

## Chapter 4

### **Hannah Arendt and the Banality of Evil: Post Holocaust Literary Responses**

*Antisemitism in Europe* (2018) is a documentary that has presented the re-emergence of antisemitism in European countries especially Germany, Poland, and France in our present time. This, with several other documentaries and public news broadcasts in Germany, France, Poland and other countries have, have presented before us striking similarities between the current/present rise of antisemitic sentiments with that of 1930s and 1940s of central European and Eastern European countries. A few characteristics of these rising antisemitic movements are, but are not limited to, ultra-nationalistic sentiments, leaning towards ethnoreligious ideologies, intolerance of multiculturalism, and direct or indirect resentment of Jewish population and culture.

This kind of rise of behavioural and attitudinal changes has become more common after the rise of right-wing politics in European countries but are not limited to them; for example, the 2017 Charlottesville Rally in the United States where antisemitic slogans were proudly chanted by the participants shows that the rise of this sentiment is not limited to Europe. In the name of free speech, the use of hate speech and demeaning statements towards Jews and other minorities have become more common. Antisemitic comments which were perhaps restricted to personal conversation, after the second world war and Holocaust, are now freely expressed in public and in some cases without protest by civil society.

The population of Jews has always remained a micro minority just 0.2% (around 14.7 million) of the total population of the world, but the persecution of the Jews especially in European countries has been continuous over the past 2000 years. This chapter focuses particularly on the rise of antisemitism after the First World War and to the causes that led to the holocaust. It also focuses on the social, cultural, political, and economic treatment of the Jewish population in central Europe, especially Germany where the evils of the “final solution” originated and were implemented.

The question of antisemitism is not only a question of Jew hatred, it is a question of minority treatment, tolerance of other cultures, and also the question of living together in harmony and mutual acceptance. Jews remained a stateless or wandering minority, deemed as an enemy of the public and also a scapegoat for all the European problems, which they were not directly related to but were easily available to carry the blame. As Sartre has pointed out, “antisemitism is not a Jewish problem, it is a problem for non-Jews, and must primarily be viewed and understood as such, as ‘our (non-Jews’) fault” (qtd. in Beller 4). The Jewish question remains the central theme of importance in European countries and a very politically lucrative topic for a few of the political parties. Antisemitism was created as a tool and has been used for political and social functions, it has effects ranging in politics, society, culture, economics, science, philosophy, and apart from all on the European psyche as a whole. According to Hannah Arendt “modern antisemitism grew in proportion as traditional nationalism declined, and reached its climax at the exact moment when the European system of nation-states and its precarious balance of power crashed” (Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* 3). Jews were very essential to this power balance, although they were the only European people without a state of their own (Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* 23) and their political aloofness has made them a commodity/ profitable ally in the time of need. They were despised and discriminated against but their annihilation was never thought of or proposed by any anti-Semite before the Nazis. The question remains unanswered: how does this scattered and insignificant minority remain at the centre of European history?

Historically, Jews have remained a scattered population all over Europe across centuries. They do not belong anywhere there and although they are born and live in specific countries, they are considered as Jews first and last. Jews in a way can be considered to be global or cosmopolitan nomads. The idea of antisemitism in modern Europe is a very simple yet complex narrative. Deborah Lipstadt in her interview (“*Understanding Antisemitism*”) argues that there are three major characteristics which anti-Semites attribute to Jews 1) their connection with money and wealth 2) intelligence or cleverness in a very nefarious sense and 3) their global status or demand for global control. These attributes, although incorrect in many ways, have become stereotyped and are associated with the Jews, and one can find this kind of narrative everywhere. Even in European countries after the world wars, one finds this kind of narrative. Anti-Semites use these narratives to prove that there is a global Jewish conspiracy.

To understand the above-mentioned stereotypes, we can look at the history of the Jews and their treatment by the nations and governments to see how they have come to acquire these kinds of abilities and characteristics. First of all, their relation to money has been the result of the restriction on occupations forced on them by the catholic church (Beller 13). Because of these restrictions the majority of poor Jews were left to live as peddlers or as proprietors of other minor businesses which had their roots in trading. Rich Jews only had the option of money lending. As Christianity proscribed usury, Jews found a way of survival in that business and they survived in this way from the mid thirteenth century (Beller 13). They managed banking transactions of feudal lords, and kings, and nation-states, and even many modern governments in history. The Rothschilds family is very important in this context because they were influential in consolidating the narrative of a global Jewish family handling the finance of France, England, and Austria (Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* 28). Arendt says “It was precisely the Rothschilds' monopoly on the issuance of government loans which made it possible and necessary to draw on Jewish capital at large, to direct a great percentage of Jewish wealth into the channels of state business, and which thereby provided the natural basis for a new inter-European cohesiveness of Central and Western European Jewry” (Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* 27). This is how Jews became synonymous with the idea of money and it has been taken for granted that all Jews are greedy and nefarious and they control most of the global events due to their power of money.

The second stereotype Jews were connected to is their intelligence and cleverness. The older generation of the Jews did not care about the current social and political discrimination they were facing, they were not so much concerned about the outer world unless it was related to their business. Most of the time the rich Jews/court Jews who handled business transactions were only focused on the personal affairs of their masters. But for the new generation in the modern nation-state, things changed. It was their need and urge to be recognized, they were attracted to the idea of fame, but not for themselves. The Jews as individuals were accepted in the social circles and were despised or hated as the Jewish community as a whole (Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* 30). This led the newer generation of Jews to pursue fame and they wanted to try to create and live in this aura of fame. The rise of Jewish intelligentsia, which was earlier feared by the nation-state and seen as a threat, was changed as individuals were encouraged to pursue those occupations which were closely connected to cultural institutions and social enterprises like newspapers, publishing houses, theatre, and music. The path created

by earlier individual Jews who were accepted into the social circles gave inspiration and ideas to Jews everywhere. This led them to the pursuit of greatness, the pursuit of excellence, in science, art, history, music, and every field they entered. They became marvelous and unsettling writers, pioneers in science, virtuosos in music, and each field which is connected to knowledge and power production but they always remained separate from it. This pursuit of excellence which has made individual Jews accepted in social circles also put the Jewish community in the public eye; consequently, Jews were seen as a threat to the public, manipulators of power, and also rumored to be connected to black magic. This growing hatred towards Jews led to political profits to the anti-Semites and parties which was a tested assimilator of the public consent in the central European countries. This intelligence, excellence, and progress have been seen as the nefarious plot to control the whole world.

The third stereotype connected with the Jews is that there is some kind of global conspiracy of Jews, through which Jews have been trying to control the world. Although it was proved as a forgery in 1921 by the *New York Times*, the infamous *Protocols of the Learned Elders of Zion* (*Protocols*) is a foundational book for many Anti-Semites which sought to prove and document a global Jewish conspiracy. It is still a very popular and assimilating book for Anti-Semites. Beller notes that *Protocols* was forged by Russian secret services and was based on the many nineteenth century fictions projecting Jewish elements in capitalism and socialism to put forward international Jewish conspiracy for global domination. Similar arguments are found in William Marr's 1879 *Victory of Jewry over Germandom* which was written with the intention of inspiring hatred and contempt against Jews on a larger scale (Beller 72-73). Jews were presented by the anti-Semites as the originators of all evil and devious systems of control. Jews were considered to be responsible for the control of the world. Being a micro population and still being in a powerful and influential position at the world level led the masses to believe that there is a possibility of Jewish world conspiracy or there is Jewish world conspiracy for global control (Beller 27).

To understand these stereotypes and their roots we should look at the historic treatment of the Jews and the history of the Jewish question. Around the first century in history when Romans were powerful, and very strict against suppressing the rebellion, Jews, Christians, and pagans were living together. Jewish people were more important to the Roman emperors as they were



financially influential and due to that they were also provided certain privileges for their religious purposes. This does not mean they were given citizenship. This was the case in many modern states until the second world war where they were provided with special privileges which enabled them to enjoy certain political and social activities without the right to citizenship (Pinson 64-66). In the first century C.E. Jews were given certain privileges such as freedom of religious and social gatherings, exception from military service, places by the government to build prayer halls and permissions to perform sacrifice according to Jewish laws. These kinds of privileges were given to the Jews by the power of the Roman rulers and were known as immunities. These kinds of privileges were reasons behind the anti-Jewish violence when governments were not able to protect Jews particularly in Hellenistic Roman period (Pinson 64-70). The rise of Christianity exacerbated this kind of violence leading to the conversion of many Jews in the diaspora to Christianity. As a result, the position of the Jews who remained faithful to Judaism became more miserable.

