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Thematic Similarities in the Concept of Survival in Michael Ondaatje's *The English Patient* and Rohinton Mistry's *A Fine Balance*

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Abstract

Michael Ondaatje's *The English Patient* and Rohinton Mistry's *A Fine Balance* have thematic similarities. They have similar views on the concept of survival amongst caste system and racism. Suppression and survival are the two issues of the social systems of any nation. A close comparative study reveals that the characters of Michael Ondaatje and Rohinton Mistry have shown exposed survival approach amidst socio-cultural problems. In *A Fine Balance*, Ishvar and Om forego of their identity as Chamaars which eventually leads them to become sufferers to the very identical thing they fought against. Likewise, in *The English Patient* we find the English Patient letting go off his foreign identity only to give way to it. During a time of disaster the truth stares right on the face that nothing is more important than one's identity.

Keywords

Caste System; Racial Segregation; and Concept of Survival.

Michael Ondaatje's *The English Patient* and Rohinton Mistry's *A Fine Balance* have thematic similarities. They have similar views on the concept of survival amongst caste system and racism. Suppression and survival are the two issues of the social systems of any nation. A close comparative study reveals that the characters of Michael Ondaatje and Rohinton Mistry have shown exposed survival approach amidst socio-cultural problems. In *A Fine Balance*, Ishvar and Om forego of their identity as Chamaars which eventually leads them to become sufferers to the very identical thing they fought against. Likewise, in *The English Patient* we find the English Patient letting go off his foreign identity only to give way to it. During a time of disaster the truth stares right on the face that nothing is more important than one's identity.

The search for identity dismisses the very idea of one fixed identity by acknowledging that identity is entirely solution. So that contact between two people can be equally influencing rather than a war of argument and dominations. This is evident in *A Fine Balance* from Ishvar and Om who are at first Chamaars then turn to Darjis. Even Dina who initially insists on differentiation between herself and tailors later accepts them into her family. In *The English Patient* we find how the characters Almasy, Kip, Hana be unable to find their identity in the wilderness and are equally influenced by one another.

The appropriate example is Almasy from *The English Patient* who is Hungarian but-becomes an English Patient because he speaks English and was found by the British army burnt beyond recognition. One's identity is inescapable prejudiced by contact with other people.

In Canada as well in India, the cultural identity of each person is multiplied and continuously being prejudiced cross-culturally and so categorizing cultural groups becomes impracticable. This is not to speak that

all Canadians and Indians would adopt a normalized identity but that Canadian and Indian identities would be exclusive to each person, the product of manifold and various influences.

Acceptance of cross-culturalism

The acceptance of cross-culturalism as a policy as opposed to multiculturalism in Canada and India encourages the gratitude of communal authority and with it mutual respect between different cultural groups would come out.

Cross-culturalism consequently discusses about the impact of one culture over another. It stresses on unity rather than demarcations. While 'multiculturalism' or 'mosaic' stresses on the demarcation in maintaining one's individuality and thereby contributing to the society at large, cross-culturalism stresses on the recognition of cultural influence of over the other and thereby how similar we are different. This attitude would cover the way for unity with the change in mentality over the social demarcations. Voicing out for the unspoken becomes a great responsibility. This responsibility in every citizen could lay concrete on the way for a better society if social issues such as casteism and racism are being spoken out.

In spite of these tribulations, the city is center of wealth, industry, and entertainment, and they continue to attract far more millions of refugees from rural poverty, than they can possibly accommodate. Bombay is undeniably India's best global city. But can Bombay make it into the universal league? The optimists among those who love the city will adore it. There is the bleak realism that hits on the face; it is not the laws that are missing but the enforcement of the laws that are being underprivileged of. Why are the laws not being enforced even in the educated 21st century? The bare fact is that people are not slow to change but they are opposed to change. As change of any kind leads to new set of rules and values.

The age old practices have to be completed with or at slightest customized to give space to new ones. If this has to change, the mentality of the people has to change. They have to be broad- minded in order to welcome the change.

