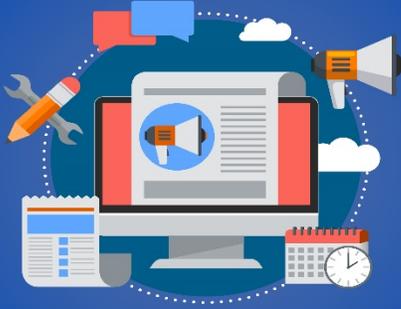


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## **Exploring the Narratives of Human Resilience in History and Highlighting their Significance in Present Times as in Anne Frank's *The Diary of a Young Girl***

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### **Abstract:**

“We realize the importance of our voice only when we are silenced”

Remembering the quotes of Malala Yousafzai, I would like to travel through the memoirs of holocaust faced by the Jews during Hitler's reign as marked in the writings of Anne Frank in her famous work “The Diary of a Young Girl”. It is indeed true that throughout the history, hundreds of thousands of individuals have undergone heart rending suffering and horrors beyond their worst dreams. Humans have, time and again exhibited extraordinary resilience in adapting to the situation. During these lock down days we do face a lot of discomfort and frustration to be confined into our own safe home. But just think about the thousands and millions who had gone on exile on fear of death and about the cruelties they had undergone. My attempt here is to pen down the agonies and resilience they had faced during these holocausts. Anne, a young Jewish girl is forced into hiding with her family and one other family in Nazi occupied Amsterdam. The inscriptions in the form of diary writing tells us about her feelings and experiences they had faced and also about her budding hopes to be free once again. Things began to change when the Nazis came to power. Their aim was to remove the Jews from German society even though they were less than 1% of the population. Nazi believed that Jews were the root of all the evils. Life was horrific for Jews and they began to flee from Germany. Nazis burned down the synagogues and Jewish owned shops and even burned their books. Jews were fleeing and tried to find shelter wherever they could. Nazis deported these people to forced labour camps, where they worked to produce supplies for the increasingly strained war economy. In most camps the prisoners were devoid of sufficient food, equipment, medicine and clothing. There was a complete disregard and their health was deteriorating day by day. As a result of these conditions, death rates in labour camps were extremely high.

Believing Holland was safe for Jews, Anne's family moved to Amsterdam in 1933. 'The Diary of a Young Girl' also known as 'The Diary of Anne Frank', a book of diary writings kept by Anne Frank while she was hiding for two years in the secret annex, with her family during the Nazi occupation of the Netherlands. The family was apprehended in 1944 and Anne Frank died of typhus in the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp in 1945. The diary was retrieved by Anne's father Mr. Otto Frank, the family's only known survivor after the war. The writings were from 14<sup>th</sup> June 1942 to 1<sup>st</sup> August 1944. Her father gifted her a red checked diary on her 13<sup>th</sup> birthday, June 12<sup>th</sup> 1942. It was not like a usual diary writing, she wrote as letters to her best friend that is, diary whom she addressed as Kitty. In August 1944, they were caught from the secret annex and were deported to Nazi concentration camps. Anne died when she was just fifteen years old. These letters were not just the experiences of a thirteen-year-old young girl, it gives us an insight into the most terrific inhumane situation that mankind had ever undergone. The wordings which she breathed became eternal and true.

"I want to go on living even after my death"

**Keywords: Holocaust, Concentration Camps, Resilience.**

"I want to bring out all kinds of things that lie buried deep in my heart".