During the second and third centuries, Christianity was getting powerful; it started claiming the Bible and also presenting the Jewish people as disciples of the Devil or sometimes the Devil himself (Pinson 87). Jews were losing political and social power and Christianity was getting more organized and more powerful. The doctrine of Jewish hatred and presenting Jews as evil was promoted by the church fathers and any social intercourse with Jews was discouraged by Christian authorities (Pinson 85-91). When around sixth-century Christianity had risen to power and was able to control some Christian emperors it started promoting anti-Jewish laws and exclude Jews from some economic and social stages legally (Pinson 90), but these ideas were shared by few. It was at this time that Jewish theological resistance was somewhat powerful and they were able to articulate their side of facts presenting the Christian Messiah in their light of Jewishness (Pinson 85). This led to Christianity taking a different strategy of presenting Judaism as inferior which led to the conclusion that Jews were inferior and Christians superior. Jews were expelled from many cities and declared outcasts; in some cases, they were branded with the Jewish badge (Pinson 91). Jewish merchants were faced with the competition of Christian merchants, Jews were seen as expendables and hindrances to Christian development. At the end of the Middle Ages when Jewish merchants were coming into direct competition with the Christian merchants, Jewish merchants had to change business practices due to Christian social and religious power. The only business left to the Jews was that of money lending which was prohibited to the Christians. Jewish development in money lending

was not seen as a significant contribution to the banking system, it was viewed with contempt by the creditors and king and Jewish moneylenders were characterized as having greedy and parasitical nature (Pinson 92).

“The Jewish Question” is and was a question related to politics since the rise of conflict between Judaism and Christianity. It has been noted by Solomon Grayzel in his essay “Christian-Jewish relations in First Millenia”, that in the early days of Christianity neither Jesus nor his disciples wished that the Jewish people be degraded or destroyed or live a life of misery (Pinson 79). Their views were geared more to the peaceful and harmonious existence of both faiths. But after the collapse of the Jewish state in 70 C.E., the Jewish people lost their prestige in the pagan world who then leaned towards Christianity and the sole purpose of self-preservation became the only option of the Jewish people. Grayzel also notes that by the year 140 C.E “Judaism and Christianity now became two distinct religions and anti-Jewishness became a matter of Christian policy” (qtd. in Pinson 83). Jews were primarily projected throughout history as the killers of Christ. The religious hatred towards the Jews was systemically sponsored and was well backed by the church. On the other hand, Jews with their mythological concepts like “The Chosen People” and “The Eternal Jew” created a walled existence around themselves and followed their life in isolation from other societies strictly adhering to their orthodox ethos and tradition that they believed they had followed since they were freed from the slavery of the Pharaohs. They used this way of life as a survival strategy for centuries. This strategy had been proven successful as it allowed the micro-population of Jews to survive.

From the medieval period until the 14th century, the Church became so powerful that it dominated politics, society, and personal life in most of the western and European countries. One can observe the rampant antisemitism backed by the Christian church in medieval art (Pinson 93-103). Joseph Reider in his “Jews in Medieval Art” observes that the misrepresentation of Jews in Medieval art was comprehensive. He writes that:

Wherever the Christian turned in his daily life the distorted figure of the Jew was flaunted before his eyes: on portals, frescoes, and stained-glass windows of churches and cathedrals; on monuments and memorials in public squares, city-halls and on bridges; in illuminated and illustrated Bibles, Psalters, and prayer books in general,

constantly used at home; and besides on many household articles, such as stoves, china plates, and urinals, and bric-a-brac on mantelpieces. Add to these the parallel misrepresentations in literature (hymnals, sermons, polemics) and on the stage (miracle and passion plays), and one gets an idea of the far-flung and thorough poisoning of the minds of the people, leading to a deep-seated bias against and profound hatred of the Jews. It helps to explain the violent outbreaks in peaceful communities which often led to bloodshed” (qtd. in Pinson 100-101).

The figures depicting Christianity and Judaism have been projected in such a way that Christianity rises victorious and Judaism falls as defeated and destroyed (Zukier 1996). The depictions of Jews and Jewish characteristics were stereotyped and, in some cases, they promoted and endorsed stereotypes leading to them being prevalent for a very long time. Anything related to Judaism and Jewish culture was presented in a manner that produced a feeling of disgust and hatred. These kinds of antisemitic writing and image creation were presented everywhere in and outside the cathedral, churches, and houses. These cultural and ideological stereotypes were found everywhere in medieval art. In literature too, the Jews were stereotyped and depicted as greedy, nefarious, disciples of devils, or sometimes devil himself; these negative descriptions of Jews in medieval art and culture made a permanent impact on the lives of Jews across nations.

Surprisingly, medieval law was somewhat more secular and just in the treatment of Jews and Christians. Guido Kisch in his essay “The Jews in Medieval law” observes that the idea or comparison of law with God and the doctrine that all are equal before God and that means all are equal before law gave Jews some opportunity and security as well as a sense of equality. We have also seen that Jews were protected by the kings and rulers for purposes related to the economy or Royal treasury. Kisch notes that:

The treatment of the Jews in the latter half of the Middle Ages, the temporal and numerical restrictions, their exclusion from the ownership of land, the designation of special living quarters and the prescription of distinguishing dress or other visible signs of distinction for them, in short, their degradation to citizens of the second rank did not spring primarily from law, but resulted from political, religious, economic, social, and psychological reasons (qtd. in Pinson 111).

Jews were living in almost every European country; they also share similar characteristics throughout Europe which can be also possible due to the antisemitic culture and society of Europe. Hannah Arendt in her *Origins of Totalitarianism* (1979) states that Jews as a community are people who are devoid of any kind of political authority, ambitions, and ideals (Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* 34) as she writes that:

Of all European peoples, the Jews had been the only one without a state of their own and had been, precisely for this reason, so eager and so suitable for alliances with governments and states as such, no matter what these governments or states might represent. On the other hand, the Jews had no political tradition or experience, and were as little aware of the tension between society and state as they were of the obvious risks and power-possibilities of their new role. (Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* 23)

Jews after living for many years in Europe were not able to rise politically. In short, Jews never emerged as a political class, and yet they were at the center of the European political stage which is somewhat ironic (Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* 3). Antisemitism developed as a useful tool to gain political support, economic gain, and power. Antisemitism became a very important position taken by European political parties as it was evident at the time that antisemitism was the point through which nothing can go wrong and that Jews could be made scapegoats to anything. For example, Jews were blamed for capitalism as well as communism, Jews were blamed for the defeat as well as the profiteering of wars. Jews were never actively accepted in the culture of many European countries but they are also presented as the reason for the destruction of cultures. As Waldemar Gurian puts it in his “Antisemitism in Modern Germany” that “The speeches of Hitler accused Jews of being responsible for both parasitic capitalism and destructive communism; the Jews were the exploiters of German defeat and instigators of revolutions for their own profit.” (qtd. in Pinson 243). This kind of irrationality has been discussed by Steven Beller in his *Antisemitism: A Very Short Introduction* (2015). He notes that this kind of behavior is seen throughout history, which makes someone believe to connect antisemitism with irrational behavior or irrationality, and he writes that “Antisemitism has been defined by many scholars as irrational hostility to Jews. This definition’s adequacy is debatable, but it is quite clear that antisemitism has usually been seen as linked to the irrational, non-rational, or anti-rational in some way” (Beller 40). According to him this kind of irrationalist thinking was shared all over Europe and many well-known philosophers and social thinkers contributed to this, for example, Richard Wagner, Schopenhauer, Fichte, and many more shared these ideas (Beller 42).