Tradition and Change

What is the use of living just asserting on to simple rituals and traditions? Meaningless rituals and traditions have to be altered to pave way for new ones; the culture changes with the society. The 21st century has seen a number of changes in the pasture of technology which is considered to be a boon. In the similar way, the mentality of the people towards the age old practices such as racism and caste system should change; pave the way for a new and better future. What is good in tradition must be kept alive by practicing them, but the rest can be done away with.

It is the society which creates a culture with changing trends for each environment. Change for the better must be always welcomed. Education is not fruitful unless the theories learnt are applied virtually. Education helps us to gain knowledge and knowledge must lead to the art of questioning the social issues and coming out with probable solution. Thus if something is considered to be wrong in the traditions of a society education must give them the courage to see the realism. It is to give you an idea about the way for the change in mentality. This leads to the progressive growth of the society.

Single drops of water mount up to create an ocean. When change is met with resistance as, it is must be harmony among those who stand for the change and raise their voice against the social evils. As one starts, change starts happening. The voice of one can be easily silenced but the voice of many is heard; change can at least be a hope in the near future. Equality is different to diversity. But to find a way between both we need to hit a balance. Welcome the change needed, and stick to the roots as well this is called the art of survival.

The Conservation between Cultures

The term "mosaic" assumes the conservation of difference between distinct cultures which together produce a whole wide-ranging cultural representation. The term "multiculturalism," likewise, carries the suggestion that each cultural group, while fundamental to society, remains dividing and separate. So, "multi-culturalist" allows for those with freedom to mistreatment the idea of "difference". As means to fasten and stereotype cultural -identity and impose a hierarchy of value upon separate particular cultural groups. "Cross-culturalism" offers a preferable option as it dispenses with the notion of separate cultural groups by acknowledging, the unpredictability of cultural identity and the mutual influence of one cultural identity on another.

Education, the Powerful Medium

The powerful medium is Education, which can be used to link the gap between the higher and lower castes. But casteism and racism needs to be abolished the change in the mentality of the people is very important. The change of mentality of the people takes time and plan by each and every individual. It is the socio-responsibility of every individual to retrospect.

To analyze why untouchability has not yet been abolished even after independence, they must voice out against such violence and not just be an unreceptive witness. Even if a few, it will be a beginning for a change.

Education sans the discussion of caste and race questions cannot eliminate the caste and racial prejudice, in turn propagates it very strongly. If education on the one hand propagates the evils of caste system and racial prejudice and emphasizes on the difference, it will not lead to the desired result. The change in the mentality of the people can be brought out by analyzing the roots of caste and race. The roots of both these problems state the fact that had always had a cultural mix-up either through assault or through trade with different cultures and races. Therefore, the notion of a pure

caste or race is a myth which does not exist in today's society. Down the pages of history they have already intermingled and now it is a cross-cultural society.

Once this understanding is brought out the violence which take place in the name of caste and race seems futile. The very idea of purity does not exist in reality and therefore they have no basis for differentiation in the name of caste and race. The ultimate truth is that civilization is gradually fading by severely holding on meaningless traditions. What is the use of education if the theory learnt is not almost appropriate? As educated people, they have to improve themselves in knowledge and use it for the better of the society by applying them practically to abolish social evils. Education does not stop with academic brilliance and the fruit of it is appreciated only when it is practically applied causally to the growth of the society.

Education system has to keep updating itself and grow with the current tendency and provide to the needs of the society. Activity based learning is the current trend where the classes are student centered. The students have to participate in debates and with possible solutions to abolish these social evil. Everyday situation must be taken into consideration and the progress made by the student to abolish the social evils such as caste and racial discrimination both within their educational institutions and in the society.

One Globe through Education

Education has indeed taken a new description to support these causes instead of eradicate them. The problem is not the lack of principles, to abolish caste and race but the enforcement of the laws. The basic survival is threatened beyond limits. The victims are divided in their struggle for survival and are strained to show the discrimination.

An end has to come for these massacres, one day someone has to say it is enough. As illustrated by the novels taken for study the voices of a few can be easily hidden but many will make a stand to be heard and pave the way for the change.

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