

Multicultural Elements in Richler's novel Incomparable Atuk

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Abstract:

Canada is a soil which beckons the immigrants from various foreign countries and a nation of Immigrants. Canadian writers such as Margaret Atwood, Nathan Cohen, and Mordecai Richler voice off their views of cultural diversity in their novels. Cultural diversity is deep rooted in the Canadian soil which has caused a huge impact on the psyche of the characters created by the Mordecai Richler. Richler, as a Jew and an Immigrant writer of Canada experiences a further conflict as he tries to imbue the alien norms of the host country and experiences rootlessness and paradoxical nature of assimilation in the case of his native colonial country. He realizes that he hangs on the periphery of the dominant culture which could be traced through different ethnic groups with respect to the minorities within the individual nation and the treatment given to the minorities which leads to the disparity such as Whites/Blacks, The Suppressed/The Oppressed etc. The Incomparable Atuk by Mordecai Richler is the novel which is analyzed in this article. It is a deep and a detailed analysis on the impact of cultural diversity in the characters portrayed and the mental trauma and consequences faced by

them in a literal battle to prove their identity and assimilation to the society.

Keywords: Cultural Diversity, Assimilation, Immigrants, Multicultural, Eskimo

Introduction:

The Incomparable Atuk written by Mordecai Richler has several instances and traces of cultural identity picturized with an ideal society comprising multi cultural relationships reflected throughout the novel. The Eskimo, Atuk, the protagonist is an immigrant who migrates to Canada with a firm faith and belief that he could create a bright future and settle there. Though he is an immigrant, he is offered succor by some of the natives. When he started his life in Canada, he doesn't have anyone to assist him. He got assistance from the natives as they help him by offering shelter, food, clothes and the language English to survive. The essence of multiculturalism sprouts up even at the beginning of the novel as the novelist describes:

Atuk, the incomparable, came to Toronto from Baffin Bay in 1960. As every Canadian schoolboy now knows it was out there on the tundra that the young Eskimo had been befriended by a Royal Canadian Mounted Policeman who had fed and clothed him and taught him English. (2)

The natives' made him feel comfortable and aided Atuk to stay in Toronto in particular and Canada in general. The natives who oiled Atuk are Rory Peel, Norman Gore, Bette Dolan and others.

Atuk started his life by writing poetry. Rory Peel, the brightest young Jewish advertising man in Toronto, praises Atuk's poetry. He attributed compliments to his poetry stating that 'It's a gasser. A real gasser' (ATUK 2). He has been a sole inspiration for Atuk to proceed with his art of writing poetry. Rory's appreciation of his poem encourages him to produce more works. He offers financial and practical assistance to Atuk by facilitating his stay in Canada and by inspiring him to live with dignity. He offers him two blankets, a sack of flour, his own cigarette lighter and twelve bars of chocolate in exchange of Atuk's poetry. The mere exchange of things seems like a business as multiculturalism promotes business. Although he is discouraged by Jack Wilson, the sergeant who criticizes his poetry ungrammatical and some clerks cannot detect even a feeble talent.

Rory extends a helping hand by publishing Atuk's poems into a series of a newspaper.

He is so hilarious to be a Canadian and is contented for rich and secure life that he leads in Canada. Canada is such a multicultural nation which beckons the immigrants by providing enough opportunity to everyone so that they could enjoy the air and the spirit of the nation. He speaks of freedom and growth that he enjoys in Canada where it is easily possible to develop and improve financially. Rory's conversation with Mr. Toby, the manager of the store reiterates the multicultural atmosphere in Canada. There is another instance in the multicultural society where Rory reaches the store to tell Mr. Toby:

My name's Peel, Rory muttered, I am Jewish.

Why some of our best customers are Jews.

Oh, yes,' certainly;- how good of you- it's this roast - my

wife, yesterday- look I don't want to make a fuss- not fresh

-it's not that I really want money back, I'm not that- kind of a - ofa -

But it's no trouble at all.

Mr. Toby, still smiling, made a refund slip.

Why tins is just wonderful of you, Rory said.

You tell your little lady how sorry we are. It won't happen again.

