

BBC TELEVISION ADAPTATION OF *THE DIARY OF ANNE FRANK* (2009): HOLOCAUST AND DESIRE TO LIVE

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ABSTRACT

Holocaust has arrested the attention of the innumerable cinematic connoisseurs and historians for more than 75 years. Many literary texts narrating the stories of the trials and tribulations of Jewish families and their persecutions by Nazi regime have been successfully adapted by the directors and captured on celluloid screen. Anne Frank's *The Diary of a Young Girl* remains one of the most undisputed, well-acclaimed and most celebrated biographical and historical text of both 20th and 21st century. Ever since its publication it has been the preoccupation of various cinema directors, theatres and T.V. productions. The present paper will explore Anne Frank's adaptation of the afore mentioned text in the light of its historical documentation of the Holocaust. The paper will also explore the reasons which make Anne Frank's *The Diary of a Young Girl* so appealing apart from the theme of holocaust for cinema makers.

INTRODUCTION

Theatre, Cinema and T.V. has always been the most powerful means to narrate the stories of the people across the cultures, countries and continents. Cinema maker's preoccupation with the adaptation of the texts based on historical facts and stories is well known across the globe. Cinematic adaptations of historical document have a colossal effect upon its spectators. There are numerous reasons for it as the director with his impeccable craft is able to make the audience experience the actual events within two hours of movie, play or T.V. series. He employs quintessential visual effects, music, sets, artists, dialogues, costumes etc. to bring upon the desired effect upon the audience. The intensity of its impact is measured on the basis of the story or event the cinema makers have chosen for their adaptation.

The stories of brutality of holocaust which shook the world during World War II have arrested the attention of the innumerable cinematic connoisseurs and historians for more than 75 years. Anne Frank's *The Diary of a Young Girl* remains one of the most undisputed, well-acclaimed and most celebrated thought provoking biographical and historical text which has many cinematic adaptations to its credit. It has been an interesting subject matter ever since its publication for both the directors of 20th and 21st century. Despite its multiple adaptations in the form of movie and plays, the BBC television adaptation of *The Diary of Anne Frank* (2009) stands as an embodiment of capturing the true spirit of the text. Moreover it has received many accolades and appreciations for successfully translating on silver screen the horrors of holocaust and the emotions through which Anne Frank underwent as recorded in her diary.

BBC Adaptation *The Diary of Anne Frank* (2009) and Holocaust

The name Anne Frank is synonymous with the persecution of millions of Jews during the World War II. She has become the symbol of the Holocaust. In her article Khabibullina calls such icons “subjects of culture” (Khabibullina, 2004). Anne Frank's *The Diary of a Young Girl* which was written from 1942 to 1944 got published in 1945, readers witnessed the trials and tribulations of the families especially Jews through their imagination. The BBC adaptation *The Diary of Anne Frank* in association with France 2 which telecasted its five-hour episodes from 5-9 January 2009 made Anne Frank alive and the tragedy to which Jews were subjected to on the television. Later a DVD on 12th January was also released in 2009.

The story begins with loads of suspense and mystery. As per the original text of the diary Anne Frank received the famous diary as a gift from her father, Otto Frank on her 13th birthday on June 12, 1942. The movie too captures the scene where the father of Anne Frank gives her a gift of a diary on her birthday. On the very day of her birthday she starts recording her random thoughts where she addresses the diary and call her kitty and says:

*I hope I will be able to confide everything to you, as I have never been able to confide in anyone, and I hope you will be a great source of comfort and support. (Anne Frank's *The Diary of a Young Girl* on June 12, 1942)*

All of a sudden the entire fun and laughter gets changed when she comes to know they have to leave the house next morning as the army of Hitler has been able to win the Amsterdam. The Holocaust shadow of fear of being persecuted and the fear of being caught anytime by the Nazis can be seen in the scene when father tells not to carry anything with them since they are going into hiding and he doesn't want anyone to know about it. The director has done full justice to the scene where in rains the family leaves for the secret hiding, the ambience of the entire shot captures the constant fear, tension, struggle, and panic of being caught and captured any time during their attempt to flee to a safe haven.

