

Shoah Education: The Indian Scenario

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***Abstract:** India represents a country that was neither directly affected nor involved with the Holocaust. As the timeline of the Holocaust overlaps the timeline of the struggle for freedom for the Indian subcontinent, the later events overshadow the former. Holocaust education is neither mandatory nor prevalent in India. Equating the partition of India with the Holocaust and tagging the Holocaust as one of the genocides, represents one of the few misconceptions about the Holocaust in India that often strips off the uniqueness of the catastrophic event. My article describes the present status of Holocaust education in schools and universities. The survey stems from the standard books used in Indian schools and my personal experience as an educator. The article not only articulates the need of creating awareness regarding the Holocaust in India but also traces a few examples, which illuminate the fact that India proved a haven for Jewish refugees during the Holocaust. The need of the hour is to recognize such connections, which would serve as the appropriate entry wedges to create awareness regarding Holocaust education in India.*

Keywords: Holocaust, Shoah, Partition of India, Dissemination

The Indian Perception

As we pause to observe Holocaust Remembrance Day each year on 27 January, it becomes important to consider how Holocaust education is perceived across the globe. The dissemination of the knowledge of the Holocaust becomes more pertinent in the countries that were not directly affected by it. Holocaust education is not widespread in Asian countries and is thus not mandatory as an academic discipline for elementary, high school, and university students. One Asian country that often considers the Holocaust an isolated event is India. Though the struggle for freedom began with the 1857 mutiny (the First War of Indian Independence), the freedom revolts gained

momentum specifically during the years 1944–1947, when India was steeped in several rebellions. The revolts ranging from the Royal Indian Navy (R.I.N) mutiny in 1945–46 and the violent upsurges in many states of India were accompanied by communal violence. Freedom for the Indian subcontinent from the domination of the British Raj, however, came at the cost of the partition of India, resulting in widespread bloodshed and immigration. For India, it is this backdrop of her struggle for freedom that always outweighs the incidents of the Second World War, including the catastrophic event of the Holocaust. As a result, knowledge about the Holocaust is available through secondary sources such as Holocaust documentaries and movies.

Dissemination of Holocaust Knowledge

As an English Literature educator, I always find university students clueless about the knowledge of the Holocaust. The only thing with which they can associate is Anne Frank’s diary, which for them has become a synonym for Holocaust. The diary too is viewed and discussed by the students as a normal teenage diary written during “war years” without having any knowledge about the Holocaust or European Jewry. Besides Anne Frank’s diary, the most common literary acquaintance with the Jewish faith for university students is when they come across Jewish characters in their course readings: “The Prioress’s Tale” in Chaucer’s *Canterbury Tales*, the character of Shylock in Shakespeare’s *The Merchant of Venice* and the Jewish protagonist, Barabas in Marlow’s *Jew of Malta*. The Prioress narrates a tale of a young Christian boy (Hugh of Lincoln), who walks along the street in the Jewish ghetto every day singing “O Alma Redemptoris” in praise of the Virgin Mary. However, the boy is murdered by the Jews upon an invitation by Satan and is thrown into a cesspool after slitting his throat. Chaucer describes it as:

Oure firste foo, the serpent Sathanas,
That hath in Jues herte his waspes nest,
Up swal, and seide, “O Hebrayk peple, allas!
Is this to yow a thyng that is honest,
That swich a boy shal walken as hym lest
In youre despit, and synge of swich sentence,
Which is agayn youre lawes reverence?”
Fro thennes forth the Jues han conspired

leader....perhaps now, 70 years after formal recognition, India should begin to take steps to see that Indian students are also taught about the Holocaust, to better understand the people and the country that has grown so close to us.¹⁶

The youngest Holocaust survivors are presently in their late eighties. With the dwindling number of survivors left to share their accounts, it is up to us to share their testimonies with future generations, so that history does not repeat itself, and that just social orders triumph and prevail.

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[Dr. Mehak Burza](#) currently serves as the Head of Global Holocaust and Religious Studies at the Global Center for Religious Research. Her Ph.D. thesis titled, "Literary Representations of the Holocaust: An Assessment," analyzes the gendered response to the Holocaust with a focus on women memoirists and diarists. As an Assistant Professor at the University of Delhi, she teaches English Literature. Her primary research interests include Holocaust/Genocide Studies, Holocaust Trauma and PTSD

¹⁶ Hardas, "Indian Students should be taught about Holocaust."

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