" I want you to know, Rory said, clutching Mr. Toby's sleeve,

that as long as I live; this my supermarket. I buy here.(10)

There is a disparity between Jews and Gentiles. After the conversation, Rory

started considering the store of the Gentile, Mr. Toby as his own supermarket which elucidates the attachment. The acceptance of guilt by Mr. Toby and expressing apology for not providing fresh roast enrich the respect for each other. Rory Peel's proposal to Atuk of Esky Enterprises with twenty-five per cent of benefit is a helping hand to him. Atuk says, 'we must love one another or die' (42). Another man who steps forward to help Atuk is Norman Gore, the professor from Eglinton University. Earlier Gore advises him to go back to his native place to save himself from being corrupted in Canada. He tells him, 'You've had a quick success, so you think it's easy. He advises him not to get corrupt by staying in Canada rather he can go and live his life happily in Baffin land. Actually, the writer's path in this country is a thorny one' (4). Atuk's firm decision to stay in Toronto provides Norman to cite his multicultural behavior. Apart from his feelings for Atuk, Gore discloses his love for Canada. He is awestruck to observe that the Canadians have an upper hand against America. His aspiration towards Atuk's success reveals that his expectation would be achieved to handle classes at Eglinton. He has become a sole inspiration for Atuk, he drops into Gore if he feels upset or dejected to get his consultation. Gore's suggestion 'Go back to the Bay, Atuk. You will only be corrupted here' (4) is the outcome of his love for innocent Eskimo. He knows Atuk is simple and naive and Toronto may turn cruel to him. So Gore's guidance should be looked upon with positive interpretations of love and respect for the Eskimo. The co-operation rendered

by Gore to Atuk's poetry represents the aspects of multiculturalistic society. Canada is a land which beckons everyone no matter whether Atuk's poetry lost its strength and power but still it is acknowledged and appreciated by people like Gore and Rory.

It is another instance which is seen in the novel that Gore is appointed as the president of the Canadian-Chinese Friendship Society which explicates his nature of appreciation of other culture owing to his service to the society. He takes a chance to make the Atuk's poem popular by scheduling a reading function at Cha-Cha-Chow-fyfein Restaurant where Atuk declares that he would be nothing without the support of Gore as he is solely responsible if he reads his poetry at this juncture. He reads out his poem:

I go hunt bear in white dawn,
good spirit come with me.
I go fish in silver twilight,
good spirit come with me.
Over the, white crust soon comes
forever night

good spirit,
O, spirit,
stay with me. (46)

The poem is published in the newspapers of Canada with the support of everyone. The day which he has read the poem is marked as a significant historical day in Canada. He gains his popularity from time to time and he tastes his success as he is invited to almost all the events such as literary party at Park Plaza hotel, Canadian television interview, a spectator viewing

wrestling match and other wonders of Toronto. It is such an opportunity which he feels so glad and he doesn't like to give up his pride and hence he has decided to stay in Toronto to enjoy enormous luxuries and comfort and not to return to Baffin Bay. Norman asks Atuk to be careful and he sees to it that he should not be deceived by any Canadian. He informs him that he has to be careful before signing the products by saying:

To these men you are not a noble
savage, a thing of beauty,
but something else to exploit and
murder. Maybe we can do
something about it Bring the papers
you've signed to my
house. We'll go over them together.
(81)

Atuk tells him:
Men with greased words come here
and ask me to sign little
papers. I am grateful for Toronto's
goodness to me. They
give me money. I sign. I am able to
send money to the Bay
to fight my ' people's hunger and
sickness. Is that bad.
Professor? (81)

He is introduced to Bette Dolana Canadian TV star and heroine, is another lady who facilitates Atuk. As soon as, Bette Dolan becomes the first eighteen years old marathon swimmer to swim Lake Ontario in less than twenty hours, she becomes Canada's darling. She is offered with many offers to endorse bathing suits, health foods, beauty lotions, chocolate bars. Her rejection

of offers explicates her hatred for money. She says to the reporters, 'I did not swim the lake for personal gain. I wanted to show the world what a Canadian girl could do (16,17). She considers, it is her responsibility to help the needy people, especially like Atuk. Her attitude of helping other displays the multicultural philosophy. She happily donates the bulk of the prize money over to her town council to build a fantastically well equipped gym for the crippled- children. She follows 'give love and get love' philosophy. All Canadians love her, she loves them all. She happily reveals her determination to aid him and to create confidence in him. She encourages him, 'Some are bald - you have a head full of hair. Some are blind- you can see. Everybody envies somebody else. You must learn to have faith in yourself (19). She reiterates normative multicultural stand when. Atuk asks him why she takes the trouble to help him. She replies, 'Because I have to help people. That's me' (19). To her question whether he .loves .her, Atuk reacts, 'Everybody loves Bette Dolan, so do I' (20). Her education to him about practicality in life develops their close relationship. His trust of her forces him to confess secretly the crime that he has: done that is eating bones of American soldier in Tundra. Bette, though feels horrified, ensures him not to worry too much by suggesting him not to disclose the secret to anyone. She tells him, 'The case is closed. You have nothing to worry about, darling' (24). Bette is nationalist, but her nationalism is not an obstacle to help people from other country and religion.