David Seymour notes that Bruno Bauer was against the Jews being given either civil rights (the rights of man) or political rights (the rights of the citizens) on the three grounds. Seymour further explains that:

First, he (Bauer) said the granting of rights depends upon the Jews renouncing their religious beliefs and adopting atheism. Second, he said that, were the Jews to be emancipated as Jews, their ‘particularism’ (their ‘restricted nature’) would always dominate over the universalism that he saw as the essence of political and civil rights. Third, he claimed that the Jews had remained outside the historical development that led from Christianity to ‘Christianity in dissolution’ to human emancipation (2).

In response to Bauer’s argument, Marx writes “The Jewish Question” where he defends the separateness of Jews and their religion ultimately advocating that Jews should be granted the rights of man and the rights of citizens. For Marx, “Political emancipation is certainly a big step forward. It may not be the last form of general human emancipation, but it is the last form of human emancipation within the prevailing scheme of things. Needless to say, we are here speaking of real, practical emancipation” (qtd. Seymour 11). He believed that “the recognition of the individual as a rights-bearing person is a recognition of their equality and freedom that should be welcomed” (qtd. in Seymour 11). But, in “The Jewish Question”, he also tried to link the Jewish problem to their connection to materialism and mistakenly connects Judaism with materialism, in a move that employed the stereotypical antisemitic argument (Beller 53).

This link to money and materialism has been a stereotype connected to the Jews for many centuries. Economically, Jews were seen as greedy, miserly, stingy, frugal, as well as possessors of great wealth in a devilish way. Jewish population can be divided into two extreme groups economically. As Arendt says that “Jews with a lot of money and great ability were able to enter the paradise of rights and liberties and Jews without money and business still continued to live in poverty and without civic rights” (qtd. in Pinson 220). Not all the Jews in Europe were/are rich. There were Jews who were rich and worked as private bankers of royalty, aristocracy, nobles, and lords. On the other hand, there were Jews who were living in dire poverty. It has been noted by Bernard D. Weinryb in his “The Economic and Social Background of Modern Antisemitism” that Jews were in most of Europe kept out of traditional business or provisions were made which prevent them to start a legal business as easy as other citizens or were permitted by paying the high amount of fees and taxes (Pinson 17-35). In the

more general scenario, Jews were hawkers and small businessmen who traveled from village to village and city to city to do business, they were faced with a harsh business environment but they managed to do well (Pinson 22). After the rise of urbanization due to industrial development and large-scale migration from villages to cities after the first world war, there were opportunities for many Jews to access various jobs and occupations and it became one of the major reasons which have shaped the Jewish Problem around Europe. The economic development of this very flexible minority became an issue of contempt in many countries, they were seen as the beneficiaries of the misfortunes of other citizens, and a general feeling of disgust developed in people due to this economic development of Jews. In this imagination, Jews were never seen as connected with any productive or economic business, instead they were imagined as mostly connected with banking and usury, and therefore, parasitic people living off others life and blood. Arendt, in her *Origins of Totalitarianism* gives the example of French aristocracy, using Tocqueville as a case:

According to Tocqueville, the French people hated aristocrats about to lose their power more than it had ever hated them before, precisely because their rapid loss of real power was not accompanied by any considerable decline in their fortunes. As long as the aristocracy held vast powers of jurisdiction, they were not only tolerated but respected. When noblemen lost their privileges, among others the privilege to exploit and oppress, the people felt them to be parasites, without any real function in the rule of the country. In other words, neither oppression nor exploitation as such is ever the main cause for resentment; wealth without visible function is much more intolerable because nobody can understand why it should be tolerated. Antisemitism reached its climax when Jews had similarly lost their public functions and their influence and were left with nothing but their wealth (4).

After the first world war, Jewish privileges and economic gains were seen as a parasitical system built on the sacrifice of common people. Jews without political protection, power, and influence were left with their wealth and this wealth became the reason for the people to be more intolerant towards Jews. The consolidation of antisemitic stereotypes has led to a popular European imagination which refuses to accept that there were many Jews who were poor, unprotected, and without equal rights or privileges. It finds it hard to believe that there were many Jews who were living in nations for generations and were still not given citizenships, that there were Jews who were patriotic and contributing to the welfare of the nation. Steven Beller notes that:

Anti-Jewish prejudice continued to receive institutional reinforcement into the 18th century. Andreas of Rinn, a Tyrolean ritual murder ‘victim’, was beatified in 1755; Maria Theresa attempted to expel the Jews from Prague in 1744. Outbursts of popular Jew-hatred continued in various parts of Europe into the 19th century, as evidenced by the Hep-Hep riots of 1819 in Germany. The negative Jewish stereotype, developed over centuries, clearly also survived in 19th-century European culture, in figures such as that other archetype of English literature, Fagin. Even cases of ritual murder accusations persisted, for instance in Damascus in 1840, and Tiszaeszlar in 1882. The latter case was the occasion for one of the first campaigns of modern antisemitism. Modern antisemitism could not have occurred without this Christian-based heritage of Jew-hatred (14-15).

These stereotypes created in the Middle Ages became the building blocks of modern antisemitism. Each century has added something to the hatred towards the Jews. Although we do not find similar treatment of Jews across European nations, the presence of antisemitism was a fact. With the rise of racial theory and ethnonationalism, the growing power of singularity was becoming a threat to the plurality and the minorities around Europe. This was felt in every major country (Beller 29; Pinson 121-145).

Modern antisemitism can be arguably dated to 1914 and after the Great War and depressive recession; gains its peak in the 1930s and 1940s around Europe. It was the reason for the miserable conditions and second rank status of Jewish people all over Europe. The “Final Solution” and The Holocaust was the result of this centuries-old hatred towards Jews which developed into the more perverted and degraded Utopia of the Nazis where anything Jewish should not exist. The Nazi concentration camps were the result of the collective moral failure of European people who in times of darkness turned their eyes away from the slaughtering of the innocents and supported the genocide directly or indirectly.

Arendt was criticized for her *Report on Eichmann* (1964) in the Jerusalem Trial.<sup>3</sup> She argues here that the “Banality of Evil” is evident when it is recognized that Eichmann did not possess

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<sup>3</sup> She was personally attached to the Jewish question and had given great thought and time to this question especially to the treatment of Jews by Germans during and after the rise of Nazi Totalitarianism. This can be observed from her early writings in essays like *Race-Thinking before Racism* (1944), *The Jew as Pariah: A Hidden Tradition* (1944), and *Privileged Jews* (1946) and also by her work as a volunteer in Paris. She was

any strong hatred towards Jews. His action of organizing thousands of Jews for concentration camps was driven by his career ambitions. It has been argued by Deborah Hopstadt and others that Eichmann was aware of his actions and he was evil by nature, but this is the point where Arendt disagrees (White). Arendt never rejects the reality that Eichmann is responsible for the murder of thousands of innocent people and that he is guilty of crimes committed by him. Rather her understanding of the issue of the Holocaust is led by the idea that it was an event that had significance beyond that of the persecution of the Jews (White “What Did Hannah Arendt Really Mean by the Banality of Evil?”).

Her identity as a political thinker rather than a philosopher puts her in a beneficial position from where she can freely traverse through philosophy and political theory. She developed an interest in philosophy at a very early age and had formal education of philosophy but later leaned towards the realm of political theory. Her major idea where she inserts the question of “the origin of freedom” in political thought as well as her focus on the importance of the political realm which creates equality is unique and marvellous (Ibid.; Arendt 1960). She emphasizes the political over social or individual and also observes that without politics the concept/idea of freedom and equality becomes baseless or non-existent. For her the “*The raison d’être* of politics is freedom, and its field of experience is action” (Arendt, *Chicago Review* 28).