On reaching the secret annex which was behind the Otto Frank's company, the fear grasps them more. The director showcases death looms large on the family as when they reach the annex in the early morning. The annex has its strict rules to be abided by as being silent during the working hours of the company. The plight of the family under intense fear for all those long hours has been presented in a very intense manner as when the elder sister Margot has serious cough but she covers her mouth tightly so that her voice remains inaudible. In one of the scenes when there is an air raid, Anne is so terrified that she runs to her parents to find solace. The repercussions of the raid can be captured in the fear and tension amongst the characters. The brutality of war and Holocaust is referred to in the scene when a yet another family comes; Mr. Van Dann, Mrs Van Dann and their son Peter to stay with Franks in the secret annex. The tension and fear all of a sudden gets heightened on the dinner table when Mrs Van Dann abruptly mentions the rounding up of about 700 Jews and the disappearance of their neighbor last night. The silence of anxiety and imminent danger ensues.

The traumatic experiences of the Holocaust comes vivid when Mr. Dussels shares with the families on the very day of his arrival to live with them, the way 6000 Jews are subjected to ethnic cleansing and inhuman treatment by their mass sterilization and sending them to lunatic asylums. The impact of the scene is so huge that it brings chills down the spine. In the hour of distress, tribulations and sufferings both mental and discomfort caused by being in constant fear Miep Gies was the only

source of relief and comfort for the family members. Moreover she was somewhat the only connection with the outside world. In a scene where she comes to dinner with her husband to the annex she brings a bad news which she only confides with Frank that the Van Daan's residence has been ransacked and their entire property has been confiscated. The ordeals of the family are not confined to these events, there is yet another scene when Otto is flabbergasted to know that the building has been sold to someone but after that a relief comes when he says to get the lease finalized it will take months and by that time the war will be over. From the various events of the films we come across a fact that to live in constant threat was more of misery and a source of constant stress and anxiety for the families.

Each scene lays a foundation for the next scene as one day Miep comes with the news that their benefactor vegetable vendor has gone missing. The problem of food shortage, bathing, money, clothes aggravates the situation for the families to live on have been authentically shot and presented by the director. To add to the woes of their everyday struggle one day Peter forgets to unlock the front doors which makes the employees to break in the company. As the scenes move ahead the emotions, troubles and unpleasant events start taking place. In the month of May 1944 it is found that the office has been burgled by the intruders. The next morning Kugler comes with a news that a lot of valuables and expensive things have been stolen.

In one of the scenes towards the end of the movie Anne says, "When parents came back from shopping they would find their children missing and when kids came from school they would find their parents missing." These lines actually portrayed the appalling conditions of life outside annex and the painful experiences of the people who were the victims of this genocide.

And finally on August 4, 1944 all of a sudden their all fears, anxieties come true when their secret annex is raided by the police. The horror of holocaust which didn't spare one million of Jews in those times is written on every character face. The director has captured every character in a frame with their future concentration camp and their date of death. The last scene leaves audience with imagination of their inhuman treatment which audiences are already made aware through various accounts of people in the annex and the movie ends with Miep's discovery of Anne's diary scattered across the floor and she takes them into her custody.

The Diary of Anne Frank (2009) and Desire to Live

I have plenty of dreams, but the reality is that we will have to stay here until the war is over: (Anne Frank's The Diary of a Young Girl)

The movie has beautifully captured the essence of Anne Frank and director Joe Jones has been victorious in portraying the heroine of the text in the same light as she was in person. The inner recesses of a young mind have been beautifully translated on screen. The little and innocent desires of an individual who wants to experience life and hope to see the world once again in normalcy and seeing at the same times all her dreams come true have been showcased minutely. In the very opening scene we get to watch the buoyant spirit of Anne which has been splendidly portrayed by Ellie Kendrick in the BBC television adaptation of *The Diary of Anne Frank*.

