hiding place. Anne had felt annoyed by her mother's and her sister's temperaments. She experienced her father to be nice and adorable to her always and understanding her much better. She sometimes "burst into tears" that she "can't help it" when in their presence. She had expressed,

*I can't stand Mother. It's obvious that I'm a stranger to her;
she doesn't even know what I think
about the most ordinary things.....
I don't get along with Margot very well either.....
Margot's and Mother's personalities are so alien to me.
I understand my girlfriends better than my
own mother.*

(Sunday, September 27, 1942)

Quest for identity as neighbor

Anne's freedom was at stake when Mr. and Mrs. Daan and their son, Peter came to share the place. She found her adolescence being spent hidden from the outside world. She had to tolerate the cooping up of her in tiny rooms, walking stealthily around daytime and becoming shell-shocked from the sounds of gunfire and bombs during night time. She had emphasized her aversion towards Mrs. Daan's dictatorship as,

Mrs. Daan is unbearable. I'm continuously being scolded for my incessant chatter when I'm upstairs.....If there's a bit of food left at the bottom of the pan, she leaves it to spoil instead of transferring it to a glass dish. Then in the afternoon when Margot is stuck with cleaning all the pots and pans, Madame exclaims, " oh, poor Margot, you have so much work to do!"

(Monday, September 21, 1942)

The only solace for Anne was the tons of books and a radio brought by them. She lost herself in reading, studying and writing, bubbling with the knowledge of politics and literature but drifting away from the other members of the Annex.

Quest for identity as beloved

Anne was confused of her identity between her love for Peter Van Daan and Peter Schiff she was already in love with. She was drawn towards Peter Van Daan as Anne's longing to talk to someone became so intense. He somehow got mixed up in Anne's mind with Peter Wessel, her first puppy love. She found herself one with Peter when she found out that he also got into fits of rage as she did, and he also felt alienated from his parents. This common bond increased Anne's desire to confide in him even her innermost thoughts. Anne considered Peter as a 'darling' and 'very brave'. She even hated Mrs. Van Daan for calling Peter sarcastically, 'a thinker'. Anne felt happy when Peter said that she always helped him by her cheerfulness but she was torn to pieces when the real intention of Peter in veiling his identity as a Jew to his enemies was out of the pan. She could hardly bear the stamping of their race as the one that was unfit to exist. When everybody in the Annex started constantly criticizing her, she was plunged into the state of solitude with the thought that everybody hated her. She kept all her emotions shut within herself:

.....during meals I talk more to myself than to the others, which

has two advantages. First, they're glad they don't have to listen to my continuous chatter, and second, I don't have to get annoyed by their opinions. I don't think my opinions are stupid but other people do, so it's better to keep them to myself

(Tuesday, August 10, 1943)

Mental Contradiction

Anne felt remorse to be in the hiding place without finding her identity and had gone to the extent of expecting the death of all of her family members including her. She had transformed her temperament as harder and behaved harder on those around her. Her diary ended on August 1, 1944 with her words describing her mental contradiction as

I just can't keep it up anymore, because when everybody starts hovering over me, I get cross, then sad, and finally end up turning my heart inside, and keep trying to find a way to become what I'd like to be and what I could be if.....if only there were no other people in the world.

(Tuesday, August 1, 1944)

Ghastly effects of Alienation

The novel has an 'Afterword' narrating the events from the morning of August 4, 1944 listing down the arrest and the demise of the inmates of the Secret Annex who mostly were gassed to death in various camps. Anne and Margot died of the epidemic Typhus that broke out due to unhygienic conditions in the camp. The bodies of the girls were believed to have been dumped in Bergen-Belsen's mass graves according to the testimony of Otto Frank who later

shared the message of his beloved daughter, Anne Frank's diary with people all over the world after the liberation of the camp happened to be on April 12, 1945.

Conclusion

Thus, Anne Frank had been a pioneer of Diasporic writings through her personal diary that engulfs many diasporic issues like Quest for identity, Alienation, Feminine sensibility and so on. Hence, Diasporic writings have been at the centre stage possessing writers of different countries and varied literatures pre-occupied often with the sense of nostalgia when they seek to reinstate themselves in new cultures. Sense of loneliness and homelessness has been reiterated in their works with their incessant search of space and identity in the alien soil. Optimistically speaking, Diasporic literature helps in promoting goodwill and in spreading values, virtues and universal peace. It is a sojourn towards self-realization and self-recognition. Hence, the Diasporic or Expatriate Literature stands as a recluse for the losses encountered by the people whenever they need and wherever they are.

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