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Tracing Eva's Traumatic Experiences of the Holocaust in Isaacs' *Torn Thread*

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By

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Letter of Recommendation

Hari Sharma has completed his thesis entitled “Tracing Eva’s Traumatic Experiences of the Holocaust in Isaacs’ *Torn Thread*” under my supervision. He carried out his research from July 2015 to August 2016 and completed it successfully. I hereby recommend his thesis be submitted for the final Viva voce.

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Letter of Approval

This thesis entitled “Tracing Eva’s Traumatic Experiences of the Holocaust in Isaacs’ *Torn Thread*” submitted to the Central Department of English, Tribhuvan University by Hari Sharma has been approved by the undersigned members of Research Committee.

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Tracing Eva's Traumatic Experiences of the Holocaust in Isaacs' *Torn Thread*

Abstract

This research project, based on the biographical novel Torn Thread by Anne Isaacs, depicts the traumatic experience of Jews during and after the Holocaust. It not only shows the pathetic life of Jews during the Holocaust but also shows the tormented psyche of the living Jews that the Holocaust resulted. By making a significant theoretical connection between the events of the Holocaust and the concept of trauma, this research analyzes the traumatic experiences and feelings. During the World War II, Nazis not only attacked Jews, they also attacked on their tradition, culture and religious heritages which caused devastating effects upon the mind and psyche of those who survived the Holocaust. Eva, main character of the novel, spent sometime in the Nazi Labour camp and faced extremely hard days with shocking scenes around the camp. She saw horrible killings and dead bodies in the hands of Nazis, which always occurred to her memories. Thus, Issacs' novel Torn Thread records and reveals mainly Eva's traumatic experiences.

Torn Thread is a fictional memoir based on the experiences of the Eva Buchbinder, the mother-in-law of the author, and her sister in a slave labor camp for Jewish girls and young women in Parschnitz, Czechoslovakia. The novel is set in the Nazi labor camp during the World War II. The novel serves up the memories both delicious and bitter of Eva that she shares with her sister. In the novel Isaacs creates a vivid picture of chaos and inhumanity that is faced by the people who have been imprisoned in the Labor camp. The encroaching violence, horror, and brutality dominate the lives of the people. Some of the details of the story in this novel are likely to be upsetting to some readers including the difficult living conditions, the vivid description of the illness, accidents, and deprivation, and killing of prisoners by

the Nazi guards. By telling the story of her mother-in-law Isaacs not only records the story of her family, she also recreates the painful experience of the Holocaust for young adult readers in a way that they can understand and appreciate.

The objective of this research is to show how the novel illustrates the carefully planned programme of the Nazi rule which killed six million Jews, together with hundreds of thousands of other people, traumatizing their surviving relatives and countrymen. This research works through the transference of traumatic experience from one generation to another generation which gets transformed through oral narration as well as written narration.

The novel *Torn Thread* is written in the historical background of the Holocaust. The period during the World War II in which the Nazi government carried out its plan of mass extermination is known as the Holocaust. Holocaust literally means massive destruction by fire. It is thought that eleven million million people were killed by the Nazis. These included political opponents, slaves, gypsies, mentally and/or physically disabled, homosexuals, and other undesirables. An estimated six million men, women and children were killed merely because they were Jews. The destruction of Jews in Europe stands as the archetype of genocide in human history. Jews had been the subjects of persecution in Europe at least since the seventeenth century. When Adolph Hitler, the charismatic, Austrian-born demagogue, rose to power in Germany during the 1920s and early 1930s, he rallied the German people with a message that included notion of 'Aryan', or white superiority and the inferiority of other races. The Jews were special target of his hatred, and they were incorrectly represented during this time of social, political, and economic upheaval as being wealthy and in control of the country's economy. He eliminated all opposition and launched a program of world domination and extermination of the Jews. His

government, like totalitarian regimes, established complex political, social and cultural control over its subjects.

Under the Nazi rule Germany conquered most of the nation of Eastern Europe, and proceeded to institute a reign of terror and mass extermination of Jewish people in each country. The Nazi also imprisoned or murdered members of other ethnic or political groups including anyone they deemed undesirable to their plan for a “racially pure” Europe. Not all prisoners were sent to labor camps; some camps, such as the large and well-known one at Auschwitz, existed primarily as killing factories in which millions of Jews and other victims were murdered.

In the World War II the united military forces of the Allies- including Britain, the United States, and the Soviet Union- fought to free Europe and the world from the oppressive rule of Nazi Germany and their Axis partner nations. The Holocaust ended in the spring of 1945, when Allied forces overcame the Axis power, liberated the Jews and other prisoners, and restored peace to the world. Much of the Europe was destroyed in the war. Survivors of the camps were in the terrible condition, both physically and psychologically because of the torture given in the camp. When Israel was established as a state in 1948 and opened its doors to all Jews, many of them who survived Holocaust migrated there, as well as to the United States, Australia, Canada and elsewhere.

Based on this horrible event of Holocaust many literary works were produced. The novel *Torn Thread* was among them. Through a large cast of interesting, sympathetic characters and universal themes that convey important truths for all readers, *Torn Thread* touches many of the central facts and issues of the Holocaust and engages readers in learning and caring about this important historical period. Isaacs based the novel on the experience of her mother-in-law, Eva Buchbinder and

Eva's sister, Rachel, in a slave labor camp in Parschinitz, Czechoslovakia from 1943 to 1945. The novel is the recollection of the story of Eva who, along with her father and sister have been forced to leave their comfortable home and move into a tiny attic room in the Jewish ghetto. It recounts the lives of Eva, her sister, Rachel, and dozens of other Jews and Czech women who underwent the horrors of the Nazi machinery. At the centre of the story are the actions and struggle of Eva, who was sent to labor camp, after her sister Rachel, who was sick, is seized in a roundup by Nazi guards, to protect Rachel not by heroic act but by making small choice that will keep them alive one more hour at a time until they have finally survived the war. It is the story of love and responsibility between two sisters which help them to survive in the midst of inhumanity and chaos in the camp. The book explores the complex nature virtues, the importance of individual human life, importance of love, the role of witness to the Holocaust, and the attention to rules and details that sustained the Nazi system of terror.