Atuk works hard to get equal status and success. His father, Old One guides and appreciates his son for it:

When Atuk had been a rough but impressionable Baffin Bay

boy the Old One - described in a prize winning National

Film Board short as 'wise and leathery, his neck laced by

many winds, the face bitten by decades offrost, and his eyes

accustomed to the hungers of the long night' - had been

taken him on his lap and told him, 'For an Eskimo boy to

make his mark in this world, Atuk, he must be brighter,

better, and faster than other boys'.
(53)

He gets up early and starts off his work and concentrates hard for his growth. He has to involve himself in several ventures as he has association with Hany Snipe of initiating a television business through the television series with him. It is obvious that the multicultural elements are found vivid that both the cultures mingle together to get success. He has shown his intention to learn Yiddish from Seigal to pay respect to Jewish' people. He shows tremendous passion and love for the Jewish community as most of the people who helped him from the distress and for his growth are Jewish. Atuk is in contact with Jew people like Gore, Goldie, and Seigal who have helped him to success in his career. He closely gets acquainted with the customs and traditions of the Jews. Atuk's love for Goldie Panofsky, the Jewish -

plumped and rosy cheeked daughter of Mr. Panofsky, is out of similarity that he finds in her and other Eskimo girls. She also loves him though her father opposes her. In a discussion with his father, Atuk expresses his wish to marry a non-Eskimo girl. His father is shocked and disturbed to listen to Atuk's decision of marrying out of race. His insistence on marrying a girl he loves- no matter for him whether the girl belongs to Eskimo tradition or not- is his yearning for launching the multicultural relation. The conversation between Atuk and his father goes like this:

I do not wish to hear of marriage with a non-Eskimo girl.

You know something, Old One you're a bigot.

You've never overcome your igloo mentality.

I'm proud of my heritage. So am I.

I refuse to be imprisoned by it. Tell me, Atuk.

What would you do about the children?

Richler has not idealized multiculturalism, but presented the fact in which Atuk's father opposes to marry a Jewish girl, Goldie. He also places the problems of children in the future and insists to follow the tradition. But is firm in his decision as he loves her sincerely. He tells his father that he is proud of his heritage and tries to convince him that they will provide modern education in which there will be respect for mixed culture. The discussion between them comprehends Atuk's multicultural stance. His pleading to his father to see the girl who is precisely

fine, very fat and oily, like one of Eskimos is an appeal for the relationship between the various cultures. This addresses of equality in girls of both cultures. Atuk's defiance to hunting on Saturday is his love as well as his respect for her. It will be impossible for him because according to the girl's community Saturday is a day of rest, he says, 'You see their God.....em, created the world in six days,and on the seventh day, Saturday, he rested'(85). The girl belongs to Jewish community and he compliments her tradition and culture. He tells his final decision to marry the girl and settle in Canada. He, however, expects the same co-operation and respect from her. He says, 'she will have to accept me as I am, an Eskimo' (88). The concept of multiculturalism expects the acceptance of other culture with its strengths and weaknesses. Atuk's opposition to his religion at an early age is the reaction against his father who does not agree over the multicultural marriage issue. He does not know Yiddish, but Goldie teaches him the language and inspires him. It is the hard work that is needed. 'Look at the Hebrews. We took a desert and made a garden out of it' (114) and Atuk openly praises them. 'I admire you people enormously for that' (114). He points out that the Eskimos believe Canada belongs to them. According to their religious book, Canada is Thurs. Goldie supports what Atuk says. Apart from their love, liberal and critical multiculturalism is reflected in the relation of Atuk and Goldie.

As soon as, Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) arrests Atuk with the

charge that Atuk had eaten Colonel Swiggert's bones, nearly all Canadian stand in support of him. There are processions to back him up. Goldie, leading the procession, sings:

It's a long way to the jailhouse,
it's a long way to go,
it's a long way to the jailhouse,
to the sweetest guy I know (162)

The people of Canada joined together and stage a protest against American authority against Canada in their land. Though everybody has extended support to Atuk for his release Jean-Paul McEwen, the most fearless columnist in Toronto, does not allow herself to flow with other Canadians. She is a straightforward lady. She openly comes against Atuk. She says,

To begin with I'd like to point out that I abhor everything

American as much as the next, ah, man. The record speaks

for itself. But we are going too far with Atuk. If he is guilty,

and I have a witness to prove he is, then he must pay. (161)

The Canadians prop up to give him freedom to join the programme 'Stick Out Your Neck' under armed escort. After answering correctly two questions with the help of Twerityman:, Atuk fails to answer the third one. Then it is declared that Atuk is dead, when he undergoes the guillotines.

Conclusion:

Canada has done quite a lot for his success to make him enjoy the comfort and the luxury of the land. It fails to protect the

Eskimo that it made him fell steeply and has almost become a proof for a catastrophic tragic death of an Eskimo poet. It is observed from this article that the cultural diversity could make the people proud of living in the land and it would go to such an extent that it would claim their lives. Richler handles the theme perfectly as he has shown an indictment towards the American authority in Canadian land.

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