As rightly said by Anne Frank, this is exactly what her writings were. A mixture of agonies, frustration, happiness, fear, realisations, relations, her first love and more over an account of what happened in the outside world. These letters were not just the experiences of a thirteen-year-old young girl, it gives us an insight into the most terrific inhumane situation that mankind had ever undergone. An account for her journals do tell us about how much Jews had suffered and deprived from the rest of the society. The restrictions imposed on them were even more harsh. They must always wear a yellow star and had to be indoors by eight o'clock and cannot even sit in their own gardens after that hour. They were forbidden to visit theatres, cinema halls and any other places of entertainment. Not allowed to take part in public sports, swimming baths, tennis courts, hockey fields and other sports grounds. They cannot visit any Christians and were allowed only to go to Jewish schools, many more such restrictions. A brief account of these imposed restrictions is clearly mentioned in the initial pages of the diary:

"The rest of our family, however, felt the full impact of Hitler's anti-Jewish laws, so life was filled with anxiety. After 1940 good times rapidly fled: first the war, then the

capitulation, followed by the arrival of the Germans, which is when the sufferings of us Jews really began. Anti-Jewish decrees followed each other in quick succession. Jews must wear a yellow star, Jews must hand in their bicycles, Jews are banned from trams and are forbidden to drive, Jews are only allowed to do their shopping between three and five o'clock and then only in shops which bear the placard "Jewish shop". (pg. 20, 21)

Amidst her class mates and friends she was all alone. She never had a real friend and was always in quarrel with her mother. She doesn't want to fit into the usual slot. Wished to have her own space and always voiced her own opinions. Father was her favourite and she used to say "I can understand my friends better than my own mother – too bad! (pg 53). She always longed for someone to be her best companion and to someone to whom she can express herself. And it is until when she received a diary as a birthday gift from father, she began to express all her emotions to her best friend "Kitty" – the diary. In her own words what the diary meant for her:

"In order to enhance in my mind's eye the picture of the friend for whom I have waited so long, I don't want to set down a series of bald facts in a diary like most people do, but I want this diary itself to be my friend, and I shall call my friend Kitty. No one will grasp what I am talking about if I begin my letters to Kitty just out of the blue, so, albeit unwillingly, I will start by sketching in brief the story of my life". (pg 20)

On July 5<sup>th</sup> 1942, Anne's elder sister Margot received an official summons to report to a Nazi work camp in Germany. On July 6<sup>th</sup> they went into hiding. They were later joined by Hermann Van Pels, Otto's business partner including his wife Auguste and their teenage son Peter. They hid in the sealed off upper rooms of the annex of Otto's company building in Amsterdam. The rooms they hid in were concealed behind a moveable book case, not easily noticeable. Mrs Van Pel's dentist Fritz Pfeffe, joined them four months later. They remained hidden there for two years and one month. Anne rightly called it as their "Secret Annex". They heard about the cruelties in camps and choose to be on exile than being caught. It is right what Otto Frank said before going into hiding, that "we don't want our belongings to be seized in by the Germans, but we certainly don't want to fall into their clutches ourselves. So we shall disappear of our own accord and not wait until they come and fetch us" (pg no. 31). All kinds of thoughts disturbed her as into where they are going to hide, "in a town or the country, in a house or a cottage, when, how, and where...?" (pg 33). It was quite natural to think of all such unique possibilities as all of a sudden when one is forced to go on exile. We cannot even

imagine of such a dreadful thing, all of a sudden to leave our belongings and to go somewhere we are not sure of, whether to live or to die. All of them wore two or three layers of dress and packed just enough to hold in a sachet and left their house with anxiety. On their way they received sympathetic looks from people and their face showed how sorry they were as they couldn't help because the gaudy yellow star spoke more than needed.

“Our many Jewish friends are being taken away by the dozen. These people are treated by the Gestapo without a shred of decency, being loaded into cattle trucks and sent to Westerbork, the big Jewish camp the big Jewish camp in Drente. Westerbork sounds terrible: only one washing cubicle for a hundred people and not nearly enough lavatories. There is no separate accommodation. Men, women and children all sleep together. One hears of frightful immorality because of this; and a lot of the women, and even girls, who stay there any length of time are expecting babies.” (pg 63)