Since the time *Torn Tread* appeared in the literary scenario, it became able to attract the attention of many critics and scholars. This novel is read by different critics whose interpretation is different according to their own understanding. It can be judged from different point of view; therefore, the criticism depends on the reader how s/he interpretes. In this regard, critic Virginia Golodetz in the *School Library Journal* writes:

A riveting account of two Polish-Jewish girls during World War II, Isaacs spares no details in describing the physical suffering and mental anguish.... Despite almost starving, Eva remains obedient to her religious dietary laws. The prisoners help one another in the time of need, and a kindly German supervisor in the mill protect girls who are ill to work.... This powerful testament to the human spirit

provides much opportunity for discussion of this dark time in human history. (136) Virginia Golodetz here not only explains the suffering of the two Jewish sisters but also positively acknowledges the German supervisor who helped them at the time when they are ill to work. Moreover, Golodetz analyzes this novel as the powerful testament to the human spirit that provides much opportunity for the discussion of the violence that the Jewish have experienced in the labor camp. Golodetz also sees this novel from the religious perspectives in which the character Eva is obedient to her religious dietary laws.

Another critic Janice Del Negro views this novel as the survival story and says “an accessible survival story, which avoids epic drama and focuses on the small choices that keep the two sisters alive” (53).

Del Negro analyzes novel *Torn Thread* as the survival story which avoiding the epic drama focuses on the love, responsibility and the small choices between two sisters in the labor camp that helps them to survive for one more hour.

According to the critic Herman Wouk, “*Torn Thread* is vivid, moving and utterly convincing” (cover page).

Herman Wouk has examined the novel critically from the emotional perspective. He sees *Torn Thread* as a novel is vivid and moving one which makes the reader feel the kind of experience that the characters are experiencing and tagged this novel as an utterly convincing one.

In the same way in a review in the *Publishers Weekly* reads the novel *Torn Thread* as the strongest Holocaust memoir and says:

In a noteworthy departure, Isaacs turns her considerable literary gifts to a painful subject- her mother-in-law’s experience as a teenage prisoner of the Nazi camp – and transforms it into a powerful work of fiction...

Isaacs takes the measure of acts of casual cruelty or kindness and lets readers see the repercussion. Given its precise details and sensitivity to unimaginable suffering, this gripping novel reads like the strongest of Holocaust memoirs. (94)

This review explains the novel *Torn Thread* from the perspective of memoirs. As memoir is the collection of the memory of one's past, this novel also contains the memory of Eva, mother-in-law of the author that she has experienced in the Nazi labor camp during World War II. In the novel Isaacs takes the measure of acts of casual cruelty or kindness and lets readers see the repercussion. As the novel gives the precise details of unimaginable suffering in the Nazi labor camp, this novel is described as the strongest of Holocaust memoirs.

From these reviews we can see that the novel has been from various perspectives. It has been analyzed as the powerful testament to the human spirit, as a survival story focusing on the small choices that keep the two sisters alive and also as a memoir. Though the novel has been analyzed from different perspectives, it has not been seen through the traumatic aspect. So there lies a strong need to analyze the novel from the perspective of trauma. The novel in this research is analyzed from the perspective of historical trauma. This research paper explores the traumatic experience of the characters which is caused by the Holocaust history.

Trauma, a medical term of Greek origin denotes a severe wound or injury and the resulting aftereffects. But this injury is not limited within the sphere of the body but it refers all injuries of psyche, community and even the nation. When a person is physically hurt, s/he is compelled to live with the psychological injury as well. This psychological injury of the person is not limited with the person because his/her injury is interpreted in a specific socio-cultural context. Thus an individual trauma

becomes the national traumatic event. Trauma is also a psychological term which shows a mental condition caused by a severe shock, especially when harmful effects last for long time.

Freudian psychoanalysis provided a model of traumatic subjectivity and various accounts about the effects of trauma and memory. Based on the World War victims', accounts of psychological wounds, Freud initially took the job of managing and flourishing the trauma theory in the course of this treatment of the people who were being mentally and physically wounded, disturbed, and disordered in the World War I. Traumatic effect on a person usually results in shock, including numbered emotion, questioning of perception and memory disturbances. The person suffers from the traumatic memory which introduced on everyday living and in dreams, learning his/her feeling out of control.

Trauma theory in the literature developed systematically after the mid 1990s when various lines of inquiry converged to make trauma a privileged critical category. Trauma, as a privileged category includes diverse field with its specific focus on psychological, philosophical, ethical and aesthetic questions about the nature and representation of the traumatic event. Trauma is serious injury or shock to the body, from violence or an accident and relating to psychiatry. It is an emotional wound or shock that creates substantial lasting damage to the psychological development of a person. Trauma effects may also be evidenced as multiple personalities, paranoia, anger and sleep problem, and difficult relationship. Giving the general definition of trauma in her essay "Unclaimed Experience: Trauma and the Possibility of History" Caruth says:

Trauma describes an overwhelming experience of sudden or catastrophic events in which the response to the event occurs in the

often delayed, and uncontrolled repetitive occurrence of hallucinations and other intrusive phenomena. The experience of the soldier faced with sudden and massive death around him, for example, who suffers this sight in a numbed state, only to relive it later on in repeated nightmares, is a central and recurring image of trauma in our century. (181)

As this definition suggests trauma describes the tragic and unwanted impressions of the history which are stuck in the psychological structure constantly reminding the events that occurs in the often delayed, and uncontrolled repetitive occurrence of hallucinations and other intrusive phenomena.

Dominick LaCapra in his essay “Trauma, Absence, and Loss” defines historical trauma. The observed intergenerational stress response to negative social and historical event is at the core of the Historical trauma. Everyone is not subject to it or entitled to the subject-position associated with it. With respect to historical trauma and its representation, the distinction among victims, perpetrators, and bystanders is crucial. In this regard LaCapra writes:

Historical trauma is specific and not everyone is subject to it or entitled to the subject-position associated with it. It is dubious to identify with the victim to the point of making oneself a surrogate victim who has a right to the victim’s voice or subject position. It involves a kind of virtual experience the difference through which one put oneself in the other’s position while recognizing the difference of that position and hence not taking the other’s place. (722)

In the same way, LaCapra’s theory of trauma focuses on three psychoanalytic topics: the return of the repressed; acting out versus working through; and the dynamics of

transference. Among three, transference is the most pervasive concern of LaCapra. The failure to come to terms with the discursive returns of some traumatic event usually signals the failure to recognize one's own emotional and ideological investments in the event and its representation. Transference in psychoanalysis is itself a return of repressed, or rather a more conscious summoning of the repressed; transference repeats or acts out a past event or relationship in a new, therapeutic setting that allows for critical evaluation and change. Transference is the occasion for working through the traumatic symptom. It is imperative therefore to recognize the symptom and the trauma as one's own, to acknowledge that the trauma still is active and that one is implicated in its destructive effects.

