

A Critical Analysis of Elie Weisel's "Night"

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Abstract

Elie Weisel is the most famous writer of Holocaust. Born in the Jewish family, his works embodies Jewish suffering, pain, trauma, destruction and isolation of the whole Jewish society. Weisel's magnum opus "Night" shows various aspects of Jews' pain and fight for survival during Holocaust. The Holocaust was the mass murder of Jewish by the cruel Nazis during 1933 to 1945. It was a destruction of approximately six million of the people. Except the death of Jews, the Holocaust filled Jewish lives with day to day suffer and pain in a larger scale.

This paper analyses Weisel's mind as a Jewish writer and explores the condition of the Jew's during the period of Holocaust. Jews became the victim of Nazis' domination and were treated inhumanely. Elie Weisel's Night is a story of a child named Eliezer, who becomes the victim of Holocaust. The paper traces the height of Holocaust and analyses critically the inhumanity of Hitler's Nazi Party, loss of faith in God, loss of morals, death of Jews, father and child relationship and fight for survival of the fittest through the life of Eliezer. This paper also finds the reality of Holocaust's pain of Jews governed by the Nazi's during the destruction of humanity.

Key words: Holocaust, Jewish Suffering, Death, Cruelty, Nazi Party.

Introduction

"Night" is one of the famous work of Elie Weisel, which was initially written in French entitled "la nuit", published in 1958 and translated into English in 1960. It is considered to be his first piece of Holocaust Fiction. Ruth Franklin in the book *A Thousand Darkness: Lies and Truth in Holocaust Fiction* (2011) writes about the Night as a document of pain and suffering of human life. This work is based on Elie Weisel's life. Eliezer, who is the central character of Night, Elie Weisel himself. Eliezer is also the narrator of the story. He is a Jewish boy and this work revolves around his journey in the concentration camp. Eliezer's hometown is Sighet, he wants to learn Kabbalah but his parents do not find any teacher for him. Eventually Eliezer himself finds a teacher for himself in Moishe The Beadle. He is the only son and he had three Sisters Hilda, Bea, and Tzipora.

Living as a Jew was not easy; in 1942 the news came that all the Jews were exiled from Sighet. On the way, all the deportees were taken over to the Gestapo, where they were imposed to dig pits. When the Jews stopped the work, the Nazis' started massacring them. Many people died, wounded and some escaped. Moishe, the teacher of Eliezer who was a foreigner succeeded in escaping but unfortunately, he got injured, and that Night Moishe said to Eliezer about his critical condition, pain, and hiding and of getting saved from the Nazis. He also told him about the desire of getting die and if he is alive, only to warn Eliezer about the Nazi Anti-Semitic act towards the Jewish people. This was the first encounter of the Jews. The death of Moishe was not the death of a person but the death of a pious soul and god. After this, still, Jews were hoping for better days but in 1944, the Nazi soldiers marched into the town and Nazis' opened ghettos in Sighet for the Jews.

It was very disappointing news for Jews as Nazis troops had invaded Hungarian territory, and at last, Jewish people began to panic about the future. Moishe Chaim Berkowitz a friend of Eliezer, told every Jews about the fearful environment of Budapest, where Jews were living in the Nazi ideology of anti-Semitism. Every day, the Nazis were attacking the Jewish stores, synagogues, and homes. Things changed quickly. Eliezer, during his childhood, used to think his life was easy and filled with joy but, soon, the rules of exclusion for the Jews came up. With this rule, Germans arrested Jews and started torturing them. Two ghettos were created in Sighet. Jews were forbidden to own any gold ornament and were forced to wear a Yellow Star, they were in extreme danger as anytime they could be murdered in the ghettos by the Nazis, and due to this Jews were in very severe psychological trauma. In 1944 Eliezer and his whole family along with the whole Sighet population were sent to the ghetto, where he lost his mother and sister. Eliezer's teachers, friends, and others

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whom he had feared were beaten and humiliated by the Nazis, and this made people lose their faith in God and humanity. Many died due to hunger, harsh weather, and extreme tiredness. Eliezer was watching this and remembering the past and he commented, "It was like a page torn from a book, a historical novel, perhaps, dealing with the captivity in Babylon or the Spanish inquisition"⁽¹⁷⁾.

Eliezer says, Nazis abandoned their morals and values and they were unimaginably cruel towards Jews. The Nazis were considering Jews more as objects or animals than humans. Eliezer says "That was the secret. A secret for all, except one: the president of the Jewish council. But he would not tell, or could not tell. The Gestapo had threatened to shoot him if talked"⁽¹³⁾.

The next day, Eliezer with his family and other Jewish were crammed in a truck, then, they sealed it from outside. They were completely unaware of the details where Nazis were taking them to. One Nazi officer said to them "From this moment on, you are under the authority of the German army" (24). Eliezer said, the Nazi's were saying, "If anyone goes missing, you will be shot, like dogs" (24). In this journey many people lost their dear ones. Eliezer recalls a woman in his journey named Mrs. Schachter, who lost her memory because of her separation from her husband and her ten years old son. Soon, Eliezer experienced the same pain when his mother and sister got killed by the Nazis, and this tore him apart. For the first time, Eliezer suffered and expressed his anger towards God to be silent for this inhuman act.

