

“Two Solitude”: Mordecai Richler’s ‘The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz’

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Abstract- The Jewish-Canadian Literature is characterized by a sense of homelessness and exile, which is dominated in the writings of the immigrant writers of Canada. The characters in the novels of Mordecai Richler try to establish their identity in the Canadian society. Richler’s novels deal with the large national problem of assimilating a Canadian identity out of racial and cultural elements in general and with the process of integrating Jewish elements into Canadian culture. The protagonist Duddy, an young man who has consciously accepted the responsibility of life and was ready to get freed from the clutches of two holds , Jews and non-Jews to assert his individual supremacy. The novel focuses on the relationship between Jew and the Gentile, the struggle for freedom and survival and the disappearances of old values in the modern world.

The Jewish – Canadian literature is characterized by a sense of homelessness and exile, which dominated the writings of the immigrant writers of Canada. The Protagonists of the Canadian novelists try to establish their identity in the Canadian society. The Pattern of isolation, fear of survival and search for identity are the dominated themes of Canadian writings.

Mordecai Richler is one of the most accomplished writers. His famous works are The Acrobats, Son of a Smaller Hero, The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz and Joshua Then and Now. He was awarded Commonwealth Writers Prize for Solomon Gursky Was Here, Governor General’s Award for Cocksure and St.Urbain’s Horsemen, Qspell Award for Barney’s Version. Richler was given his due as a “Citizen of Honour” in the city of Montreal in 2015. His ability to describe Canadian perspective is one of his greatest contributions to the country’s culture.

Mordecai Richler’s protagonists are dominated by the wish to redress the tragic injustice of the holocaust and restore self-respect and potency to the Jewish people. Most of his novels embrace themes of persecution, escape from the ghetto, feeling of alienation, fear of survival, a bitter sense of isolation and the archetypal search for identity.

The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz is the story of a Jewish youth who is ready to stoop to any level to achieve his goal. One of Richler’s memorable characters, Duddy Kravitz at one point perceives how differently his life might have unfolded had his grandfather possessed the few extra Dollars it would have required to take him as far as Toronto. This novel of Richler is a picturesque one written in a classic manner. It deals with the growing up of a young man to the point where he is on his own, alone, feeling lonely, ready to strike out in life, freed from his ties of his youth. His solitary condition is the result of long thought and much self-examination. He has made a choice and consciously accepted the responsibility of his own life. How an ordinary boy of sixteen metamorphoses into a businessman, buying the land he is dreaming of, forms

the story of this novel. But he does not opt forth right ways to achieve his goal.

It is interesting to note that Duddy’s Montreal is a bi-cultural city populated by Jews and non-Jews. The two-culture theme of ‘Two Solitude’ takes on a new dimension in Richler’s novel. Richler is aware of the flaws in his society. This novel is the revelation of the vulgarity and raw materialism of the middle class Canadian life. Richler deals with the sufferings of the Jews, their problems, persecution and social alienation in his fiction. The protagonist of The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz is a young dreamer who struggles to escape the Jewish ghetto by asserting his individual supremacy. Duddy is obsessed with a passion for acquiring land in order to escape the ghetto and considers the words of his grandfather – ‘a man without land is nobody’ (Ibid, 49) as the one and only motto of his life.

The first part of the novel deals with the school life of Duddy Kravitz at F.F.H.S, under Mac Pherson, who is an anti-Jew. Duddy joined the Talmud Torah Parochial School at the age of eleven. At the Parochial school until he was thirteen he met many boys who came from families that were much better off than his own. He teaches them all vices and fraudulence. Duddy’s other Parochial school activities are commercial. Duddy’s eagerness to come up in life, his resorting to crooked methods to achieve his goal and his frustration to free himself from the ghetto are well depicted by Richler. ‘The search for identity’ theme could be very well traced in The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz. One can establish his identity by becoming famous in some field or the other; or he should be rich. Duddy, the protagonist tries his hands in all sorts of jobs to earn money. He takes up stamp business and invests the profits in the comic book market. He even buys contraband American comics and rents them out. He steals hockey sticks from the players and sells them for large sums. He takes up his first job at the age of thirteen in his uncle Benjy’s dress factory for sixteen Dollars a week. He gives up the job after some time and becomes a waiter in a big hotel. He watches the way the businessmen staying at the hotel

avoiding their wives and talking about the market and the readers are introduced to an ambitious but fraudulent protagonist even at the beginning of the novel. Duddy's other endeavours are pictured in the remaining three parts of the novel.

The second part of the novel is chiefly concerned with Duddy's attempts to produce an art novel in collaboration with Mr. Friar, an expert in the field of videography. Without knowing what he has been doing he helps Dingleman smuggle heroin. He gets the acquaintance of Virgil who seeks Duddy's help in publishing his poems. Then, he comes across a young girl called Yvette who falls in love with him.

The third part of the novel is about Duddy's initial success as a movie producer. Mr. Friar has succeeded in making something of the Siegel Barmitzva movie and Duddy is profited out of it. Then he starts making commercial films for television and establishes an office with a studio of his own at Toronto. When Virgil meets with an accident, Yvette stays with him and nurses him. Soon a misunderstanding arises between Duddy and Yvette. When he learns that Dingleman is arrested for smuggling heroin he is shocked that he has been deceived by Dingleman so long.