The indomitable spirit of a young teenager against the face of adversity can be traced when in the movie she quickly compromises with the place she is hiding in with a smile on her face as her dreams are bigger than the trauma and challenging situation she and her family has been thrown into

by destiny. She reflects upon the situation by saying that how privileged her family is to get a place to hide. In the movie she gets amazed at the other people that how uncomfortable they feel to be in that place however she feels: “*there is probably not a more comfortable hiding place in all of Amsterdam.*” (Anne Frank's *The Diary of a Young Girl* July 11, 1942)

The director must be applauded for the fact that the only point of reference for him was just a diary by Anne Frank but still he was able to translate the spirit of Anne Frank in his piece of creation. He has been able to dramatize the character of Anne in the true spirit of her diary. In spite of her iconic stature the director is able to bring forth her frankness, youth, sagaciousness, earnestness and her zeal to live her life on her own terms. She comes across as an independent, fiery spirit who refuses to bend down at the face of danger or threat. She records all the episodes of her life very normally which by any means nobody else would have dared to even write under given circumstances. She shares her life without any hitch. Through her frankness and love for life she immediately forges connection with the audience and take them all to the odyssey of her dreams and aspirations. She gives immense importance to her dreams, needs, and ideas she only compromises with the physical state of being under which she lives but never compromises her dreams of future like the world of compromise of adults.

Just like any teenager she says on the screen I wanted to be a movie star first but now I want to become a writer as she comes to terms with the fact that her innate passion lies in writing as she can unburden her sorrows through it. To facilitate the thoughts of Anne Frank many scenes are devoted to her writings on a specific table.

I can shake off everything if I write, my sorrows disappear, my courage is reborn. ...I hope so very much, for I can recapture everything when I write, my thoughts, my ideals and my fantasies...So I go on again with fresh courage, I think I shall succeed, because I want to write! (Anne Frank *The Diary of a Young Girl*, on April 5, 1944)

From the following lines from the movie when she ponders about life, dreams and hopes in her hearts, the transition of a 13 year old to 15 year old trajectory could be traced evidently in the movie. The lines which were the replica of what she wrote in her diary foreshadows how exceptional she is in her writing and how earnestly she wants her diary to get it. The BBC television adaptation has beautifully dramatized the scene where she writes her final entries. The lines were:

It's difficult in times like these: ideals, dreams, and, cherished hopes rise within us, only to be crushed by grim reality. It's a wonder I haven't abandoned all my ideals, they seem so absurd and impractical. Yet I cling to them because I still believe, in spite of everything, that people are truly good at heart. (Anne Frank *The Diary of a Young Girl*, on April 15, 1944)

In this very scene the very dreams of the Anne frank are culminated in the movie as when she stops writing all of a sudden police break into their apartment to take her away from the life and desire to live with her dreams that she had cherished in her heart after the war. But the time had some other plans for her. The climax scene is piercingly tragic to watch when Anne starts crying and starts holding her family members and the other people as she knew what future had to offer her against her hopes, dreams and whims.

CONCLUSION

The BBC Television adaptation of *The Diary of Anne Frank* has been much successful in dramatizing the iconic diary with great authenticity and deep insight. The director of the adaptation Joe Jones has made Anne Frank and rest of the characters alive on the screen with his meticulous employment of camera shots, dialogues, costumes, sets, and movement of shadow and light. The sequence of the diary and the adaptation is very much in sync. The director has not intervened with the flow of diary and has faithfully exhibited the inner conflicts of the characters, their everyday struggle with all the emotions what one could have faced and went through then. The adaptation has been victorious in imparting the message and true record of the historical events to the audience. It actually brings out the horrors, cruelty, systematic humiliation, displacement, starvation, torture, loss and death people were subjected to during World War II. The trials and tribulations of the people living under the regime of Hitler and the inhuman treatment of the Jews in the hands of the Nazis although not explicitly but the words were enough to bring those unbearable scenes alive in the imagination of the audience.

The BBC television adaptation 2009 has triumphantly captured the true spirit of Anne frank dreams aspirations and desires. The earnest desire to live and to be a famous writer leaves audience in awe of the iconic figure. Anne frank inner reflections and her zeal to be an independent person reverberates across the scenes and makes her a cult figure of the story. The drama has translated the essence of the diary and the technique of a voiceover of Anne Frank when she thinks about her life in general and about people makes it more charismatic in the eyes of the spectators. The director has one more time immortalized the most celebrated and tragic figure of all centuries through his impeccable delineation of the character both internally and on the outside.

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