



TRAUMATIC EXPERIENCE OF SURVIVORS IN SINGER'S ENEMIES, A LOVE STORY

Dr. Kiran S. Khandare
Dept. of English, Akola.



ABSTRACT

I.B.Singer is one of the greatest Jewish-American novelists in the realm of literature. *Enemies, A Love Story* is an important novel written by him. During Hitler's Nazism lakhs of Jews were killed. After World War II so many people were rescued from imprisonment. They are known as survivors of the war, brutality and mass killing of Hitler's rule. This novel by Singer is a way of crying out for the numerous unknown victims and survivors of that time. In this paper an attempt is made to elaborate how survivors of Nazism go through traumatic experience. Even after the world war they are restless and unable to live the normal life because of traumatic experience they faced in execution camps.

KEYWORDS: Nazism, Second World War, victims, agony, Jewish Fiction

INTRODUCTION

I.B.Singer is regarded as, 'a visionary gleam in the Jewish American literature.'¹ He won the Nobel Prize for literature in 1970. His literary world is rich of Polish Jewry from the seventeenth to twentieth century. Singer preserves the extinct Jewish world and culture through his novels, short stories and memoirs. He had to face enigmatic experiences in Poland so he left and immigrated to New York City in America in 1935. America served the place of tranquility for him where he could recollect his past memories of Jewish sufferings and their victimization. In one of his interviews Singer admits: since I know the Jewish people best and since I know the Yiddish language best, so my heroes, the people of my stories, are always Jewish and speak Yiddish.'²

Enemies A Love Story was an important work for Singer. Writing *Enemies* was Singer's way of crying out for the numerous unknown victims and survivors. It was also his way of crying out against the silence and ignorance of the general public about the holocaust that took so many innocent people's lives. Permanently wounded people inhabit Singer's novels. Even though they have survived the Holocaust; they seem to permanently engage in mourning process and repeatedly act out their trauma.

In *Enemies A Love Story*, Singer has elaborated many characters in the light of the theme of victimizing effect of Nazism. One of the major characters, Masha, was haunted by the past trauma. After escaping from the clutches of Nazis, Herman immigrated to America and started to work as a ghost writer for a rabbi. Herman committed bigamy by marrying Masha, who was also the victim of Nazi's torture during Second World War. Being immigrant survivor like Herman, Masha too carry the scars of the past event though she has started new life in America after the war.

In this novel the gripping force of past trauma is illustrated in such a way that it repeats itself in each character's life. Although sexual attraction plays an important role in bringing them together even Masha's catastrophic recounts of her holocaust experiences is a means of confirming the unbelievable fact that they withstood the tests of life and death and outlived the endless persecution. The shackling force of the past is

so powerful that it becomes difficult to both of them to accept and restart their life even after they become free. Masha was unable to have sound sleep. The dreams plagued her:

"She would shout in her sleep talk German, Russian, Polish. The dead revealed themselves to her. She would use a flashlight and show Herman the scars the dead had left on her arms, her breasts, and her thighs. Her father appeared to her in a dream and read her verses he had written on the other world. A stanza had remained in her mind and had recited it to Herman" (ELS 46)

From the above description it is revealed that the survivors are removed by time and distance. They recall disconnected fragments, the terrible events of their European past. The survivors are ravaged by nightmares of Nazi pursuit. Singer describes the pathetic condition of the Jews who are horrified by execution camps and tortures by the Gentiles. The extreme traumatization of the camps inflicted deep wounds. All the time they live under fear. Masha tells that her mother was unable to live alone: *My mother is afraid of people. If someone knocks at the door, she thinks it's a Nazi* (ELS 109). The survivors relate their bitter experiences to each other. One of such conversations between Mrs. Schrier and Tamara about their journey and torture in the camp reveals the fact. When the Jews were transported to the concentration camps, they lived in horrible conditions such as filth and lack of hygiene, diseases and extreme harassment and physical ill treatment. Masha says:

"Three weeks we rode, packed in like herring in a barrel. If we had to eliminate you should excuse me-we had to do it through a small window. Picture if men and women together. How we survived, I'll never be able to understand. And some didn't survive. They died standing up. They simply threw the dead bodies out of the train. We came to forest in a terrible frost and first we had to chop down the trees with which to build the barracks. We dug ditches in the frozen earth and that's where we slept". (ELS 200).

In the concentration camp, people risked their lives for a piece of bread or a potato. One of the characters says: *"Don't imagine these were small matters. A crust of bread was a dream. A few potatoes were a fortune"* (ELS 81). The survivors narrate their bitter experiences about deportation to each other. Tamara states: "There were mass deportations to the camps. They took men, starved them, and made them do work that would destroy even the strongest within a year. I witnessed it myself. If I hadn't seen it, I wouldn't believe it either. (ELS 73) While narrating her experience of the execution camp, Masha says that being a Jew they had to suffer a lot. Here she narrates how Gentiles tortured her father:

"I had to stand by and watch those monsters rip out my father's beard and a piece of his cheek as well. Anyone who did not see my father at that moment doesn't know what it means to be a Jew..." (ELS 74).

Masha had survived several years in the ghetto and concentration camps. During deportation her mother, ShifraPauh, was sent to one ghetto and Masha to another. They did not see each other for many years. To enhance their agonies, they were separated from each other deliberately. Jews are marginalized in such an extent that they express doubt about the justice of god. Masha expresses her anxiety on god's role. She blames Him for His silence: "But if God could allow the Jews of Europe to be killed, what reason is there to think. He would prevent the extermination of Jews of America? God doesn't care, that's how God is".

"If God is almighty and omnipotent, He ought to be able to stand up for his beloved people. If He sits in heaven and stays silent, that means it must bother him as much as last year's frost" (ELS37)

Once, Herman visits Masha's house, when she asks him to take food. He tells her that he had promised not to eat meat any more. Masha replies : "god himself eats meat-human flesh, there are no vegetarians-none. If you had seen what I have seen, you would know that God approves of slaughter". (ELS 33). Herman's sense of victimization is so strong that he not only refuses to eat flesh but gets up restlessly in the middle of the night to free mice from Masha's traps.

However Herman and Masha are not the only persons suffering from past trauma in the novel. Other survivors of the Holocaust in Enemies, such as Masha's mother ShifrahPauh, and Tamara also live in the past because the past they could not integrate haunt them. In one of his interviews he comments that my characters are men of great suffering.³ singer himself called his religion "a religion of protest"⁴

WORKS CITED:-

- 1) Dr. V.J. Reddy, IssacBashevis Singer, Chennai: common Wealth University Book Publisher, 2000 Pref.i.
- 2) Laurie Colwin, New York Times Book Review, July 23, 1928.
- 3) Harold Flender, IssacBashevis Singer, Paris Review 44 (Fall, 19680, p.68.
- 4) IssacBashevis Singer, Conversations with IssacBashevis Singer, eds. IssacBashevis Singer, and Richard Burgin (New York: Double day, 1985),175.

Note: All Textual quotations are taken from the novel, *Enemies A Love Story*, Trans. Aliza Shevrin and Elizabeth Shub New York:Farar, Straus and Giroux, 1969.