A central claim of contemporary literary theory asserts that trauma creates a speechless fight that divides or destroys identity. This serves as the basis for a larger argument that suggests identity which is formed by the intergenerational transmission of trauma. However, a discursive dependence upon a single psychological theory of trauma novel and the interplay that occurs between language, experience, memory, and place. Considering the multiple models of trauma and memory presentation in the trauma novel draws attention to the role of place, which functions to portray trauma's effects through metaphoric and material means. Description of the geographical place of traumatic experience and remembrance situate the individual in relation to a larger cultural context that contains social values that influence the recollection of the event and the reconfiguration of the self.

The trauma novel demonstrates how a traumatic event disrupts attachments between self and others by challenging fundamental assumptions about moral laws and social relationship that are themselves connected to specific environment. Novels represent this disruption between self and others by carefully describing the place of

trauma because the physical environment offers the opportunity to examine both the personal and cultural histories embedded in landscapes that define the character's identity and the meaning of the traumatic experience. The primacy of place in the representations of trauma anchors the individual experience within a larger cultural context, and, in fact, organizes the memory and meaning of trauma. Trauma refers to a person's emotional response is forever unknown and unintegrated; yet, the ambiguous, literal event is ever-present and intrusive. Trauma is only known through respective flashback that literally re-enacts the event because the mind cannot represent it otherwise.

The novel *Torn Thread* is set in the historical background of Holocaust. This period of history is on inhumane and horrific that some may find it difficult to hear about and discuss. The Jews, arrested and brought to the concentration camps during the World War II were under the sentences of death. Their chances of surviving the war were minimal. The people in the concentration camp lived in horrible conditions such as filth and lack of hygiene, diseases and extreme nutritional insufficiency, continuous harassment, and physical ill treatment which time and again traumatized the survivors. By bringing forth the historical circumstances of Holocaust the writer has justified how the innocent and powerless people, especially Jews, have been victimized by the Nazi authority. It further analyzes how the indelible marks were left in the psyche of the survivors of Holocaust like Eva that ultimately traumatized her.

In the novel, though Isaacs recalls the experience of her mother-in-law, Eva uchbinder, it explores the dehumanization of the Germans who have enslaved, tortured, and killed the Jews in the order of Adolf Hitler. Isaacs, being the part of Jewish history, narrates the cultural as well as historical implication of trauma, memory, and identity of all the Holocaust victims. Isaacs, while presenting the past of

her mother-in-law, shares the collective traumatic past of the Holocaust and the traumatic past itself becomes a collective memory of the victims as well as the future generation. As the historical event of Nazi Holocaust is the result of cultural differences, the traumatic abnormalities caused by the prolonged Nazi Holocaust can be judged in terms of historical and cultural dimension.

This research attempts to carry out a comprehensive survey of Holocaust in general and of the central character, Eva, the mother-in-law of the author, in particular. Since the novel *Thorn Thread* is the narrative of the traumatic experience of the author's mother-in-law, this research strives to show the transference of traumatic experience. Anne Isaacs, who first heard the story from her mother-in-law, presents it in the form of text, so that the upcoming generation shall know where they have come from. Living through the heart-wrenching memories of her mother-in-law urges her to write this novel where Isaacs presents the experience of Eva in such a way that she herself has experienced it. As the novel *Torn Thread* is set in the labor camp rather than in a death camp like Auschwitz, it introduces us to the horrific nature of Nazi regime and Holocaust without dwelling on the apparatuses of death, like the gas chamber. Instead, it focuses on the struggle faced by individuals as they fought to survive. This novel carries the undercurrents of traumatic experience embedded within the structure of the novel, where the writer employs figurative language to express the tragic situation of the characters.

Much of what has occurred during the Holocaust seems too horrible to imagine. Indeed, for many years following the end of World War II, survivors are extremely hesitant to speak of their personal experience. They have focused only on rebuilding their lives. For each survivor, the act of recounting the Holocaust experience is personal struggle. Most of the people share their painful memories in an

effort to understand or accept the Holocaust with the urgent hope that such a dark age of human history will never be repeated. The content of written survivor's literary memoir, whether has presented as fact or transformed into fiction is often harrowing and gruesome. Biographies and personal narratives can help to personalize historical events and establish reality in the overwhelming sea of facts and statistics. Jenny Edkins, observing Agamen's testimony, in *Trauma, Time and Politics* argues:

In this study of testimony, 'Remnants of Auschwitz', Agamen examines the extremes to which people were brought to Nazi death camps. He draws our attention to the way in which it becomes impossible in this situation to make a satisfactory distinction between the human and the non-human. We cannot call those who became like animals as a result of their treatment non-human. Although they no longer cared whether they lived or died, and in a sense their 'humanity' was extinguished, to call them 'non-human' would be repeat the gesture of their persecutors. The survivors of the camp were on the whole drawn from ranks of those who in one sense retained their 'human' dignity: they did not become mindless, unfeeling animals. However, the survivors were lucky, in other words, the ones who in every important sense were inhuman. (111)

From the above argument it is clear that Germans without the sense of humanity have performed the activities of violence upon the innocent body of the Jews. They regarded as the unfeeling animal and mindless creatures. Such dehumanization of the innocent people forces Anne Isaacs to account the politico-historical traumatic realism.

As the novel opens, the Jews of the Bedzin have been round up and confined

into the ghetto where they lived in constant fear of being “selected” and sent to the Nazi death camps. Eva, the central character of the novel, is sitting cross-legged by the attic window, playing chess with herself. She along with her father and sister have been forced to leave their comfortable home and move into a tiny attic room in the Jewish ghetto where they live in deplorable condition with little food and water, no jobs, no jobs and also continuous fear of death. The fence that marked the boundary of the ghetto is patrolled by the German soldier and no Jews are allowed beyond it without special pass. The opening line of the novel “Night was coming” foreshadows the darkness of the event that follows the life of the Eva and the other Jews in the ghetto. In this regard Isaacs recalls:

I wish we could go home, even for an hour, Rachel said softly. Just to stand in the kitchen would be enough. It would not be enough, Eva told her, frowning as she fastened Rachel’s hair in a place. She didn’t want to think about their home on Zawale Street where they had lived from the time they were born until one month ago. We are caged in like criminals or dogs, Rachel said. (6)

The above utterances of Eva and her sister are outcome of traumatic experience, which shows the pain that one feels when he or she is forced to leave home and caged is like criminals. The deplorable condition of the ghetto makes them to think about their comfortable home. During the period of Holocaust Jews have been forced to leave their comfortable home and move into different Jewish ghetto that are full of violence and terror. In the ghetto they live in the constant fear of being selected and sent East to the Nazi death camp from where German armies used to seize the Jews randomly and send them to the different death camps and labor camps.