It is impossible for them to escape, most of the people in the camp are branded as inmates by their shaven heads and many also by their Jewish appearance. If it is as bad as this in Holland whatever will it be like in the distant and barbarous regions they are sent to? We can assume that most of them are murdered. The English radio speaks of their being gassed. Perhaps that is quickest way to die. We feel helpless and sympathetic for them. Anne wrote an incident which really wets our eyes: “Just recently for instance, a poor old crippled Jewess was sitting on her doorstep; she had been told to wait there by the Gestapo, who had gone to fetch a car to take her away. The poor old thing was terrified by the guns that were shooting at English planes overhead, and by the glaring beams of the searchlights. No one would dare to take her in and to undergo such a risk.” (pg 64). The Germans strike without the slightest mercy. Prominent citizens and innocent people are thrown into prison to await their fate. If the saboteur can't be traced, the Gestapo simply put about five hostages against the wall. Announcements of their deaths appear in the papers frequently. These outrages are described as “fatal accidents” and countless people have gone to a terrible fate. Evening after evening the green and grey army lorries trundle past. The Germans ring at every front door to inquire if there are any Jews living in the house. No one has a chance of evading them unless one goes into hiding. Often, they go around with lists, and only ring when they know they can get a good haul. No one is spared not even the old people, babies, expectant mothers, the sick all join in the march towards death. Their nationality and even their very existence is being questioned. The fault is them is that they were born as Jews.

“Nice people, the Germans! To think that I was once one of them too! No, Hitler took away our nationality long ago. In fact, Germans and Jews are the greatest enemies in the world” (pg 65)

It is only on the second day of arrival Anne started writing her diary. It was about how she felt on hiding and the peculiar place and its ambience. “Then I had a chance, for the first time since our arrival, to tell you all about it, and at the same time to realize myself what had actually happened to me and what was still going to happen” (pg 40). There was no variety in thoughts or nothing new to be done. They go round and round like a roundabout – from Jews to food and from food to politics. It isn’t an easy task to go on hiding with such alerts outside. Day and night more of those poor miserable people are being dragged off, with nothing but a rucksack and a little money. On the way they are deprived even of these possessions. Families are torn apart, the men, women and children all being separated. Children coming from school find that their parents have disappeared. Women return from shopping to find their homes shut up and their families gone. Every night hundreds of planes fly over Holland and go to German towns, where the earth is ploughed up by their bombs, and every hour hundreds and thousands of people are killed in Russia and Africa. No one is able to keep out of it, the whole globe is waging war and although it is going better for the Allies, the end is not yet in sight. And as for us, we are fortunate. Yes, we are luckier than millions of people. The children here run about in just a thin blouse and clogs, no coat, no hat, no stockings and no one helps them. Their tummies are empty, they chew an old carrot to stay the pangs, go from their cold homes out into the cold street and when they get to school, find themselves in an even colder classroom. Countless children stop the passers-by and beg for a piece of bread. There is nothing we can do but wait as calmly as we can till the misery comes to an end. Jews and Christians wit, the whole earth waits, and there are many who wait for death. It was not easy to go on hiding because of the terrific things happened outside, an account of what was happening outside:

“We had a short circuit last evening, and on top of that the guns kept banging away all the time. I still haven’t got over my fear of everything connected with shooting and planes, and I creep into Daddy’s bed nearly every night for comfort. I know it is very childish but you don’t know what it is like. The A.A. guns roar so loudly that you can’t hear yourself speak. Mrs. Van Daan, the fatalist, was nearly crying, and said in a very timid little voice, “Oh, it is so unpleasant! Oh, they are shooting so hard,” by which she really means am so frightened.” (pg 100)

Apart from that there were frequent banging outside that feared everyone and Anne gathered all her belongings together. She packed a suitcase with the most necessary things for an escape. But as her mother rightly said “Where will you escape to?” (pg114). They are Jews, can't go anywhere. Even the nature, birds, animals are free to do as they like but not them. They are even degraded to that level. On exile they have only option to divert their mind books, reading and studying new things. “Ordinary people simply don't know what books mean to us, shut up here, reading, learning and the radio are our amusements.” (pg 121). With the little ration they receive from fake cards they moved on. Celebrated birthday's with whatever they find. One such poem written by Margot on Anne's birthday tells us how their daily life and thoughts have been immersed in fear and agonies.

