

‘The Dance of the Dead’: A Reading of Genocide Poetry

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Abstract

‘Genocide’, which signifies rampant, targeted mass killing intended to annihilate a tribe, a race or the people of a particular nationality, has been made a punishable crime under the International Law since the Nüremberg trials. Yet the objective of prevention has not been achieved as evident from repeated violation of the provisions by the Superpowers or their satellites. One obvious reason is the lack of enforcing power; but such violations are no less due to the culture of legitimization, which normalizes ‘othering’ by promoting the practice of projecting the members of the targeted group as untermenschen. Literature expressing the pity of genocide is hard to come across, for while the affected lack agency, the bullying race either gags or subtly manipulates the voice the conscientious objectors. Yet diaries and poems picturing the horrors and atrocities of genocide have survived. Unlike films on genocide these are not later reflections but rather capture the feelings of the people passing through the trauma of genocide. The sensibilities expressed in such literary pieces do not engross us or invite us to enjoy but rather disturb us and appeal to us to shake off our indifference to the barbarous inhumanity of genocide. The article proposes to examine select genocide poems and explore their cultural significance.

Keywords: Genocide, trauma, othering, pity, indifference, death