In the novel, after Rachel, Eva’s sister, is seized in the round up and taken by

the German soldiers to the labor camp in Parchnitz, Eva's father manages Eva to send to the labor where Rachel is taken because he fears that in the next round up she might be selected to the death camp in the East. He becomes more frightened when he learns from the man who used to work in his candy factory about the Nazi camp where Nazis take Jews take Jews there in hundreds, thousands everyday and kill them. In this context Isaacs recites:

Chavele listen to me. Papa said gently. It is not safe for you here. Eva clung to papa as if she could disappear into the folds of his coat. Do you remember Gregor Toponizky, who used to work in our factory? He told me about a Nazi camp a half an hour train ride from here, near Auschwitz. Gregor's brother works on the rail lines and saw it for himself. The Nazis take Jews there by hundreds, thousands every day- then kill them. It will not be long until they have killed every Jews in the Poland. (17)

Eva as well as other characters in the novel are suffering from cultural trauma, cultural trauma occurs when members of collectivity feel they have been subjected to horrendous event that leaves indelible marks on their group consciousness, making their memories forever and changing their future identity in fundamental and irrevocable ways. Events themselves are not traumatic but there are other factors such as socio-cultural condition that determines whether it is traumatic or not. A threat to a culture with which individuals in that society presumably have identification arouses a cultural trauma. While defining the cultural trauma Neil J. Smelser in *Psychological and Cultural Trauma* says:

A cultural trauma is, above all a threat to a culture with which individuals in that society presumably have an identification. To put in

differently, a cultural trauma is a threat to some part of their personal identities. As such, this threat, if experienced, arouses negative effect. We may go further: if a potentially traumatizing event cannot be endowed with negative effect, then it cannot qualify as being traumatic. (40)

The way Smelser defines is the way Eva has been victimized because of the haunting memories of cultural trauma. There is threat to her personal as well as cultural identity. She has been victimized only because she was a Jew and she has different cultural identity than that of Aryans.

In the time Holocaust Jews have been the subject of persecution only because they don't have the same belief as the Germans have. The Jews have been victimized to make the "racially pure" Europe according to Nazis' plan. Since Nazis seemed Jews to be undesirable to their plan of "racially pure" Europe they have killed the Jews. Not only the German armies but also the common German people have the bias attitude towards the Jews only because Jews are from another cultural background. Jews are not treated as human being and they are tortured psychologically. There is lack of fraternity, and humanity. In this concern Isaacs narrates:

As they passed a woman selling eggs and butter, her little boy threw a half eaten currant bun on the cobblestones and ran off to join some friends. His mother picked up the bun and began to scold him, but when she saw Eva and papa she fell silent and busied herself counting eggs in baskets. A toothless woman in a ragged black shawl limped towards them. "Dirty Jews", she muttered and spat on the ground. (21)

This novel also talks about how Jew families are torn from each other and how they are destined to witness the death of their own family members. When Rachel, who

was sick, is seized Eva is sent to the labor camp to protect her, and there in the camp she gets acquainted with other Jews girls who have the same background as the Eva and Rachel have. They are torn from their other family members and they don't know about what is happening to them. The memory of their family haunts them time and again.

According to one of the girls in the camp named Kayla, friend of Eva, she herself has witnessed the death of her family members which is the horrific situation that most of the Jews have faced during the Holocaust, and the death of her family members caused by the Nazi authority traumatize her time and again. The traumatic experience of Kayla represents the experience of the whole Jews community during the Holocaust. In this sense Isaacs recites the narration of the girl and writes:

One day when I came home, the house was empty. A polish neighbor told me that the Nazis had come, along with the polish police, and had led my family to the woods where they had shoot them into the ditch and buried them. She told me to run before the police cane back and found me. So I ran for five days. On the sixth, I hid in the forest near the cows. Kayla let out a long breath. "You know the rest", she concluded quietly. (51)

The above utterances reveal that the memory of death of the loved one equally haunted the psyche of the survivor. Though, the girl Kayla succeeds to survive the memory of her family members haunted her time and again which she shares when she meets with the other Jew girls in the camp, so that she can reduce her psychic pain. In this connection William Cote and Roger Simpson in their *Covering Violence: A Guide to Ethical Reporting about victims and Trauma*, state:

All the memories related to traumatic injury are not created equal. A

memory of how a loved one died in all drive-by shooting may be very painful but clearly remain just that a memory not a terrifying reenactment. Retelling the painful memory under the right condition can even help reduce and eventually master the pain. (30)

Traumas are very hazardous that ultimately lead towards the psychological destruction. Kayla as traumatized person always ponders on the past events when she gets contacted with the similar events.

The manifestation of dehumanization of the Jews by throwing the pile of violent and brutal activities is the focus of this novel. Though Eva is living with her sister in the labor camp sharing the moment of love and responsibility amidst chaos and inhumanity, uncertainty remains. Their father is separated from them and they don't have any idea about what has happened to their father. In the camp they have lived through the horrific condition where there is starvation, filth and degradation by the Nazi guards.

Prisoners in the camp have been forced to work hard where they are not allowed to take rest for a while. In spite of their sickness and tiredness they always have to present themselves strong and fresh, and they are able to work given to them. Though their psyche is full of horror and pain, they have to present themselves as if they are happy. Eva remembers the moment when her sister, Rachel, informed her about what should be done in the time of inspection: "pinch your cheeks give them color. You have to look strong, show Fraw Hawlik you are able to work" (34). If the prisoner in the camp seems to be sick and unable to work given by the Nazis they are sent to the death camp like Auschwitz. In this concern Isaacs recalls: "Just then, several rows ahead of Eva, one of the prisoners fainted. Instantly, guards dragged her toward a German army truck parked outside the factory. They threw her in the back

like a sack of flour; her body landed with a soft thud”(52).