Arendt claims that the Holocaust cannot be counted as an act or incident only related/to Jewish history. She defined it as an unprecedented event which she claimed to be a rootless and evil event that was a crime against humanity. She thought that this event was led by the death of private space, the singularity of fabricated reality by the Nazis, and collective failure and moral bankruptcy and thoughtlessness of German people. She was also intrigued by the inability of the Jewish to act who went to death camps complying with their murderer never resisting even at the moment when they were faced with death (Betz 379–422). To her the ability to act is essential for it is through this one can experience the freedom which was bestowed upon the humans, the ability to act also brings the possibilities of bringing something new to this world. This inability to act and acceptance of death without any resistance, she suggests, was the result

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observing the rise of totalitarianism in European countries and how it was affecting Jewish life around Europe. *Origins of Totalitarianism* (1951) is proof of this where she devotes one section to antisemitism and the other to totalitarianism. In this work, she develops her idea that lack of political ambitions or presence is the root cause for the Jewish persecution and degradation of Jewish life (Betz 410).



of the long and systemic process of stripping the humanness of the Jewish victims. Nazi totalitarianism throughout slowly and gradually stripped the Jews of their humanness through racial rules, ghettos, camps, strategies of comparing them to rats, and pigs, and insects. This dehumanization process, which was one step in the 'final solutions' project, robbed the victims of humanness and from other Germans and perpetrators guilt or feeling which transferred them from the commandment "Thou shall not kill" to "Thou shall kill" (Betz 414). This effect of stripping humans of their humanness, of their ability to create something new, of their courage, morality, and moral responsibility was the result of totalitarianism. This acceptance of mass murder by society as a whole, she shows, is the sign of hegemonic rule and acceptance of normalization of evil.

Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer were focused on the theoretical study of antisemitism in their seminal work *Dialectic of Enlightenment* (1944). The antisemitism project was a long-thought out project of Horkheimer and could be regarded as his major work. Horkheimer was thinking about the antisemitism/Jewish question for a very long time, in the later period of his career, he distanced himself from the Marxist perspective (Jacobs 157). On the other hand, Adorno was not that much interested in the study of antisemitism or the Jewish question and only later he develops the need to theoretically explain the antisemitism after the death of his close friend Benjamin and the persecution of millions of Jews (Jacobs 161). Adorno and Horkheimer were in exile when and where they came to realize the need to analyze antisemitism not only through a Marxist/economic perspective but from a complex theoretical and critical perspective. Their *Dialectic of Enlightenment* was the result of that and it also included their essay on antisemitism "Elements of Antisemitism" They found their path to the myth as the root or origin of antisemitism. This myth which was defined by the enlightenment as the opposite to reason, they claimed has itself become the reason and this victory of myth over reason is the consequences of this situation of Jews.

Adorno and Horkheimer believed that it was the image of the Jew that is at the center of the antisemitism (Jacobs 163). They write in the *Dialectic of Enlightenment* that:

No matter what the makeup of the Jews may be in reality, their image, that of the defeated, has characteristics which must make totalitarian rule their mortal enemy: happiness without power, reward without work, a homeland without frontiers, religion

without myth. These features are outlawed by the ruling powers because they are secretly covered by the ruled. The former can survive only as long as the latter turn what they yearn for into an object of hate. (Horkheimer et al. 164-165)

This image of the Jew is at the centre of antisemitism and this image is made up of the anti-Semites in their own image. Antisemitism as Horkheimer puts it later as is “Fundamentally a psychological phenomenon” (qtd. in Jacobs 163). These images are formed of the stereotypes which were in society for centuries and became the backbone of the hatred towards Jews. Horkheimer and Adorno criticized the Enlightenment in their major work *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, for its totalitarian attributes and its objectivity towards experience and subjectivity. Rather they found that the objectivity that Enlightenment was trying to achieve by separating itself from the myth has, in turn, become the fundamental characteristic of the Enlightenment itself as they write in the preface that “Myth is already enlightenment, and enlightenment reverts to mythology” (Horkheimer et al. xviii). For them the Enlightenment is a path through which civilization is marching towards barbarism, they set out to question how it can be that the thinking which has provided the idea of universal human rights has also provided the rationale for the destruction of Jews. Enlightenment in the name of progress as secularism, they show, promoted the singularity and totalitarianism (Horkheimer et al. 140). The totalitarian and authoritarian thinking of Enlightenment offered tools to hegemonize and manipulate the masses to maintain domination and control. The rise of Hitler and Mussolini and the history after that provides ample explanation of it.

Enlightenment, which resulted in the disenchantment of nature, has shifted the focus of the world to knowledge, rationality, and reason. The old authority of religious myth was rejected by science. Science became a secular force which was directed towards the separation of the human from nature. This rise of science and fall of religious authority was one of the reasons where Jews became superfluous and unprotected. Their special status became the reason of discomfort of others, the rise of the idea that Jews should emancipate themselves of their Jewishness and assimilate themselves with Christian religion was in itself proving the totalitarian and authoritarian nature of the Enlightenment thought.

Simultaneously the racial theory was getting stronger in the European world. Scientific theses which are based on subjective prejudices were presented as the examples of proof of superiority

of one race and inferiority of another. In this many false projections were made of science, history, culture which has created the atmosphere where plurality or difference was seen as the object of hatred and those who were different as unnecessary and expendable. With the economic advancement there also came desperate times, the industrial revolution brought changes around the world. The world which started producing things in abundance provided more to those who are in circulation and Jews were in the circulation for way too long. They were stuck in the circulation and as the middle man. This made people thought, the Jews are getting what they don't deserve. These changes affected different demographics differently. To Jews who were strategically excluded and kept at the margins it brought fortune to some because of their flexibility and the type of their work.

At first glance the problem of the Jewish question looks economic but when we try to analyze the persecution of Jews in the 1930s and 1940s the economic structures fail to incorporate the totality of the question. It was result of all the historical persecution of the Jews due to, their image, their culture, their political aloofness, their inability to act even at the point of destruction, their easy availability for the scapegoating and the psychological condition of the Anti-Semites, were turned into the horrors of the Holocaust.

The rise of racial thinking has been a part of European politics/body politic since their conception and foundation. Ethno-nationalism was strongly felt in central German Europe and Germanness was a concept developed by both the anti-Semites and German Chauvinists. Hitler's propaganda of projecting only the German race as superior and master of the world built on this history. In this light, we can see that he has made many laws particularly racial laws regarding work, miscegenation, and segregating jobs based on racial/antisemitic thinking. These laws were directed to protect German purity and even members of the elite were not exempt from these laws (Betz 408). The Nuremberg Laws (1935), namely 'Law for the Protection of German Blood and German Honour' prohibited any physical or intimate relationship between any German and Jew; and the 'Reich Citizenship Law' declared only Germans as Reich citizens. The 'Law for the Restoration of Professional Civil Service' excluded Jews from the legal profession and civil service. This was termed as the Aryanzation of Germany which led to greater segregation of the German Jews and fueled hatred towards Jews and other minorities. This antisemitic thinking was first found in the writings of Comte

de Gobineau when he tried to explain the fall of the great civilization is due to degeneration of races and mixture of races which leads to decay in which lower races are always as victorious (Arendt, *The Review of Politics* 57). Gobineau believed that Germans were superior, an Aryan race which was in “danger of being submerged by the lower-Aryan classes through that old foe of feudalism: democracy” (Arendt, *The Review of Politics* 58). This idea of the superiority of one race and the inferiority of others has been the origin of conflict in most European and Western countries since the 18th century. The Nazis equated the Aryan or Germanic race with the Nietzschean idea of *Übermensch* (“superman” or “superhuman”) while Jews, gypsies, migrants, homosexuals, physically or mentally challenged (and other marginal categories) were looked down upon as *Untermensch* “sub-human” (Majumdar 42). David Seymour notes that “It was in this new, modern situation that natural science proved its worth. Its ‘laws of race’ claimed and were depended upon to reveal the essence or nature of the Jew that could not but lay hidden under the mask adopted in the name of a false and unnatural ‘equality’. And, in so doing, antisemitism took on its modern naturalist, that is, racist, form” (Seymour 2).

Jewish persecution has been a tradition of European and Christian dominating nations but the destruction of Jews and systemic planning and WILL to do that has never been presented by anyone or accepted by the society before the rise of the Nazi party. Traditional antisemitism, which emphasized on the difference of Jews due to their religion, was limited to the riots, destruction of Jewish property, ban from certain economic activities, and implementation of restrictions (social and legal) on Jews, but modern antisemitism, which focus on modern race laws, with its racial pseudo-scientific theory and technological advancement has attempted to cure the world, which for them only cured for the development of Germany and German population. Seymour notes that:

Modern racist antisemitism then developed and inserted itself into this milieu. What had previously been explained in religious or theological terms came now to be expressed in the naturalist language of ‘race’ and of ‘blood’ (21).