“The first shot sounds at dead of night

Hush, look! A door creaks open wide,

A little girl glides into sight,

Clasping a pillow to her side” (pg 136)

Not just that Anne used to swallow Valerian pills every day against worry and depression, but that doesn't prevent her from being even more miserable the next day. She wrote “a good hearty laugh would help more than ten Valerian pills, but we have almost forgotten how to laugh. I feel afraid sometimes that from having to be so serious I will grow a long face and my mouth will droop at the corners”. (pg 150). She wrote about the ambience there to be so oppressive and sleepy and as heavy as lead. They can't hear a single bird singing outside and a deadly close silence hangs everywhere, catching hold of them as if it will drag them down deep into an underworld. She used to wander from one room to another, downstairs and up again, feeling like a song bird whose wings have been clipped and who is hurling himself in utter darkness against the bars of his cage. She longed to “Go outside, laugh, and take a breath of fresh air, a voice cries within me, but I don't even feel a response anymore; I go and lie on divan and sleep, to make the time pass more quickly and the stillness and the terrible fear, because there is no way of killing them” (pg 155). We could understand what she needs:

“When someone comes in from outside, with the wind in their clothes and the cold on their faces, then I could bury my head in the blankets to stop myself thinking: “When will we be granted the privilege of smelling fresh air?” And because I must not bury my head in the

blankets, but the thoughts will come. Believe me, if you have been shut up for a year and a half, it can get too much for you some days. In spite of all the justice and thankfulness you can't crush your feelings. Crying, dancing, whistling, looking out into the world, feeling young, to know that am free – that is what I long for, still I must not show it, because I sometimes think is all eight of a us began to pity ourselves or went about with discontented faces where would it lead us? I couldn't talk this to anyone but only van cry. Crying can bring such relief” (pg 168)

There are a number of organisations such as “The Free Netherlanda” which forge identity cards, supply money to people “underground”, find hiding places for people, and work for young men in hiding and it is amazing how much noble, unselfish work these people are doing, risking their own lives to help and save others. Our helpers are a very good example. They have pulled us through up till-now and we hope they will bring us safely to dry land. Otherwise, they will have to share the same fate as the many others who are being searched for. Never had they heard one word of the burden which they certainly must be to them, never has one of them complained of all the trouble we give. They put on the brightest possible faces, bring flowers and presents for birthdays and bank holidays are always ready to help and do all they can. That is something we must never forget; although the Germans our helpers display heroism in their cheerfulness and affection “(pg 195). Rauter, one of the German big shots, has made a speech. “All Jews must be out of the German occupied countries before July 1. Between April 1 and May 1 the province of Utrecht must be cleaned out (as if Jews are cockroaches). Between May 1 and June 1 the provinces of North and South Holland.”( pg 108). We cannot even imagine to face such a dreadful situation. On 29<sup>th</sup> march 1944, she heard a London radio broadcast made by the exiled Dutch minister for education, art and science Gerrit Bolkestein, calling for the preservation of “ordinary documents – a diary, letters....simple everyday material” to create an archive for posterity as testimony to the suffering of civilians during the Nazi occupation. That is when she began to write more seriously that someone may read it. In August 1944, they were discovered and deported to Nazi concentration camps and that is what she heard of her last. As she said she is living in many minds even after her death and too years and years apart. It is really relevant what she said, we also need to do that to keep our minds engaged during these lockdown days.

“I finally realized that I must do my school work to keep from being ignorant, to get on in life, to become a journalist, because that is what I want! I know I can write.....but it remains to be seen whether I really have talent.....”

Exploring the Narratives of Human Resilience in History and Highlighting their Significance in Present Times  
as in Anne Frank's *The Diary of a Young Girl*

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