Most of the prisoners in the labor camp died not in the natural process but they are killed by the cruel hands of German armies in the blooming age and the plight of those who survived is more dangerous than the death. Death is easier than the life in the hand of German soldiers for the Holocaust victims. The survivors feel as if they are withered trees in the heart of the desert. Because of the extreme fear of Nazi soldiers, who since the very beginning, pour their anger mercilessly upon victims they remains silent even in the absence of their guards. There is lack of brotherhood and humanity.

Moreover, the condition again is not sufficient, the victims are stored in a suffocated environment. There is not sufficient place to take rest, no single air for breathing, no water to drink, and there is not a single word of consolation in the difficult condition. There is only the presence of thick smoke that is poisoning the air and stunning their throat. In spite of the world of consolation, there is extreme pain in the camp where they are destined to witness the death of their companion, the memory of which traumatizes the survivors of the Holocaust in the present time. In this regard Isaacs narrates:

All at once a shot rang out, and dogs began to bark. Guards came into the yard from the Appellplatz, dragging a dead woman. The body left streaks of blood on the snow. A minute later more guards came, half dragging the woman in the red shawl. She struggle in their grasp, shrieking, “kill me, kill me too!” (133)

These lines explore how the Jews are obliged to remain silent in the death of the member of their own race. The death they have witnessed disturbs their mind and the disturbed mind is full of horror and terror which makes the protagonist, Eva

psychologically crippled. So Eva could not free herself from the memory of the women who had passed through the Parschnitz even after their death. Though they want to resist or speak against such brutality they don't have enough courage. They fear that Nazis will harm them too if they speak against the brutality of German armies. In this regard Jane Kilby in *Violence and the Cultural Politics of Trauma* mentions:

Originally, victim silence was figured in terms of social censorship; women remained silent because there was a taboo on speaking about sexual violence, not because they had lost the capacity to talk per se, it was an externally imposed silence still figuring as a consequence of social censorship manifest in any number of forms, explicit and implicit. By drawing on her own rape experience, Cathy Winkler argues, for example, that silence is 'the choice of most victims' because they fear the consequences of reporting the rape to others or to the police. (3)

Though the Jews, who are victims of the Holocaust, remain silent in the act of foregrounding their traumatic experiences, Anne Isaacs has attempted to explore the traumatized psyche of the Jews with the help of this novel. The innocent Jews remain silent because they are afraid of being physically abused again.

Traumas are naturally occurring events that shatter an individual or collective actor's sense of well-being. In other words, the power to shatter the trauma is thought to emerge from the events themselves. The reaction to such shattering events being traumatized is felt and thought to be an immediate and unreflexive response. The traumatic experience occurs when the traumatizing events interact with human nature. Human beings need peace, security, love, harmony, order, and connection. If something happens with the order of such things, according to trauma theory, people are traumatized. By supporting this claim Alexander speaks, "trauma is a kind of

rational response to abrupt change, whether at the individual or social level. The objects of events that trigger trauma are perceived clearly by actors. When bad things happen to good people, they become shocked, perhaps even unbearable that create a sense of anger and aimlessness”(87). As the Alexander states, we can see such condition in the characters of the novel.

During the period of Holocaust, there is less possibility of sustaining life due to the brutality of the Nazis. Jews are in danger zone facing the horrors and terrors that is the result of the inhuman action of the Nazis. They are forced to live in the world of fears and terrors. Though they struggle to have the secure life, there is not appropriate environment for their living in the camp. In the world of inhumanity and brutality, it is difficult for them to live. The novel *Torn Thread* is a terrifying account of horrific events where characters are tortured without providing them minimum human needs. Nazi atrocities are very unbearable and unimaginable. Prisoners in the camp are unaware about what is going to be happened with them and when they are going to be killed which creates sense of anger and aimlessness in the characters. In this sense Isaacs narrates:

Just then barracks door crashed open. Lights went on with a building glare. Guard stormed into the room and took the red-haired twins.

“Rachel!” Eva whispered after they had gone and the lights had been switched off again. “What will happen to them?”

Before Rachel could answer, the woman in the bunk above her leaned over and whispered one word: “Auschwitz.” (44)

Majority of the Jews are suffered by the exercise of absolute power of Nazis. The Nazis exercise the power on Jews without concerning about the humanitarian value. The powerless Jews are horrified by the cruelty and brutality of Adolf Hitler and his

blind agent. Due to the avoid humanitarian value in Nazis, Jews are suffered in the labor camp, in *Torn Thread* by Anne Isaacs. The experience of brutality caused by the Nazi explores the emotional shock and wounds. So, traumatic events are the result of absence of morality and humanity. The traumatic wounds are so unbearable and unmeasurable, but Nazis are unable to feel the pain and agonies of those subaltern people. The person, who is suffering, only knows the pain and suffering but Nazis who are in power, they don't know it and misuse.

Mostly, Jews in the labor camps like Parchnitz during the Holocaust lose their lives because of starvation and different kinds of diseases like typhus, influenza and so on. Though they have been forced to work hard there was not enough food and water for their survival. The condition of the camp too is worst. Because of the lack of hygiene and the worst condition of the camp they are infected by different kinds of diseases. And, in the camp if anyone gets sick and is unable to work, s/he is not sent for the treatment rather sent to the death camp or left to die. In the novel *Rosie*, friend of Eva, who is infected, cannot get treatment and is left to die. In this regard Isaacs mentions:

Rachel didn't seem to hear her. "Rosie's gone", she said, sobbing and clinging to Eva. She began to cough and covered her mouth with her kerchief; after a minute she caught her breath and went on.

"Guards came and took Rosie-they took anyone who was too sick to stand up. Dora was not there; she'd been called out to clean the guards' barracks." Rachel's words came out in short bursts, broken by crying and coughing; and Eva numb with exhaustion and shock, only half understood what she heard.

“Dora blames herself,” Rachel added. “She says – if she had taken better care of her, Rosie wouldn’t have died.”

Died. The word cut like a knife through Eva’s confused thoughts.

“The guards didn’t even try to hide where they were taking the sick girls.”

“No don’t say it,” Eva begged. (151)

Eva gets shocked when she learns about the death of the Rosie, one of the Jewish friends in the camp. The death of Rosie traumatizes her because they are from the same cultural background. Rosie’s death may not have the same traumatic effect in the Aryans as it has in the Eva. Since the trauma is dependent on the socio – cultural context of the affected society at the time the historical event or situation arises, the trauma of the Jews is based on the historical event of Holocaust.