He further elaborates that:

Whilst science may provide the means through which Jewish difference was naturalised and racialised, it does not explain why Jewish presence, and ultimately existence, was read in such negative terms. For Bauman the answer to this question lies not only outside the praxis of modern science, but also outside modernity itself. In arguing that

modernity 'inherited' the 'concept of the Jew', Bauman distinguishes modern racist antisemitism from its pre-modern progenitors (21-22).

This was done by the propaganda of distortion of reality and/or fabrication of reality and it was done in such a way, with precision, violence, coercion, and terror that people have come to accept that reality as reality and no scientific or other data can cure them for it. (Seymour 17)

The term 'Holocaust' is derived from Greek religious act of animal sacrifice (*holokauston*) in which the *holos* "whole" animal is completely *kaustos* "burnt" (Seymour 48) The Holocaust refers to massacre of a great number. Today the term holocaust has become synonymous with the Nazi Genocide of 6 million Jews during the WWII. Holocaust has deeply affected and shocked many around the world and its influence on the creative, academic, and social and cultural fields are tremendous. It has motivated many to create and record their life and experience or bear witness to what has happened. Richard Levy (Godlberg et al. 138-139) in his essay "The Holocaust" notes that between 1880 and 1945 approximately 1200 books with antisemitism as the key word were published. This included 800 titles written between 1930 and early 1940s, but immediately after the Holocaust this numbers were rising in a torrent. Between 1945 and 2015 around 7700 volumes have been published which included key words such as antisemitism, Jews and Holocaust.

The Holocaust should not be seen as the ultimate destination of antisemitism. It should be seen as a mirror showing the world what men are capable of. The Holocaust is a historical event which was of distinct German origin and which led to the genocide of European Jewry. After the rise of the Nazi party's control of the national politics in 1920s and 1930s, Hitler was presented as the true leader, Germany as the world conquering superior race and Jews as reason behind every problem Germany has faced over the years. The defeat of the Germany in World War I was also attributed to the Jewish community who were accused of working as foreign agents. With this background, and in the course of events, Jews at the beginning were stripped of their social status, political rights and privileges, and economic apparatuses. The image of the Jews was distanced from the human and connected with the parasites and vermin. This dehumanization was targeted at Jews and they were encouraged to leave Germany. Later, to make Germany free of Jews, it was turned into a genocidal exercise which was presented as the German duty to make the world free of Jews. The Final Solution of 1941 was the physical

culmination of the genocide and the destruction was planned and invented ways in which these plans of Jewish exterminations could be executed. The Final Solution to the Jewish Question was a Nazi plan to exterminate the Jews during the WWII. Until the end of WWII, the death camps were erected, lists of Jews prepared, Jews were gathered into ghettos, then to camps, where they were forced to work, dehumanized and killed irrespective of their age. They were sent to “gas ovens” in concentration camps, gassed, shot in groups, starved, beaten to death or sometimes killed for fun. United States Holocaust Memorial Museum has recorded that “Historians estimate that approximately six million Jews were murdered during the Holocaust. This includes approximately 2.5 million in killing centers, two million in mass shooting operations, and more than 800,000 in ghettos” (“Frequently Asked Questions about the Holocaust for Educators”).

Tuhin Majumdar notes that “Scientific racism, eugenics and religious canard in unison fueled the doctrine of ‘anti-Semitism.’...became an alibi for the Nazi party and its concerted policy of ‘Aryanisation’ to decide upon the “Final Solution” to the “Jewish Question” (Majumdar 45) The Holocaust has some racial characteristics but it cannot be pinpointed that only racial behaviours of the Nazi Germany were reasons behind the Holocaust. The race in this context is particularly pointed to the use of pseudoscientific research in eugenics done and used by the Nazi’s to prove that German is a superior Aryan Race and Jews are a parasitical race. There were many other reasons too like the rise of nationalism and one-party rule, people’s belief in the myth of superior and inferior races, the idea that economic disaster of the Jews was fortunate for others. And also, the historical facts of Jew-hatred which had been practiced for centuries played a role in the events that unfolded. Zygmunt Bauman believes that the Holocaust was not inevitable and may have been prevented. Seymour notes that:

For Bauman, it (the Holocaust) is presented as the materialisation of a latent possibility that is present within the modern quest for order. The Holocaust then becomes the moment in which this tendency within the Enlightenment heritage comes most clearly into view. However, it is important to note that Bauman is explicit in his argument that whilst the Holocaust is made possible by certain facets of the Enlightenment and the modernity that it inaugurated, it was not inevitable. It depended upon a contingent coalescence of situations and circumstances that could or could not be repeated (19).

Richard Levy points out that “The history of the twentieth century, reaching a climax in the Holocaust, destroyed the basis for such a humanistic belief in mankind’s perfectibility and the inevitable triumph of reason. Such optimism vanished during World War I and the years that followed, never to reappear” (Seymour 138). According to Marvin Perry and Frederick M Schweitzer, Holocaust is regarded as an episode that “forever cast doubt on the Enlightenment conception of human goodness, rationality, and the progress of civilization” (qtd. in Majumdar 48).

Holocaust has affected so many people around the world, both Jews and non-Jews. The experiences of holocaust survivors and their family members have created moving images of suffering of people which sometimes are represented in extremely horrifying fictions and non-fictions such as Anne Frank’s *Anne Frank: The Diary of a Young Girl* (1952), Wladyslaw Szpilman’s memoir *The Pianist* (1946), Primo Levi’s testimony *If this is a Man* (1947), Elie Wiesel’s memoir *Night* (1960), Jerzy Kosinski’s novel *The Painted Bird* (1965), Jerzy Waldorff and Imre Kertesz’s semi-autobiographical novel *Fatelessness* (1975), William Styron’s *Sophie’s Choice* (1979), these are the few texts which has deeply moved the readers around the world and made them feel the horror of the Holocaust. As Maurizio Passerini d’Entreves points out:

Narratives can thus provide a measure of truthfulness and a greater degree of significance to the actions of individuals. But they also preserve the memory of deeds through time, and in so doing, they enable these deeds to become sources of inspiration for the future, that is, models to be imitated, and, if possible, surpassed. One of the principal drawbacks of action, Arendt maintains, is to be extremely fragile, to be subject to the erosion of time and to forgetfulness; unlike the products of the activity of work, which acquire a measure of permanence by virtue of their sheer facticity, deeds and words do not survive their enactment unless they are remembered. Remembrance alone, the retelling of deeds as stories, can save the lives and deeds of actors from oblivion and futility. And it is precisely for this reason, Arendt points out, that the Greeks valued poetry and history so highly, because they rescued the glorious ... deeds of the past for the benefit of future generations. It was the poet’s and the historian’s political function to preserve the memory of past actions and to make them a source of instruction for the future. (d’Entreves, Fall 2022)

I have selected two out of a range of works as the subject of the study. My focus in this section is on Elie Wiesel's memoir *Night* (1960) and Art Spiegelman's *Maus: A Survivor's Tale* (1986-1991) which is of two parts namely "My Father Bleeds History" (1986) and "And Here My Troubles Began" (1991). The *Complete Maus* was published in 1996, and translated into multiple languages. Through these two novels I want to emphasize how the problem of antisemitism has taken a malignant and lethal nature and acted against humanity itself. The Holocaust took place in the era where man was becoming triumphant over nature through science and technology. With each triumph the domination has become severe of nature and of man. This lust of domination blinded man, and deluded the entire world to close its eyes, to ignore, and not to act to prevent such calamitous event of the Holocaust. This genocide has originated from the extreme hatred towards mankind.