The fourth part of the novel deals with Duddy's various tricks to obtain the land. His grandfather's words that 'a man without land is nobody' continue to haunt him. He blackmails Dingleman. A situation arises that he cannot clear his bills in the hotel. He comes to know that Dingleman has the idea to buy the land. He goes to the extreme of forging Virgil's signature and withdraws money from the bank. When the truth is out, Virgil is shocked and upset. Yvette cuts her acquaintance with Duddy once for all. Virgil is so generous that he refuses to sue Duddy in the court, for his act of forgery. Yvette calls him 'rotten' and informs his grandfather of his forgery and leaves him. Duddy tries to convince her by saying that he has done everything for her welfare and promises that he will repay the money he has taken from Virgil.

There occurs a sudden change in Duddy. He grabs his father Max and shouts in joy. "You see, you see ..." (Ibid, 319). He acquires the land in the end and feels that he is 'a real somebody', with a status. Duddy's morals perplex and shock the readers but he has a sense of fulfillment in whatever he has done to reach the ultimate goal. He has achieved what he desired. Perhaps this will give him a status in the society. He feels that he is no longer the son of a taxi-driver but the owner of a big hotel. But in this process, he has alienated his friends Virgil and Yvette. Duddy suffers from a loose sense of isolation and alienation, which he wants to overcome by acquiring wealth and power. Richler presents the experiences of his immigrant community in this novel by using certain literary modes like the motif of escape, ambivalence, irony, isolation and the most important of all is the search for identity.

Duddy who wants to establish himself by becoming rich and owning a vast area of land as per his grand-father's wish,

becomes a butt of ridicule among his relatives. When he calls on uncle Benjy who is in death bed, the latter charges him that Duddy is madly in pursuit of money.

Duddy is vexed with his uncle who does not show any concern for him. His uncle has a soft corner for his brother Lennie, who is a medico. Duddy retorts by pouring out his feelings. Duddy says that he is the king of the castle. The self-confidence of Duddy is amazing. The word 'own' is used in two places to stress the craving of Duddy to own a vast area of land. Uncle Benjy realizes his fault now.

Duddy's great concern for his uncle Benjy in spite of the latter's hatred for him reveals the fact that a true Jew is bonded in family ties and he could never come out of it very easily. Duddy asks the doctor to save the life of uncle Benjy at any cost. This shows his love and care for him. When Duddy leaps into the car and drives off, uncle Benjy thinks, 'Run, run, always running ... (Ibid, 245) Yes, Duddy is running towards his goal, he is running toward wealth, running towards the very establishment of his identity. In the search for identity, he is prepared to run to the very end of life. His perseverance, his bubbling with life, his tactics, his longing to have a high status, his desire of becoming rich and his sense of achievement makes Duddy an admirable character. If Duddy had accepted the financial assistance offered by Benjy, he could have made the final payment for the land on Lac St. Pierre. But Duddy coolly rejects it. This refusal shows Duddy's self-confidence that he could raise the funds elsewhere. He wants to see his uncle who is in death bed. That's all. He doesn't expect a single pie from him. Duddy's rejection of the financial offer might be a great blow to the ego of uncle Benjy. But the latter understands that Duddy wants to become a real 'some body' one day or the other climbing up the social ladder. The fountain of love and concern in Duddy's heart drenches uncle Benjy's dry image of his nephew. He sees an ambitious Duddy running towards prosperity and feels happy that his father's perception of Duddy is absolutely true. The characterization of Duddy blends with the thematic structure of the novel.

Right from the beginning, Duddy Kravitz has been aiming for a high social status. In F.F.H.S, he tells his friends cock and bull stories about his imaginary brother, Bradley, a romantically heroic figure who is supposed to have married an affluent woman. Duddy further reels on that, but for his brother's heroic deed of rescuing her from drowning, she could not have survived in this world. Duddy is influenced by his father Max who has spun stories about the Boy Wonder. The seeds of ambition and the search for his own identity have sprouted in Duddy's heart even at a very young age when he happened to listen to the fantastic stories about the Boy Wonder. The seeds are sown by Max himself. The darker side of the Boy Wonder (Dingleman) is totally concealed by Max, the irresponsible father.

Duddy Kravitz who has no mother and not much of a father yearns for the love of his dear ones. The one and the only soul in the family who has predicted Duddy's bright future is his grand-father. Duddy is deeply affected by the fact that he has

no mother. He constantly asks his relatives about his mother and whether she loved him or not. But he could not find an answer to it.

Duddy Kravitz ranges through a very broad spectrum of his society, exposing to the readers, the vices and follies of the cunning world in which he is forced to sail through. Though everything seems to work out for Duddy initially, he is a total wreck in the end. He learns that there is no place for him in the gentle, loving and kindly world of his grandfather or even in the world of Yvette, his lady love and Virgil, his close friend.

In his search for identity, Duddy causes the destruction of too many people, earns the displeasure of his dear grandfather who refuses to accept a part of the land since he is unhappy over the means by which his grandson has acquired the land. It is an irony that the grandfather who sowed the seed of ambition of owning a piece of land in Duddy's mind, prefers to stay in his old cottage. He refuses to step into the land bought by his grandson. Duddy's grandfather spits out words of hatred and agony on Duddy ...

The word 'Swindle' arouses in Duddy a sense of guilt. But he wipes it off. He feels angry that there is nobody including his dear Simcha to hear his part of the story. He slams the car door. He says to Simcha.

Duddy has proved to the world that he has established his identity by owning the vast area of land. He succeeds in his endeavour somehow. Duddy is a real Jew who has love for his family members. He is the only soul who calls on Uncle Benjy in his deathbed. He helps his brother Lennie when he was caught into trouble for performing a wrong abortion. Duddy's father Max who fails to inculcate moral principles in his son says that his son is slated for fame right from the time of birth. Duddy does not mind solitude because he will overcome the bitter feelings by acquiring more wealth. Duddy has established his identity. He has got recognition.

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