

## Conclusion

Jewish experience is one worth writing about and it is largely in the eyes of the beholder. It depends on the prism through which one perceives the world and for the writer, the skill with which that experience is rendered into words. A strong flavour of the experience of the Jews and Jewish life in Canada comes through Richler's work. His works reflect the Jewish way of life, their place in the society, their faith, belief, values and thus their predicaments and prospects. Particularly enticing is Richler's intricate and compelling analyses of how Jews and Jewish life reconstructs and is self-consciously reconstructed in the Diaspora and yet somehow retains an air of difference and a deep connection to collective memory and cultural rootedness. Supporting this trait of the Jews, Morton Weinfeld says that Jews have adapted and made Canada theirs but at the same time, not adapted and remained apart in important ways. This act of remaining the "other" is typical of Jewish, as it is not willful but because of their tradition and attachment to the culture. "To be a Jew and a Canadian is to emerge from the ghetto twice" says Richler. To emerge is to achieve some outlook. Richler's emerged protagonists of St. Urbain's street reveal how far they have come, how much they have struggled and are struggling and how much they have liberated

themselves from the clutches of social, religious and racial discriminations.

Richler's boyhood experience was firmly fixed in St. Urbain Street and that is the place which blends his memory and imagination. The commitment to St. Urbain Street was not the most obvious decision in the 1950's. When others were looking for more universal backgrounds, Richler was choosing an intensely local scene – "parochial". And when Canadian literature in English was produced mostly by descendants of the British and Irish, Richler was announcing not only that he was a Jew but that both he and his novels were tied permanently to the life of Jews. Jewishness in Richler's imaginative world is a social condition determined by the facts of history. It has an inescapably, omnipresent, day-to-day reality which informs the life of his characters at every turn. His novels, therefore deal with the social man, attempting to understand and order the apparent disorder that surrounds him.

Not only the protagonists, but also many minor Jewish characters of Richler's novels are shown as men wandering or undertaking journey for various reasons. Their predicament to wander seems to be an extension of the historical event, the Diaspora. The Jews were wandering through the world because they didn't have a nation of their own; they were taken as slaves to various parts of the

world by the conquerors. They were extracted and exploited physically and economically but chased out of the lands for no obvious reasons. The myths and tales about the Jews spread unfavourable stories about them. They fled from land to land thinking that every land is their own, till they are driven out of it. But their life in Diaspora did not discourage them from reaching their destiny—the Promised Land. In fact their life in exile strengthened their determination. From the ideas of Sigmund Freud, it could be said that the religion succeeded in saving many Jews from individual neurosis created by mental infantilism and mass-delusion. The bond between God and the people of Israel was conditioned by the wanderings of the Jewish people from place to place and environment. The mission of Israel was cemented in a mutual covenant of love between God and Israel. This belief helped Jews compensate for the hurts and humiliations of life in exile. Chaim (TA), the Jewish father figure manages to combine the two roles of grandfatherly Jewish sage and wandering Jew.

While the historic Jew wandered for physical safety and survival, the modern Jew flees in search of identity, both as a Jew and as an individual. Noah (SOSH) and Joshua (JTN) journey to experience the world outside St. Urbain's. Jake (SUHM) and Moses (SGWH) go in search of fulfilling their artistic thirst, whereas Duddy (ADK) and Solomon (SGWH) show thirst for material progress. Chaim, like the

historical Jews, is on his way to the Promised Land. A few others wander for survival and safer environment. The Jews presented in Richler's novels have settled in a country which is still not their own. So they continue to face the same or similar problems of racial, religious and social discrimination. For example, in *The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz*, Jews were not allowed to own land and were consequently forced into the role of shopkeepers. Duddy, obsessed by his *zeyda's* words "a man without land is nobody", purchases land in the name of a French chamber-maid Yvette and subsequently changes it to his name. The various tensions that prevail in the immediate society make Richler's protagonists run their race. The Jew is still on the run.

The problem of Jewish identity and the predicament of the Jews regarding their identity are examined through the novels of Richler. Most of Richler's Jews identify themselves not by the observance of the religion but adhering to the culture. There are various ways in which Richler's characters identify themselves. While the older generation Jews associate themselves mostly with the religion, the younger generation view it differently. They feel it is their culture and respect to their tradition that identify them as Jews and not the religion. Their involvement with the formation of Israel, compassion towards their community, the importance they attach to *kosher* food and

historical factors like experiences of anti-Semitism, the memory of the Holocaust, the feeling of alienation make them Jews.

The consciousness of the Holocaust strengthens Jewish identity in the postwar world. Yet, in Richler's work, the Holocaust also represents in a most concrete way, the vulnerability of the Jew in general society. In *St. Urbain's Horseman*, uncle Abe's experiences of anti-Semitism and the Holocaust make him think that submissiveness will bring security for his community. Blumberg (TA) and Melech (SOSH) and a few other older Jews could not openly blame the gentiles for their predicament. Whereas for some, the memories of Holocaust and anti-Semitism strengthen them. Joey (SUHM) becomes a model when he takes active role in resisting the local French Canadian anti-Semitism. When Jewish children are bullied on the school play ground and a youth is beaten up, Joey shows aggressive disapproval for their anti-Semitic act.

