

## **Executive Summary of Minor Research Project**

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# **Voice of the Voiceless: Articulating the Gendered Experience in the Holocaust Narratives**

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There are events in the history of Mankind which are of an unparalleled magnitude and the Nazi Holocaust is undoubtedly such an event. The Holocaust is considered the central event of the twentieth century because it takes us beyond familiar tales of persecution and cruelty of man against man. The event which assumes universal significance, in fact, represents a rupture in historical continuity as it challenged the moral, theological and psychological assumptions of the modern world. The magnitude of the atrocities perpetrated by the Nazis on humanity was on an unimaginable scale shattering all notions of Enlightenment and progress.

The Holocaust has altered the history of the world in a way no event has. This uniqueness, appalling in multifarious ways, precludes it from all theoretical formulations. Though political, sociological and psychological explanations have been advanced to address violent behaviour and atrocities of various hues and dimensions, the Holocaust is so unique an event that it is impossible to capture the whole import of it by attempting to explain it advocating any particular theoretical postulation or, as the case may be, by employing any singular mode of articulation

One of the most significant fictional works while discussing the representation of women in Holocaust literature and films is *Sophie's Choice*. At a superficial level this poignant novel (later made into a film in 1982 by Alan J. Pakula) by William Styron is a truthful account of the survivor's predicament in post war America. A closer examination of this multi-layered narrative would reveal the mental trauma of a mother, the protagonist Sophie, who was forced to choose between her children in the Nazi concentration camp. Torn by the guilt of having had to forsake her daughter to save her son, Sophie, though she outwardly appears to be a normal woman is leading a nightmarish inner life. She is always haunted by her inability to save her daughter and this guilt coupled with the destructive nature of her lover Nathan leads her on the path of self – destruction along with her eccentric lover.

The text itself, with its constant movements back and forth in time and place, reflects the schizophrenic nature of its characters. The non-linear narrative strategy employed by the author is in tune with the attitude of the central characters be it Sophie, Nathan or even Stingo, the narrator, who are unable to live in the present due to the unbearable weight of memories. To comprehend the characters of the novel, it is inevitable that one understands their past which explains the non-linear mode of narration adopted by the novelist.

This study seeks to open up scope for future researchers to explore the other facets of this human tragedy of gigantic proportions. There is ample scope for further research into hitherto unexplored aspects of the Holocaust. One hopes that this attempt will be an inspiration for all those who seek to explore the extent of man's cruelty towards man and how the consequent pain and suffering, unimaginable in its scale and magnitude, find artistic expression. It also makes an attempt to probe the coexistence of History and Art at a unique moment in the history of the universe, when the human race itself, at least in parts of Europe, was on the brink of self destruction