### **Art Spiegelman *Maus: A Survivor's Tale***

Art Spiegelman was born in 1948 to Holocaust survivors Wladyslaw Spiegelman (Vladek) and Anja Siegelman in Stockholm. He became an artist due to his problematic relationship particularly with his father, which he talks about in *Maus*. He was a very influential figure, and when he was active in the underground comic culture, it acquired a reputation of saying the unsayable. He was the co-editor of *Raw* magazine which he and his wife co-edited during 1980 to 1991. He won the Pulitzer Prize in 1992 for his *Maus: A Survivor's Tale*. Spiegelman, with his diverse and unique oeuvre of work holds a very prestigious position in the American as well as world comic genre. It can be argued that through engaging the question of the holocaust representation, such a difficult task, in a very personal and non-traditional way, Spiegelman has elevated the status of graphic novels from children and toy section to serious discussions, school curricula and book shelves.

*Maus* is a deeply personal work, which deals with the question of survival, dealing with the experience of survival of the Holocaust, and making sense of the past and reality which happened or the survivors have gone through.<sup>4</sup> Spiegelman has interviewed his father, captured his experiences, what he and his family members had gone through when they were under the

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<sup>4</sup> Here *Maus* is taken as both Volumes, *Maus: A Survivors Tale Vol.1* which was subtitled as "*My Father Bleeds History*" and Vol.2 which was subtitled "*And Here My Troubles Began*".



Nazi occupation during WWII. He undertook field visits to his family town and to Auschwitz to get some further insights. The *Maus* is a structurally unique work of fiction as it deals with three different subjects, Vladek who has experienced the Holocaust and the Camp, Vladek who is free, old and living in America and his son, and Art Spiegelman himself who has not experienced the Holocaust but who has been affected deeply as a child of the survivor. *Maus* deals with the questions such as how to deal with reality after the Holocaust? What does it mean to be human in the Camp? What does it mean for the survivors to be free after the Holocaust? It addresses the very important questions of Jewish freedom and equality in pre-WWII Germany and other European countries as well.

*Maus* has used animal imagery to represent real-life incidents and subjects. This technique is like George Orwell's *Animal Farm* (1945) which used Animal imagery to represent the real historical events. *Maus* uses graphical representation to make the presentation of the subject subtler and poignant. The *Maus* depicts Jews as mice, Germans as cats, Polish as pigs, and Americans as dogs. The technique used by Spiegelman is very apt because the treatments and behaviors of these nationals could not be directly depicted. Their Animalistic behaviors have been very strategically represented by Spiegelman. One way of seeing this would be Spiegelman is using the same tools which were used to dehumanize Jews, which represented Jews as vermin while others as humans. Spiegelman through his use of animal-centric imagery put other nationals, German, Polish, Americans and French, in the same categories of animals alongside Jews. If Jews were mice, Germans too were not humans, they were also cats, so animals, in the same category with the Jews, equal to Jews.

The Two parts in which *Maus* has been published were subtitled very thoughtfully. The subtitles of "My Father Bleeds History" and "And Here My Troubles Began" are deeply insightful on the part of the author. "My Father Bleeds History" metaphorically suggests the history which was written with innocent Jewish blood or the history of western civilisation is painted by Jewish blood. The subtitle also brings together the words "blood" and "history" which suggests violence and its connection with history or actual events, but here the blood and violence were not of the soldier or enemy on the war front, it was of innocent Jewish children, adults and elderly. The reading of volume one of the *Maus* will give reader a sharp sense of action and time of the condition and treatment of Jews in Germany and its

neighbouring countries. The process of depoliticization of Jews by snatching away from Jews their civil and political rights through systematic process, through laws, rules, and ordinances have been realistically represented by Siegelman. He shows how Jews were robbed of their business, their money, their legacy, and made economically worthless. They were removed from political space by taking away their rights through laws. They were removed from social places by removing them from the social psyche of others as well as literally removing them from sight, from putting them in the ghettos. They were removed from economic space by taking from them their economic apparatuses, robbing them of their inheritance and capital, transferring their properties to Germans. Their complete erasure from the human world was, Spiegelman shows, well planned and cunningly executed by the German Nazis.

This complete erasure of Jews from human world was half of the process of the Final Solution, the other half of the process which is their movement toward destruction is captured in the volume two of the *Maus* which is subtitled “And Here My Troubles Began.” The complete erasure of Jews from the social, political, and economic world was complemented with their movement towards death and destruction in a systematic way. The Jews were first recorded, they were transformed into data, a name on the list, a number tattooed on the bodies. Then they were gathered somewhere from where they could be deported continuously. These systemic machineries and methods were implemented in neighbouring countries for the same reason. Then the Camps were prepared. As the Camps emerged the movement of Jews which started from society to ghettos starts again now shifts from ghettos to the camps. In the Camps the Jews were stripped of their humanness, their identities were snatched away. The Jews were separated from their family and then distanced from any kind of relation. They were distanced from everyone, isolated, they were put in a situation where anyone could betray you. The representation of Nazi persecution in the volume two of *Maus* was not only on the body of the jews, but on their collective conscience.

This process of violence on the body and soul of the Jews started slowly and it looked like a regular antisemitic behaviour of the people, that Jews were used to. The Jewish businesses were robbed and the riots became frequent where Vladek had his factory. In volume one of the *Maus*, one of the panel suggests that when Vladek tells Anja that there was another riot. He tells her that “...EVERYONE YELLING, ‘JEWS OUT! JEWS OUT!’...EVEN TWO

PEOPLE KILLED. THE POLICE JUST WATCHED!” (37). This kind of attitude was rising not only in Germany but in Poland too, where Vladek was living with his family. When Vladek was captured and taken as a prisoner of war, we come to know how Jewish prisoners were treated in comparison with other prisoners. The Jewish prisoners were left to die in the cold and they were starved. As one of the panel depicts this plight of war prisoners “THE OTHER PRISONERS GET TWO MEALS A DAY. WE JUST GET ONLY A CRUST OF BREAD AND A LITTLE SOUP” (53). Only the Jewish prisoners were taken to do backbreaking work, they were forced to do hard work and were beaten if they didn’t do it. The first glimpse of Nazi genocide is seen when Vladek is released as a prisoner of war, the train took him far away from his home. When they reached there he came to know that a few days ago the Germans had killed six hundred Jews. As Vladek makes it clear, Jews were not protected even by law: he says to Art that “INTERNATIONAL LAWS PROTECTED US A LITTLE AS POLISH WAR PRISONERS. BUT A JEW OF THE REICH, ANYONE COULD KILL IN THE STREETS!” (61). This presents how Jewish identity was separate from the national identity, even where Jews have spent centuries and generations in a country they always remained Jews and failed to acquire a national identity.

The process of aryanisation of the Jewish property and factories was started as a policy to take away Jews’ economic identity. Their factories were given to “Aryan Managers”, the Jews were prohibited from owning a business or doing any business. They were reduced to being servants to the Germans. One of the reasons behind Hitler’s rise to power was this, this state sponsored aryanisation was helping many economically. People always knew what was happening with the Jews, but they were overcome by greed and contempt, the common public played a major role in this genocide. Jews were robbed of all their valuables and then they were forced to move to ghettos. The violence on the Jews became more frequent and visible. Other people started accepting this violence normally. By 1942 their movement from social life to ghettos and to the camps had already started. The fear was spreading. Even for breaking minor laws, Jews were killed, hanged, shot in public. Some of the Jewish bodies were hanged for weeks just to make an example to other Jews. Jews were gathered by the Germans and were recorded on the paper; the data production of the Nazis were started and Jews voluntarily or involuntarily were made part of it. People were just sent to the left or to the right. Those who were on the right were safe; others on the left would go to camps. Vladek said that out of thirty thousand Jews who were gathered at the Dienst stadium ten thousand were taken away, Vladek lost his father

at that time. Those ten thousand Jews were taken to four apartments which were turned into prison without any food, toilets and no space. Most of them died there (92).

The Nazis do not care about how they are killing, for them they are not killing human beings they are just destroying rats and vermin, so they do not feel anything while killing Jews regardless of their age or gender. Vladek recounts to his son that one day he thought of sending his son Richieu to Zarwicie with his relative and that was the last time they saw their son. He was sad but somewhat content that his son might be saved. After some days he heard that the Germans took some 1000 children from Srodula to concentration camps, "MOST THEY TOOK WERE KIDS-SOME ONLY 2 OR 3 YEARS. SOME KIDS WERE SCREAMING AND SCREAMING. THEY COULDN'T STOP. SO, THE GERMANS SWINGED THEM BY THE LEGS AGAINST A WALL. AND THEY NEVER ANYMORE SCREAMED" (108).