Holocaust may not have the same traumatic impact as it has in the psyche of the Jews because historical events that may not be traumatic for other societies are likely to be traumas in the afflicted societies. In this connection Neil J. Smelser in *Psychological and Cultural Trauma* argues:

The status of trauma as trauma is dependent on the socio-cultural context of the affected society at the time the historical event or situation arises. A society emerging from a major war, suffering from diminished economic resources, experiencing rampant internal conflict or having shaky social solidarity is more solid in this respect.

Historical events that may not traumatic for other society are more likely to be traumas in the afflicted society. (36)

As the above utterances suggest, trauma depends on the socio-cultural context of the

affected society at the time historical event arises, and a society which faces such historical event is more trauma prone than other societies because historical events that may not be traumatic for other society are more likely to be traumas in the afflicted society.

Trauma is an emotional shock that creates substantial lasting damage to the psychological development. Trauma also cripples the sense of the traumatized person. While defining of trauma William cote E. and Roger Simpson in their *Covering Violence: A Guide to Ethical Reporting about Victims and Trauma* writes: “trauma is a specific and devastating, and often long lasting wound. Trauma is bodily injury or shock, a emotional shock, often having a lasting psychic effect” (22). As this definition suggests, Eva also suffers from physical as well as psychological pain, mostly she confronts with the psychological pain and suffering which traumatizes her time and again. She frequently remembers about the death of her father and the accident happened to her during the work in the Trutnov factory. When she heard the news that Germans have round up everyone in the Bedzin ghetto, where her father is, and sent them to a camp in Auschwitz, she is shocked severely. She trembles and stares into the moving machinery as if it weren’t there. She, all the time, remains thinking about her father says “Papa, Papa! Where are you?” because of the pain in her psyche caused by the death of her father there occurred an accident with her. Since she is thinking only about her father, she cannot concentrate her mind in her work, and the machine held her head and dragged her closer, into its whirling metal jaws. The moment that she had an accident comes in her mind time and again. She tries to speak, but her tongue felt thick and strange, she couldn’t form the words. Half-formed images came back to her: a broken thread; the bobbins, much too close; and a terrible pain.

Memory plays a vital role while remembering the traumatic events, such memories revise the past experience and one remembers the past events that are unbearable for his/her peaceful existence. Memory is usually conceived as individually based, something that goes on inside the heads of individual human beings. Theories of identity formation or socialization tend to conceptualize memories as a part of the development of the self of personality and to locate that process within an individual as they carry out their daily lives. In this way, memory helps to account for human behavior. While exposing the role of memory in traumatic world, Ron Eyerman in his text *Cultural Trauma: Slavery and the formation of African American Identity* states:

Memory is always group memory, both because the individual is derivative of some collectivity, family, and community, and also because a group is solidified and becomes aware of itself through continuous reflection and re-creation of a distinctive, shared memory. Individual identity is said to be negotiated within this collectively shared past. Thus, while there is always a unique, biographical memory to draw upon, it is described as being rooted in a collective history. Here collective memory provides the individual with a cognitive map within which to orient present behavior. (65)

Memories interpret the past events as people try to make link between past, present, and the probable future. Memories are always collective memory, and collective memory specifies the temporal parameters of past and future: where we came from and where we are going, and also why we are here now.

During the period of Holocaust, the horrific condition of the camp makes the Jews to relate their past memories with the present and probable future. Rosie, one of

the Jews friends of Eva, memorizes her traumatic past when she was torn from her family. The memory of Rosie represents the collective memory of Jews during the Holocaust. The memory of her past haunts her time and again, and makes her to think about what is going to happen with her in the coming time. She memorize the moment that her family was divided into two groups where one is sent to the death camp, and she and Dora, her cousin, are sent to the labor camp. In this context Isaacs narrates:

A year ago, in March, everyone in the ghetto was called into an open square,” Rosie went on, “Dora and I were ordered to one side with the older children and young adults; our parents and brothers went to the other, I begged a guard to give Jakob his coat, which I had been holding for him. But the guar laughed and said that where my brother was going, he wouldn’t need a coat.” Rosie began to weep. (40)

Beside, this research tries to bring out the personal as well as communal traumatic experience of Jews and explore the Anne Isaacs’ bold attempt in the subjective expressions and sufferings, and wounds. Having the view, that remaining silent and neutral is not support oppressed one but to oppressor, Isaacs speaks about the traumatic experience of the Jews through the novel *Torn Thread*. Isaacs here challenges the Nazis’ brutality by exploring their inhumanity and insanity to the majority of the Jews.

Towards the end of the Holocaust, when the Allied forces are near to the Nazis, the condition of the Jews in the labor camps like Parchnitz is much worse than the previous. The prisoners are left in the pathetic condition. They are left in the camp just to die without food and water. Germans have stopped emptying the latrines in the yard, allowing them to overflow and hastening the spread of illness. Because of their weakness due to the starvation and dirt in the camp, prisoners are suffered from

different kinds of diseases like typhus, dysentery and influenza. In spite of treatment German soldiers come there only to carry out the dead bodies of the prisoners. In this connection Isaac's paraphrases:

Neither of them could move quickly on their bony legs; and Dora's feet were swollen from an infection so that just standing brought tears to her eyes. Nearly everyone in the camp was sick with something, but the infirmary had been closed for over a week, and doctors were gone. Guards came into the barracks twice a day to carry out the dead. Sometimes the guards made mistakes; it wasn't always easy to tell who was sick and who was sleeping. (155)

The above narrated experience of Eva during the Holocaust shows how human beings can undergo extreme traumatic experiences that haunt their psyche time and again in the later phase of their life. The traumatic experiences of Eva in the labor camp represent the trauma of whole Jews community because traumas are so experienced and thus imagined and represented; the collective identity will become significantly revised. Supporting this claim Jeffery C. Alexander speaks, "Experiencing trauma can be understood as a sociological process that defines a painful injury to the collectivity, establishes the victim, attributes responsibility, and distributes the ideal and material consequences" (22).

