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Socio – Cultural Analysis in the Selected Works of Mordecai Richler

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Culture plays a major role in the predominating attitudes and behavior to characterize the functioning of a group and to develop the individuality of a person. In 17th century French philosopher Rene Descarte have presented human being in an astounding manner. His notion of human persons is cleared by his famous dictum ‘I think, therefore I am’, based on this foundation is all subsequent knowledge built. In the present scenario too, it is still popular to think of human being primarily and fundamentally thinking things. Culture is something that one participates in and is aimed at a vision of human flourishing. Every facet of culture has an underlying vision of what the good life looks like. In the first half of twentieth century culture and personality movement was at the core of anthropology. According to the theorists of culture and personality, school socialization creates personality pattern .It shapes a person’s emotions, thoughts, behaviours, cultural values and norms to fit into and function as productive members in the surrounding human society.

Mordecai Richler a Jewish Canadian writer portrays in his work the Jewish culture. He is a third generation Galician who used to remain embarrassed by his parents foreign sounding accent and uncultivated ways. He was an atheist who found Judaism to be outmoded, yet he was still bound to his Jewishness for its comfortable cultural characteristics. At the frontier, identities are constructed not against the other, but as a result of and in conjunction with an intercultural exchange. Richler often drew his Jewish background for his fiction. He presented a male dominated society but he fails to project the individuals which leads to the repetition of his characters. Charlie Lawson, of A Choice of Enemies, appeared before in Son of a Smaller Hero as the culture-conscious professor Theo Hall. Larkin, the foul-mouthed and foul-minded tourist visiting Spain with a gentile wife in The Acrobats is indistinguishable from Noah's uncle, Max, in Son of a Smaller Hero, a manufacturer with a gentile mistress. Sonny Winkelmann, the expatriates' leader in A Choice of Enemies, is simply an up-to-date version of the grandfather in Son of a Smaller Hero. Richler disguises his characters by clothing them in borrowed garments, which preserves the conventional face of the wicked characters.

In the present century the concept of the reality, culture and truth remain inconsistent. My

approach is to focus on the works of a native Canadian writer Mordecai Richler, who in his unique style dealt with the characters, culture and values surrounded by traumas and it is presented with wit and passion. At the outset it is required to understand the cultural studies. The study attempts to decode the symbolic code of culture used in a society. The approach used to manifest the analysis is cultural sociology as it incorporates cultural analysis and critical theory.

Cultural studies being an academic field of literary theory and literary criticism has been subsequently adopted by allied academics throughout the world .It is interdisciplinary in character, it is an academic discipline aiding cultural researchers who theorize about the forces from which the whole of humankind construct their daily lives. Cultural Studies can be considered as a diverse field of study encompassing different approaches, methods and academic perspectives. Distinct from the breadth, objective and methodology of cultural anthropology and ethnic studies, cultural studies focuses upon the political dynamics of contemporary culture and its historical foundations, conflicts and defining traits. It even seeks to understand how meaning is generated, disseminated, and produced from the social, political and economic spheres within a given culture as well as the most recent communication theory, which attempts to explain the cultural forces behind globalization.

While dealing with the works of Mordecai Richler it becomes very essential to understand the culture of Canada, which is dominated by the European culture and tradition. The culture of Canada has also been affected by the migrant population projecting it as a multicultural country. The research focuses upon the analysis of the elements of culture like the symbols, language, values, beliefs and norms. The protagonist of Richler similar to the Canadian Literature undergoes alienation and isolation .As remarked by Linda Morra in ‘The Satire of Canadian Cultural Nationalism’ in Mordecai Richler’s The Incomparable Atuk, the protagonist of the novel Atuk adopts various roles that reveal and challenge hegemonic social and gender construct with traces of element. He remains in an isolated state with his weakness and strives to be a part of the main stream .In a different way of interpretation the protagonist of The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz undergoes a slum dog status striving to attain the so called status and freedom from the tradition. The struggle enforces him to think differently from the elder generation who used to stick to jewish tradition. When the history of Canada is analysed the jewish community that predominates Canada is of the Ashkenazi Jews and also other ethnic divisions. Along with them they bring their culture and customs. The Jewish community in Canada are Canadian citizens of Jewish ethnicity. They form a greater part of the Jewish diaspora and are one of the largest Jewish communities in the world. The Canadian Jewish community manifests a wide range of Jewish cultural traditions, as well as encompassing the full spectrum of Jewish religious observance. The rituals are also visible in the works of Richler The observance of Bar Mitzva, the rituals maintained after the death of Wolf Alder proclaiming, Wolf Alder died for torah.(Son of a Smaller Hero,138)

The protagonist of Richler always gets attracted towards a Shiksa, a goyim ,breaking himself from the tradition. He finds beauty in the semite but never maintains the genuine relation with her, drags her emotions, Yvette and Miriam both remain the culprits of this strained relationship. Even though the restrictions are there as per the Jewish custom the characters always try to justify themselves for not remaining in the respective circles. The values enthusted upon them are considered as bondage, the characters always decentralize the tradition, in an attempt made by Noah, to betray Theobold and the Duddy's betrayal by forgery all focus upon the aspect that they wish to run away from all confining and restricting forces. The plot provides symbolic aspects of the dominating culture, the usage of dreams to link with the past, the days of physical weakness when the character remains in the stage of illusion. As Micheal Greenstein author of Apprenticeship of Noah Adler remarks when Noah kisses his grandfather in their last encounter "After he had gone Melech touched his cheek and felt that kiss like a burn. He touched his cheek and felt that he had been punished."(Son of a Smaller Hero,200)In a side Noah defeats the grandfather with love on the other side the search of identity is analysed by defeating the concepts of the grandfather Noah was able to attain freedom.

The tradition remaining the symbol and urge to come out is deliberate. Also the status of women in the society is deteriorated, they are presented as feeble who strives to get a better support to sustain .Another women character Bete Dolan in Incomparable Atuk is presented as a matter of distinct minor recognition as she is presented as she belong to Canada : "No man has ever even held me in his arms before. I couldn't you see. Because I belong to the nation. Like Jasper Park or Niagara Falls." (Incomparable Atuk,21)Ms Dolan is also presented as 'Canada's darling' who is utilized by her own father who encourages her to swim across Lake Ontario, not only because he doesn't like quitters but it would lift him to the position Canadian- Father -of – the- Year. Similar to the Jewish tradition which was patriarchal in outlook as per Isaac Sasson the author of The Status of Women in Jewish Tradition, the women character in Richler's work played major role to mould the protagonist but never focused on the lime light remaining the essence of the salad bowl that binds the distinct characters.

This study of the characters of Mordecai Richler tries to outline and justify that cultural ethnicity is the right of any diaspora of the people who try to sustain their culture, rituals, society and lifestyle itself in the country where they sustain. The desire to escape from the culture and tradition is similar to the attempt made by Icarus in Greek mythology who disobeyed the instruction of Daedalus not to fly too close to the sun and not too low to touch the waves. Icarus flew near to the sun and dies as his wings melt and he falls into the sea. Similarly the attempt of the individual to move away from the culture and tradition leads to destruction rather than attaining freedom.

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