To survive Jews did anything, some of them lived under the bunkers and spent their days hiding and only sneaking out at night to arrange some scraps and food. They were forced to live like rats. The death and violence were unimaginable, Anja and Vladek lost their whole family in the Holocaust. From Anja's grandparents to her little son, all were murdered by the Nazis. Nazis wanted to present Jews as non-human but the Jews preserved their humanness through memory. They remembered their loved ones and tried to stick together and help each other, at times there were cases of betrayal and incidents which proved in the camps that everyone is on their own. The love and hope Vladek and Anja gave each other was the reason behind their survival. It was the memory of those who are lost and those memories, *Maus* suggests, are some of the reasons for survival.

This memory has become a voice of millions who vanished from the earth after being degraded to a level hard for any man to ever believe. This memory of being witness of the telling of the tale and showing to the world what kind of torture was being inflicted on their fellow human being became the voice and weapon for creating a society which came together to condemn such actions and preserve the memory of this heinous episode in human history. One can counter the memory questioning its credibility, but "Post-holocaust historians have gradually started recognizing personal memoirs/testimonies as reliable in archiving past events.

Generically, such testimonies do not merely focus on the chronology of events, but how the events were experienced, and how it is transmitted to next generation” notes Majumdar (48).

Being witness, to be able to tell not only one’s own but also the story of those who have vanished was a great ethical responsibility according to Giorgio Agamben (1999). This memory has become a crucial part of the survivors as well as the world. For the survivor it is traumatic as well as a tragic act of carrying this memory. On one hand this memory contains so many horrors they have suffered from and on the other hand this memory is the only remaining thing which contains some glimpses of their loved ones who unfortunately perished. This witnessing, this telling and through which containing the lost loved one has become one of the reasons for the survivor to tell to be witness and to live to preserve that memory. Dori Laub suggests that the magnitude of its horror on the survivors is so overpowering that they turn amnesic, and thereby fail to negotiate with their memory. Nevertheless, the narration of holocaust trauma becomes vital. Laub states, “The survivors did not only need to survive so that they could tell their stories, they also needed to tell their stories in order to survive” (qtd. in Majumdar 111).

At the end of volume one we come to know that Vladek and Anja were betrayed by smugglers and captured by the Gestapo and sent to the Auschwitz. Here Vladek’s troubles began. He was separated from Anja, and unpredictability of life and death started looming over them. Here in Auschwitz their names, clothes, and everything was taken away, and they were reduced to just a number tattooed on their forearms. Siegelman’s parents had tattooed prisoner numbers: his father’s prisoner-number was 175113. In such a dehumanizing process, their memory only came to their rescue through which they could remain human. This can be seen in many film adaptations such as Steven Spielberg’s *Schindler’s List*. Life was turned into the numerical, devoid of any identity, any rights, which could be destroyed easily.

Near the end of the war, when Germany was losing, the Jews from the outside camps were vacated and all the Jews were transported to smaller camps in Germany. The Jews were filled in goods carriages and trains for days, even stopped somewhere for days too. Vladek recounts that he was in one of those trains and from two hundred Jews who were loaded in a carriage, some twenty-five survived the journey. The Jews were brought to Germany from all over Europe. At the end of the war Vladek survived and after the departure of the Nazis he gain

some confidence to move around. With the departure of Nazis, we can also see that Vladek and others having a sense of freedom. Vladek found some clothes from an abandoned home and felt like a new person exclaiming words “I’M STARTING TO FEEL HUMAN AGAIN” (Spiegelman 111). Vladek and Anja both survived and later they left Poland due to lingering discrimination. They moved to Sweden and then to America. After all that suffering and loss of loved ones, Vladek and Anja were nevertheless able to survive due to some luck and their will to live which was backed by their love for each other.

### **Elie Wiesel’s *Night***

Elie Wiesel was born in 1928 in Sighet, which is now part of Romania. Wiesel was awarded The Nobel Peace Prize in 1986. *Night*, his memoir was first published in 1958 in French as *La Nuit* was later translated into many languages. *Night* is a memoir which describes Wiesel and his family’s experience during WWII. Wiesel has lost his parents and his little sister in the camps. This memoir is his attempt to keep their, and that of others like them who perished in the camps, memory alive. He believed that those who survived and chose to testify for them it is “duty is to bear witness for the dead *and* for the living. He has no right to deprive future generations of a past that belongs to our collective memory. To forget would be not only dangerous but offensive; to forget the dead would be akin to killing them a second time” (Wiesel 2006).

To a certain extent, the text suggests that this genocide has originated from the extreme greed of mankind and it is a crime not against the Jews only it was crime against humanity, and the very idea of humanness. Elie Wiesel in the Preface of the *Night* writes that:

For today, thanks to recently discovered documents, the evidence shows that in the early days of their accession to power, the Nazis in Germany set out to build a society in which there simply would be no room for Jews. Toward the end of their reign, their goal changed: they decided to leave behind a world in ruins in which Jews would seem never to have existed. That is why everywhere in Russia, in the Ukraine, and in Lithuania, the Einsatzgruppen carried out the Final Solution by turning their machine guns on more than a million Jews, men, women, and children, and throwing them into huge mass graves, dug just moments before by the victims themselves. Special units would then disinter the corpses and burn them. Thus, for the first time in history, Jews

were not only killed twice but denied burial in a cemetery... It is obvious that the war which Hitler and his accomplices waged was a war not only against Jewish men, women, and children, but also against Jewish religion, Jewish culture, Jewish tradition, therefore Jewish memory (Wiesel 2006).

When Wiesel started his memoir it was 1941, and he was around a boy of thirteen and was deeply religious. His father holds a very respectable position in the Jewish community and people come for his advice. The Final Solution was declared and was implemented by the Nazis. By the end of 1943 the German army had started gathering the Jews all over Europe to the camps in Poland and in Germany. Near the end of war, it was done with more rigour. Attacks on Jewish businesses, synagogues, riots and violence against Jews, were common and spreading everywhere. Wiesel and others think that Germans will not come to Sighet and will stop at the Budapest, but soon they were under the clutches of the Nazis.

From the seventh day of the Passover (sacred and most observed Jewish holidays) as Wiesel writes that their “race toward death had begun” (10). The edicts started coming, at first Jews were prohibited from leaving their home for three days, Jews were forbidden to own jewellery or any valuable things, every Jew had to wear a yellow star, Jews had no rights to go to restaurants, travel by train, to attend synagogue, and be on the streets after six o’clock, any minor mistakes on the side of the Jews were punishable by death. At last they were moved to ghettos (11). From ghettos they were sent to Birkenau and they were received as other Jews were received. The Jews were made to strip and given numbers and a uniform. Their individual personality was erased, Jews were made to believe that they are Jews and nothing else, certainly not humans, by the Nazis. Through constant violence and shock, from ghettos to the camp, Jews were made numb from everything. Once their social and political image/consciousness was destroyed and exterminated Nazis tried to exterminate the idea of humanness from the Jews. The idea of sacredness of life and death, dignity of burial, are ideas related to the humans and this very humanness Jews were robbed of in the camps. Jewish life and death were departed from any idea of respect or dignity, Jews were killed in such a way even animals were never massacred, burned in the ovens, starved to death, shot in cold blood and even for fun. Words will always be incompetent to represent the holocaust. Wiesel writes about how other Jews in the camp became numb to the violence and death of the other. Those who were killed or taken were easily forgotten in the camp, their rational capacity of making sense of the reality of time and of actions was destroyed. Wiesel emphasized that: “We were incapable of thinking. Our

senses were numbed, everything was fading into a fog. We no longer clung to anything. The instincts of self-preservation, of self-defence, of pride, had all deserted us” (36).