Such a horrific condition of the camp results the disturbance in the mind of the victims. The disturbed mind is full of horror and terror which makes them unable to think about what to do in such condition. Though the victims tried hard to sleep they cannot sleep, rather their thought drifts them back to their glorious past which they had experienced before the arrival of the German armies in their motherland. They remember their past and lament upon that experience. Since they are imprisoned

under the control of Nazi authority they don't have any other way than remembering their glorious past and lamenting upon that. The memory of their glorious past works as the healing force for their present torture caused by the Nazi brutality. In this regard Isaacs expresses:

Eva leaned against the window and closed her eyes, but she couldn't sleep. Her thought drifted her back to the Bedzin before the Germans came. She was in papa's candy factory, decorating chocolate candies; her school books lay open beside her on the marble counter while she shaped the tiny flowers out of her frosting. Beside her Rachel wrapped the candies in gold foil and put them into boxes. Papa was nearly at his desk, writing in a ledger. Delivery man came and went. Sholmo and Yozok, her teenaged cousin, sliced fudge and poured syrup into molds for cough lozenges, clowning and teasing each other whole time. (24)

The above memories of Eva about her past before the arrival of the Germans are the outcome of the traumatic experience that she was experienced in the labor camp.

While carpeting the traumatic events she remembers her glorious past which helps her to forget present horrific condition for a moment. Because of horror and terror she has experienced in the labor camp at Parchnitz, her thought drifts her back to her glorious past.

Thought the victimization of the Jews is unbearable and unimaginable during the Holocaust, they don't have enough courage to speak against the Nazi authority. They remain silent because they are afraid of probable physical and psychological abuse again. Though they want to resist they don't have enough voice. The only way to resist against Nazis is to run away from the camp where the chance of surviving is less than in the camp. Not only during the Holocaust, but also after end of the

Holocaust the victims remain silent because it seems too horrible to imagine about their traumatic past of Jews history, Isaacs here has attempted to explore the traumatized psyche of the Jews with the help this novel, so that such a dark age of human history will never be repeated.

The Holocaust also causes the destruction of faith on God that the Jewish people have. Since God is unable to rescue and save them at the last moment, they believe that, God is powerless and silent towards their suffering. They have lost all strength because of their crisis of faith; faith gives strength and they have lost illusion because they have already experienced all the reality in the camp. Regarding the loss of faith on God Isaacs the discussion among the girls about fasting during the Yom Kippur festival and states:

“No matter what, we should fast to honor God!” cried a girl whose father had been a principal of religious school.

“What’s God doing for us?” Kayla snapped back at her.

“She is right! Where is God, that these things happen to us?” cried another girl.

“Perhaps we could give up only half of our rations,” suggested a round-cheeked girl nearby.

“Some sacrifice,” Rosie muttered. “You get potatoes from your cousin in the kitchen.” (106)

As the above utterances suggest struggle of the characters like Kayla as their faith is also a dominant conflict in the novel *Torn Thread*. At the very beginning their faith on God was absolute but when the Nazi soldiers come with the notion on eliminating all the Jews from the Universe, the conflicting storm and the vibration starts in their mind. So, they start questioning to the creator of the Universe whether the God exists

or not. Their faith is in crisis because of their traumatic experience in the hand of Nazi soldiers which is full violence and brutality. When they were talking about fasting during the Yom Kippur festival to honor God, Kayla in response says: what's God doing for us?, which shows the loss of faith on God. Though they have known that they can't imagine living without faith in a divine, their faith is shaken by their experience during the Holocaust.

So, the silence and the pessimism of the God in such a horrific condition in the Nazi camps bring another horror in the mind of the Holocaust victims. The questions arise, if there is the existence of God, then why is he silent? Why the violations of the social compact are too terrible to utter aloud? Why the dominance of 'unspeakability'? Why the unrepresentability? So the author of the text takes the responsibility to bring out the traumatic reality of the Jews. In this regard Jeffery C. Alexander in *Towards a Theory of Cultural Trauma* states:

It is by constructing cultural traumas that social groups, national societies, and sometimes even entire civilization not only cognitively identify the existence and sources of human suffering but "taken on board" some significant responsibility for it. Insofar as they identify the cause of trauma, and thereby assume moral responsibility, members of collectivities define their solidary relationship in ways that, in principle allow them to share the suffering of others. (1)

The writer has the responsibility to bring out the traumatic experience to share the experience of inhumanity and brutality with the readers. To create sympathetic and pathetic world, the author takes responsibility to explore the existential crisis of the community and groups. Isaacs does the act of exploring the historical situation of the Jewish community.

Moreover, this research explores the role of hope during the traumatic experience. Hope is a positive expectation for future, and it is related to optimism. Optimism is associated with good mood, health, popularity, perseverance and success in endeavors. So, for the healing of psychological wound, trauma requires hope. There, in the text, we can find the sign of some hope in the future. Hope is to adopt existential stance. It helps to make out meaning. Hope is not static, it alternates with fear. In the case of suffering, hope is good for everyone. One should come out from the trauma through hope. In the novel, though the prisoners are suffering from brutality of German authority, they are in the hope that they will be rescued in the future and they will be able to live the normal life as they had lived before the arrival of Nazis. This kind of hope reduces their pain for a moment. In this concern Isaacs recites:

“With the airplanes they could be here in a few hours.” Dora said.

“We’ll be able to go home,” she added, hugging Rosie.

“It might only be rumor,” Kayla cautioned. “It’s best not to put much faith in it.”

But none of them wanted to believe it was a rumor. On the walk back to the train the argued about what route the Soviet army would take, whether the soldiers would come by land or air and how many days it would be until they reached Parchnitz. Dora’s news had lifted their spirits like the first wind of spring, and they spoke of nothing else all the way back. (65)

Although some of the victims of the Holocaust succeed to survive, they find it hard to adjust when they return to the society after the war. They are abused psychologically

by the German people even after their freedom. Isaacs recalls the moment when Eva was walking on the street after they were rescued by the Soviet Army and says: “At one house an old woman looked at Eva from a second story window and growled, ‘you Jews are still alive’? then slammed the window closed.” These lines indicate that though the direct domination has been ended, the indirect psychological domination is still remains in the inner psyche of the German Aryan people. There still remains hierarchy between Jews and Aryans.