Eliezer's father and other Jews were forced into the labour camp where their clothes raged in cold and they had to stand naked. Nazi's started killing men, women, and children and new born were thrown into fire. Eliezer told his father that he cannot bear this in front of his eyes. He held his father's hand and remembered the day of Mrs. Schachter. Remembering that night, Eliezer says, "the first night in camp that turned my life into one long night seven times sealed. Never shall I forget that smoke. Never shall I forget the small faces of the children whose bodies I saw transformed into smoke under a silent sky"⁽³⁴⁾.

Eliezer faced dark days in the camps and lost his mother and sister and saw many deaths in front of his eyes. Eliezer and his father including all the Jews were sent to work in labours camp in Auschwitz where they had to dig holes and load sand. Gradually his father's health deteriorated and he had a colic attack. Apart from this, in the camp, Eliezer became a friend of two Jew boys named Yossi and Tibi, both his friends had already lost their parents in Birkenau. He also got attracted to a polish girl named Idek who suffered physical abuse in the camp by Nazi officers. Eliezer says when I tried to save Idek, he was warned by the officer "just you wait kid...you will see what it costs to leave your work...you'll pay for this later...and now go back to your place"⁽⁵⁷⁾.

The condition of women was helpless in the camp. They were not safe physically and mentally because they were like a slave of Nazis'. Some lost their innocence; some died due to hunger and even some killed others for their survival. Suffering filled them with cruelty and jealousy. There was an officer named Kapo, he told everyone: "Here there are no fathers, no brothers, no friends," a Kapo tells him. "Everyone lives and dies for himself alone"⁽¹¹⁰⁾.

The night was falling every day for them. Gradually Thousands of people died in a day and there was silence all around. Mass of children was buried in the graves and the people, who were alive, were crying in the pathetic condition. Eliezer was thinking why God was punishing them and again he says, few prayed but many cursed God. Eliezer was also cursing god for watching silently the death of fathers, mothers, brothers, sisters, and teachers. Eliezer says He (God) made the factories of death such as Auschwitz, Birkenau and Buna. People, who believed in God, prayed but Eliezer was not happy with the decision of God and says, "I no longer accepted god's silence"⁽⁶⁹⁾. Eliezer turned as a rebellion against God for keeping the community of Jews from getting tortured by the Nazis.

Eliezer was not the only one who lost his faith in God, his friend Rabbi also lost his faith in God though, earlier he was a devotee and always used to prayer but after suffering the trauma of the holocaust, he said to Eliezer that now the good times are over, and there is no one to save us.

Day by day, Nazis were becoming more and more brutal for Jews. Later, the next order came that which powered Nazi Soldiers to shoot anyone who was not working properly, and again they killed thousands of Jews for this. That was not the end of their torture. In 1945, they were sending all the Jews to Gleiwitz, where they lived without water and food, and the only thing they received at Gleiwitz was only snow. In Gleiwitz,

Eliezer lost his father and became orphaned. He describes that day as,

I woke from my apathy just at the moment when two men came up to my father. I threw myself on top of his body.... His body remained inert...I set to work to slap him as hard as I could. After a moment, my father's eyelids moved slightly over his glazed eyes. He was breathing weakly. You see, I cried. The two men moved away. (99)

Once, he was living a normal life with his father and his family, and suddenly everything got ruined after the Nazis captured them. In the camp, he was unable to protect himself when people were fighting with each other, abusing and beating; he was left all alone and was filled with fear. Eliezer could not weep because he left with no tears, though the situation in which he was living, it was painful. Soon the day came of their liberation when Americans liberated hundreds of the Jews. Eliezer was also one of them (survivor) and was taken to the children's block where 600 Jewish children lived.

Critical Analysis

The central theme of Elie Weisel's "Night" highlighted the pain, suffering and miseries faced by the Jews during the Holocaust. The main ideas in the 'Night' reflected the pain endured by the Jews for their survival, the brutalities of the Nazis' towards Jews which lead them into the gorge of sufferings, that includes the pain of separating from their family, friends and their loved ones. Elie Weisel's 'Night' touched almost all dimensions of Jews life during the time of the holocaust as he exposed the inhumane conditions of the concentration camps and the humiliation and annihilation of Jews in the Camps, the entire meaning of Life and Death is expressed with the articulation of emotions in the 'Night'. The protagonist in the 'Night' deeply adhere to the faith in God but with the increase in the degree of suffering his faith in God was disturbed and he started questioning the existence of God, this shows that he realised that the existence of God is purely subjective but it lacks objectivity. The 'Night' presents a naked and lucid picture of the Jews and Nazis during the holocaust without being biased towards any one of them, thus, 'Night' can be considered as a work that is free from controversies and critics, A. Alvarez, a well-known poet and critic commented, "As a human document, 'Night' is almost unbearably painful, and certainly beyond criticism" ("Treatment of the Jews in Elie Wiesel's 'Night').

Conclusion

Thus, Elie Weisel's 'Night' revolves around Jewish life during the Holocaust, which was very pathetic. They lost all their faith, relations, and homes during the Genocide. If anything was present in them, it was the silence filled with fear as a character of Eliezer, who was always with the emotion of holocaust suffering, pain, and trauma. This work holds the truth of society. Apart from the Holocaust, Weisel portrays everything realistically that attracts every reader.

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