This incapacity to think during the final solutions were not limited only to the Jews and other victims. This incapacity to think and act was inflicted on the common public as well as others like Adolf Eichmann as it was noted by Arendt. Arendt notes that the banality of evil was the state where one loses the capacity to think particularly from the standpoint of someone else/other. She was misunderstood by many, no one tried to understand that at that time the Germans were made to believe that Jews were not humans, and by killing the Jews they were doing a great service to the nation. The Nazis have snatched away humanness, and with them tried to take away the otherness too, there was no human connection possible with the Jew and the Nazis, on the larger sense Jews and nationals of the neighbouring countries either. For the Germans and Nazis, Jews were not the humans at all and this belief only make it more impossible for any communication. Once this belief was internalised inside the Germans and Nazi officials the killing of the Jews for them just became tasks, for that they were given rewards and promotion. This does not make any change that the crimes committed by the Nazis should be left unpunished as they were unaware of what they have done. The notion of collective work and process of dehumanizing of the Jews should be seen from the larger perspective as the inability to think and act of all those innocent and patriotic Germans with all the Nazis and official, were not resisted it or not noticed it.

When Wiesel arrived at the camp with his father and other Jews, they were made aware that they were in the camp and they were given choice between hard work or death. After that, Wiesel described how his name was taken away and he was reduced to just a number tattooed on his hand. He writes that “The three "veteran" prisoners, needles in hand, tattooed numbers on our left arms. I became A-7713. From then on, I had no other name” (42). The camps were also the place where any kind of mercy or kindness was forbidden and severely punished. As those officers and guards who are not cruel to Jews were seen as incapable and also punished for that by their transfer.

Even God was seen as a contemptuous entity that was behind everything. God and religion were taken away from the Jews and the kind of horrors they were facing daily they were making



Jews more and more question the authority of God, His omnipotence, and His merciful nature. The questions like Where is God? Why did God choose us? Is God seeing all this? are very central for the Jews, due to their deep religious connections. But contempt was seen in many when deeply religious Wiesel started questioning God and his doing by saying that “Why, but why would I bless Him? Every fibre in me rebelled. Because He caused thousands of children to burn in His mass graves? Because He kept six crematoria working day and night, including Sabbath and the Holy Days? Because in His great might, He had created Auschwitz, Birkenau, Buna, and so many other factories of death?” (67). Samuel Totten in his essay “Entering the “Night” of the Holocaust: Studying Elie Wiesel’s *Night*” notes that “In Auschwitz, Elie Wiesel not only lost his youth but came out doubting both God and life” (100). With the death of the innocents and especially the children the question of omnipotence of God becomes the question of His impotency of action. Wiesel suffered from his loss of youth in the camps and also suffered from depression. Wiesel’s perspective widens due to his experience at the camp which led to his belief in humanity getting stronger and solidarity to all the oppressed people and races.

Elie Wiesel has said that he didn’t know why and how he survived. But he later confessed that being a witness was his obligatory responsibility towards all who perished. He says that “I only know that without this testimony, my life as a writer—or my life, period—would not have become what it is: that of a witness who believes he has a moral obligation to try to prevent the enemy from enjoying one last victory by allowing his crimes to be erased from human memory” (Wiesel 100). Wiesel, like many survivors, has become a witness and has also done his duty of preserving the memory of those who were lost. The writings of the survivors have become very influential material in shaping the collective conscious of the present generation and will also help shaping the future generations. These writings will be witness for the future generation as the proof of calamitous event of the Holocaust. This memory of all those who have lost their lives are now and will be part of the collective memory. Works of Wiesel and many others like him have substantially contributed to the understanding of the “others”, their importance and responsibility towards them.

Elie Wiesel and Vladek Spiegelman both are survivors of the Holocaust and both bear this burden of experience and memory. They both have suffered similar atrocities and share similar

experiences with others who have survived after living through living hell. Both the books are very explicit in what kind of horrors they have gone through, how man can be degraded, and how they can be exterminated.

At the beginning the exterminations of the Jews were not the primary goal of the Nazis. They just wanted a Jew-free fatherland. Religious hatred was added to racial sentiments, especially after the emancipation and rise of the nation state. Antisemitic parties cemented this feeling of hatred with their speeches and propagandas. In this environment a leader like Hitler came to power. He believed that Jews were the primary problems for the cultural and economic destruction of their nation and they should be gotten rid of. This was done in a very systematic way. The Jews who were given rights and protected as citizens lost their status with the Nuremberg laws; they were stateless in a state which did not want them. Their properties were taken away in the name of aryanisation, they were humiliated, segregated in ghettos, then they were annihilated in the 'final solution'.

Hitler has made it clear that Jews are undoubtedly a race, but they are not human. The Nazis believed that Jews were lice, ugly plague-ridden rodents who lives on the leftovers and spread diseases. This parasitic image of the Jew was not new, they were seen as the entity who are not connected in any economic or productive activity and lived on others' hard work. This mentality has made dehumanization of the Jews possible and even acceptable in the society. The Jews were stripped of their rights, their status as humans. Once that status was removed they were seen as a thing which can be disposed anywhere, anytime and anyhow. The idea of the Aryan quest of ruling the world and creating a superhuman race, who will rule the world, can only be achieved if the Jews controlling the world are exterminated. The destruction of the Jews and everything Jewish is the only way through which this Aryan-Quest can be achieved. This idea has led to the creation of the idea of the world where neither any Jew existed nor anything Jewish remained. This was done in an orderly and sound manner. The use of science and technology was at the highest for this operation. Lists were made, records were taken, names of Jews were taken away and they were given a number. The last thing which made them human was snatched. They became things, numerical on the piece of paper which can be erased, crossed, and destroyed anytime.

Why have they survived? This question was raised to the survivors, some have reasons, others do not. To survive the Holocaust was a thing like surviving the war, no one knew how they have survived as they knew nothing about why they were chosen. What wrong have they done? The story of Vladek and Ellie was of survival, the basic instinct of human life. Some felt like living, some like not. They have survived because Vladek had told his wife that to die was too easy, one has to struggle to live, till the last breath.

One of the reasons for survival may be that, though they were degraded to animals and vermin, they were alive to prove that they were humans. As if to live and to do anything to live is the core nature of human beings. As we have found out in both the novels that in the Camp, no relation has any meaning or any value, everyone is dependent upon oneself. The father, son, mother, daughter, brother, sister, wife, husband, these words do not hold the value they are attached to in the outside world, in the camp. Yet these feelings and emotions make one human, the feeling of Vladek towards his family and of Elie's towards his father gave them reason and purpose to live.

These two words, freedom and equality, have meaning only in the political place (nation/state) where there is jurisprudence of law. Without the political these two words do not have any meaning. The Jews and the camp, both these entities were snapped out from the political and placed somewhere where political or even social does not exist. In the words of Agamben, this place is "state of exception". The camps and Jews in the camps were apolitical and that is why outside the purview of the law, jurisprudence, morality, and even justice. They needed to be reinstated in the political to make them man, humans, citizens, right-bearing citizens and equal citizens. The Jews were an entity which created a problem before when it was outside the purview of political, but at that time civil society does not hold that much power over law and state, gentile does. With emancipation came resentment, with resentment came social unrest, with social unrest came destruction of the Jews. The Jews were exiled outside the political, this time it was more dangerous, without "political" protecting their rights, as citizens as men, they became entities which can be described as anything but man, citizens. This loss of 'political' became the reason for their destruction. After the Holocaust, they were reinstated in the realm of politics then only they became the right bearing citizens, human rights bearer, entitled to freedom, equality, and justice.

The Enlightenment that accompanied industrial advancement and the rise of capitalism gave rise to modernity but was also responsible for the disenchantment of the world uprooted from nature. It has promoted acts and incidents which have no precedence in history. We can observe the brighter side of Enlightenment and modernity which promoted tolerance of other religions and other cultures as well as promoted pluralistic and multicultural society. It has also promoted the need for universal human rights and started the discourse of human dignity, freedom, and equality. On the other hand, the rise of colonialism and its horrors, the rise of pseudo-scientific racial theories and prejudices created by it, the prevalence of slavery, and the subjugation of women and minorities cannot be severed from the Enlightenment thought and its impact.