The Holocaust also creates fear in the mind of the Jews even after their freedom because of which they find it very hard to adjust in society. Though they are rescued and saved by the Soviet armies, the traumatic event they have experienced in the camp haunts their psyche time again, so that they couldn't feel free even after their freedom. They have to remind themselves that, they are free now. In this context Isaacs narrates:

Eva began to take daily walks through Parchnitz, but she did not feel free. Old fears surface as Eva traveled street where she had been forced to march, shouted at by guards, not long ago. What if someone noticed that she wasn't wearing a yellow star? She looked around continuously half expecting a German guard to appear. Once she saw a blond woman on a motorcycle, and her heart pounds as she thought for a moment that it might be Frau Hawlik. (175)

Beside, the first hand experience of Holocaust is intergenerationally transmitted basing not only within a personal matter but it becomes one's ethnic, racial, gender, sexual or economic back ground thereby it is producing a 'post traumatic culture'. The Holocaust not only affects the people who have lived through it, but also affects everyone who connected to those fortune individuals who survived. The memories of

the victims are the means through which the present Jews are introduced with the traumatic experience of their ancestors. Here, the traumatic experience is timeless, repetitious and infectious that can establish a parallel casual relationship between the individual and group as well as traumatic and pathologic responses. In this regard, Isaacs while talking about her novel says:

As I worked on this book, I often thought that perhaps the reason I became a writer was to tell the story of Eva. Living through her heart-wrenching memories has brought me closer to the lost world of her family and to Jewish European life. Sometimes I felt anxious about preventing my children from their grandmother and of their aunts, uncles and cousins, most of whom they will never know. But now I understand that it was meant for them, through this book to meet their family at last. (Cover page)

The above speech reveals that, though the victims of Holocaust succeed to survive, the horrific memory of their past haunts their psyche time and again, which they share with their families, so that they can feel better in the future. But while living through the heart-wrenching memories of past generation, the present generation too is traumatized. While sharing the stories of their traumatic past, they also happened to share the trauma in their psyche. Regarding this novel Eva, mother-in-law of the author, who is the real experiencer of the Holocaust shares her traumatic past with her family and Anne Isaacs, author of the novel, being the part of Jewish history is too traumatized and narrates the traumatic past of her mother-in-law in the novel *Thorn Thread* which shows the transference of trauma from past generation to the present. Transference is itself a return of repressed. Transference repeats of act out a past event or relationship in a new, therapeutic setting that allows for critical evaluation

and change. In this connection Dominick LaCapra in *History and Psychoanalysis* writes:

Transference is at play in history, that is, in the every relation of the historian to the “object” of study. Transference in this somewhat more indirect and attenuated sense refers to the manner in which the problems at issue in the object of study reappear in the work of historian to the “object” of study. Transference in this somewhat more indirect and attenuated sense refers to the manner in which the problems at issue in the object of study reappear in the work of historian. “Transference” offers a better way of understanding a “dialogic” relation to the past than do standard, round-robin debates about objectivity or subjectivity, truth or relativism. It may even provide perspective on aspects of those debates that cannot be entirely transcended but perhaps can be rethought in a less compulsively predictable fashion. (222)

Traumatic memory haunts the existing Jews. The traumatic history even haunts in the psychology of generations of the Jews which is transferred in the form of story through oral narrative as well as written narrative that remind the upcoming generations about their traumatic past. In the conscious or unconscious level of their psyche, there is haunting memories of tormenting past. Anxiety and despair even rules in the present time in the psychology of Jewish community. Not only that, we can also see the problems reappeared in the work of historians which is issued in the object of study.

This research on Anne Isaacs’ *Torn Thread* explores the causes that force innocent Jews like Eva and Rachel to drown into the jumble of traumatic experiences.

Torn Thread marks a specific historical context of the Holocaust which creates a vivid picture of chaos and inhumanity that is faced by the Jews mainly in Germany during World War II. While showing the painful experience of Jews, Isaacs based her novel on the true story of her mother-in-law, Eva, the central character of the novel who was able to survive the Holocaust. The thesis has specifically searched the reason why Eva Buchbinder told and retold her family members about the events she saw and heard in the labour camp.

This historical novel *Torn Thread* provides a real but heart rending picture of Jews during the Holocaust and also explores the impact of Holocaust upon present generation. It explores the dehumanization of Jews who were killed mercilessly by Nazis by the order of Adolf Hitler. It further analyzes how the indelible marks were left in the survivors of the Holocaust that ultimately traumatized them. In the process of digging out the traumatic feelings and experiences of Jewish people it closely penetrates the psychological as well as physical destruction of the Jews due to the violence and brutality caused by the Nazis. It evaluates the contemporary consequences of Nazi brutality upon the Jews' tradition, culture, religious heritage and their faith.

During World War II, Jews had been the target of persecution who were killed in the process of making racially pure Europe. They were victimized only because of their racial and cultural difference with Aryan. *Torn Thread*, a biographical novel, which is written in such historical background, tries to capture the then pathetic life of Jews and to show the impact of brutality they have faced.

The novel *Thorn Thread* is Issac's record of her mother-in-law Eva's pathetic and horrible real stories experienced by herself. Eva's elder sister Rachel was taken to the labour camp at Parchnitz by the Nazi guards. Father sent Eva to the camp to take

care of sick sister. Eva chose labour camp, otherwise she might be taken to death camp at Auschwitz. In the labour, camp Eva saw hundreds of Jews dying of hunger, malnutrition and diseases. Nazi soldiers picked up sick and dead patients and put them in a van to burry them in mass. If any Jew did not work hard, then he or she was punished to death. Eva saw many cases with her own eyes. When Eva heard that her father was taken to death camp she did not tell it to her sister because it might shock Rachel to death. Since then, Eva unconsciously cried “papa! Papa!”. It is really a traumatic effect on Eva.

Kayla, one of Eva’s inmates, told her that her grandparents, parents, six brothers and sisters were shot dead cruelly and buried in a ditch of forest. Dora and Rosie, the cousin sisters, were also taken to the labour camp. Eva saw that Rosie Died of malnutrition. Their parents and brothers were sent to death camp. Those who were sent to death camp were sure to be killed. There were concentration camps in Germany to kill in mass such as gas chambers.

Eva told her past traumatic experiences to Issac, her own daughter-in-law after she was freed from the labour camp. Adolf Hitler was defeated in the World War II in 1945 and Eva was released from the labour camp. Although Eva was released from the labour camp, she could not get rid of traumatic experiences. Sometimes, she kept on talking to oneself alone at day and night. Sometimes, she had horrible dreams of the Holocaust. Eva felt a bit light when she could express her past experiences. Thus issac’s *Torn Thread* has depicted the horrible events of the Nazi labour camps and death camps based on Eva’s real experiences.

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