Social isolation and Alienation are the other predicaments the Jews face, not only in Canada but also throughout the world. Hornstein and Karp in *A Choice of Enemies* are outnumbered by gentiles and remain isolated. The alienation of Jews from America during the McCarthy era, the treatment of Jews in Spain in the novels, *The Acrobats* and *Joshua Then and Now* stand as solid examples of isolation of Jews throughout the world even after the end of Nazi era

and the two world wars. For some, the feelings of isolation are generated to a great extent by their unconscious identification with the history of Jewish persecution. In spite of their alienation, Jews in various corners of the world have built “floating bridges” between the worlds and across the nations.

Above all, a Jew is identified as a Jew when he stands up for the values. His life in Diaspora had taught him the values of perseverance and faith. The amazing quality of the Jews is their perseverance and that's why “the final solution” did not become the final chapter of the Jewish history. Carlos (JTN), Duddy (ADK), Chaim (TA), Ephraim, Solomon, Moses (SGWH) and many other Jews stand as an embodiment of perseverance. The ignominy and insolence by the people and the nations throughout the world had taught them tolerance and value of peace. For example Chaim in *The Acrobats*, preaches the value of Tolerance, love and faith to the gentile protagonist. In spite of their life in Diaspora, the Jews have kept their family values intact. Richler's successful characters are shown as people who are either family centered or who have respect for family values. But Richler didn't also forget to rattle his own creations for the loss of values. Thus when a Jew deviates from his values, he is criticized. The expectations on the Jew, regarding the values, are high. It can even be viewed that a Jew is expected to give importance to the values

so that he'll not avenge the persecutions, Holocaust and gas chambers.

The enslavement of Jews by the nations, had taught them the value of education and emancipation. In order to free themselves from the social discriminations of ignorance and illiteracy, they started to work hard to give their community an identity and strength. The result is, the finest brains of the human race are Jewish, and whose intellectual output has enriched the whole humanity. They excelled in all fields. One can say that there is no field in which the Jew has not left his foot print. They have proved that the best grapes grow in the roughest soil.

One has to agree that Jews have dramatically high rates of educational attainment and tend to earn more. They are far more likely to be employed in the "professions" and stay in the labour force longer. These trends represent the mainstream.

However, there is a significant group in the Canadian Jewish community that does not enjoy this prosperity. There is still substantial inequality between men and women. This is evident from Richler's treatment of women characters in his novels. He has not spent enough time and talent to mould his female characters. His women are not given much attention. They are not full grown characters; their development is forgotten in the middle of the novel; and their

characterizations get mutilated. May be because of his early influences of Hemingway, it was quite natural on the part of Richler to concentrate more on the heroes than on the heroines. Though his female characters are painted with light streaks and strokes, he exhibits a variety in his creations that they are not simply reduced to wax mouldings like Hemingway's women. The predicament of Jewish women, as presented by Richler though not commendable, reveals that there are inhibitions to break free the cocoons in which they have bound themselves. There are some women like Jenny (SUHM), Miriam (BV), and Ida (SOSH) who show signs of liberation. They do not demand equality but exercise their rights of equality in all aspects: social, professional and emotional.

Long before Richler died, he and his novels had become a part of the mainstream of Canadian life and literature. Various reasons are stated for the assimilation of Richler's characters. The terror of the Holocaust is one of the motives of assimilation, for example Karp (CE) and Carlos (JTN). Some express their desire to assimilate into the gentile society for social emancipation. However, what Jews as individuals may have gained by emancipation, Jews as a group lost. By leaving the ghetto and attaining the status of citizens through various ways including intermarriage, the Jews loosened the bounds of Jewish group identity. One is forced to believe that this predicament

of the Jews seems to be quite inevitable. Unlike the Jews in the Arab world and in Eastern Europe, the Jews of Canada saw themselves as nationals of their countries of citizenship and worshippers in the “Mosaic faith”. But some elder Jews of Richler never advocated assimilation, for they are fully cognizant of their origins. Though the younger generation attempt assimilation, they return to their roots or long to return. They however graft themselves with the gentile society, find it difficult to merge and grow with them in their soil. The Jew-Gentile relationship in the novels of Richler is a perfect illustration of this. The inter-personal relationships become increasingly remote in his novels. The tension between the Jew and the gentile is the recurring motif in every novel of Richer. The Jews in his novels are characterized by deep mistrust and intransigence and it is often revealed in a ruthless, aggressive attitude towards the gentiles. The modern world though does not discriminate the Jews obviously—there is surely an undercurrent of anti-Semitism—religious and racial. But Jews have found their own way of dealing with it now unlike the historical Jews.