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Literature essay

Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn's book "One Day in The Life of Ivan Denisovich" portrays the life of common Russians affected by the Soviet period of the 1950s. The author has used literature for transmitting the miserable lives of Russians. The book reflects the use of different literary devices for representing themes of hope and perseverance that encouraged victims of Stalinist labor camps to endure sufferings. Solzhenitsyn has used his literary skills for providing criticism against the Soviet Union and communism. His purpose in the novel is to question the inhumane role of Gulag forced labor camp system. The author through his remarkable tale changed perceptions of people regarding known facts. The Soviet writer has handled the most horrific features of the Stalin era.

The task of Solzhenitsyn is to select universal questions that stress on spiritual sorrows, history with which humans were born and time immemorial that cease to exist. The novel has been an attempt by the Russian author to share his Christian beliefs and eternal questions regarding freedom. The themes of the story exhibit the moral duty of self-sacrifice and self-restraint. Solzhenitsyn has used his personal experiences of labor camps because he had encountered the circumstances where he was imprisoned. A personal encounter with bondage allows him to provide a deeper analysis of the Soviet's role. Although the Stalin camp was for political prisoners many innocents were also trapped there. The only crime of Solzhenitsyn was that he made “disrespectful remarks about Stalin” (Solzhenitsyn 20). He was sentenced to the labor camp for eight years. Even after completing a period of eight years he was sent to the perpetual exile in Kazakhstan. In the forced labor camp he became a writer and shared his views about the harsh reality of the Soviet Union.

In his book "One Day in The Life of Ivan Denisovich", Solzhenitsyn captures the crucial experience of forced labor camps. Through the character of Ivan, the author shares how suffocated lives are in prisons. The events portrayed by Solzhenitsyn reflects the inhuman regulations such as starvation rations and struggle for food. After a whole day of hard work the prisoners find inadequate food to eat. Irrespective of all the odds, the Russian author explains possibilities of survival. He mentions, “our present system [the USSR in 1973] is unique in world history, because over and above its physical and economic constraints, it demands of us total surrender 89 of our souls, continuous and active participation in the general, conscious lie. To this putrefaction of the soul, this spiritual enslavement, human beings who wish to be human cannot consent" (Solzhenitsyn 24). This reflects the courage of Russian authors to promote faith by giving a positive message to the people. The book was written in 1962 when many people remained victims of the forced labor camps. Many lost hopes in the deadly fight for their lives. Solzhenitsyn thus emerged as a motivated writer who aimed at giving hope to the people. His central character Ivan provided a role model for the Russians who were destructed by the inhumane laws.

The central character in the novel is Ivan Denisovich Shukov who is a peasant and his only crime was to flee from Germans. His crime was responded by imprisonment in 1943 while later he was returned to his own lines. He couldn't tell the truth that he was in German hands because it would make his own lines believe that he was a spy. Ivan was well aware that his truth would result in his sentence to the camp as a spy. The camp conditions are extremely terrific like that of Karanga camp witnessed by Solzhenitsyn in person. Ivan struggles hard to survive in the milieu-ruled regime. The laws of the camp were inhumane and no different from that of the jungle.

Ivan exhibits the traits of individuality and personal freedom. “Come and warm up under the moon like the wolves. The feelings and role played by Ivan depict that he resisted against the lies that prevailed in the prison system. The author mentions, "wolves' sun," that's what they sometimes called the moon where Shukhov came from” (Solzhenitsyn 190). This reflects his ability to relinquishing his past story. The character managed to use his strength for attaining freedom. His freedom can be seen in his attempts to finding meaning in of his life and by doing things in the camp that makes him feel better. The author has tried to transmit a positive message of staying hopeful and determined in all conditions. The faith and hope of Ivan help him to complete his imprisonment.

Solzhenitsyn has attempted to transmit the flaws of Stalin camps by creating characters who suffered the repercussions. Another important character used by the author for illustrating the brutality of labor camps is of Soviet Navy Capitan. His only crime is his religion because he is a Baptist. Another young guy was imprisoned in the camp for taking milk to some outlaw according to Ukrainian law. This caused a sentence of 25 years. In camps, everyone is doubted and suspected if they are spies or not. In a group of 20 to 30 people, six spies are suspected. There is a real spy in the group Moldavian who has provided his services to the Germans in the past. A man who was the son of a rich peasant was drummed by the officers. After the incident, the officers were shot in the purge. The settings of the camp and relationship of people with each other depict that everyone is cheating on each other. People cannot trust anyone in the camp because they doubt their intentions. It seems like a game is played among all members of the camp and the one who observe rules and learns the art of tackling people has the highest possibilities of survival. Everyone follows rules for their own interest such as the Capitan avoid fights because he would be sent to the sub-zero guardhouse for the ten days. He is also well aware of his deteriorating health because the more he lived the more his health will get worst.

Every character is undergoing a personal conflict in which they need to choose between life and death. Although survival in labor camps is even more painful than death but many people continue to struggle for gaining freedom. However, there are string characters like Ivan who remains hopeful in all circumstances. Survival has become a triumph for the survivors of the camp. The author has created the character of Ivan to show how his faith encouraged him to endure the pain. Ivan works the whole day and feels a sense of contentment before getting to bed. This reflects his firm belief in survival. He starts taking pleasure in in the work assigned to him. he worked hard and followed rules for avoiding punishments. The author transmits the themes of perseverance and simplicity of the Russian people by displaying the character of Ivan. The character has strong relevance with the people who encountered the brutality of Stalin labor camps. Ivan did not panic irrespective of all the hardships and continue to survive.

 The Russian author through his literary skills has tried to convince the world about the adverse consequences of Stalin labor camps experienced by the people. By portraying the settings of the camp, Solzhenitsyn manages to transmit the darker reality of Soviet's role during the 1950s. In the book, Solzhenitsyn mentions, “a dim red sun had risen over the deserted compound: over pre-fab panels half buried in snowdrifts over the broken crank of an earthmoving machine, a jug, a heap of scrap iron. There were drains, trenches, holes everywhere” (Solzhenitsyn 990). This conveys the miserable conditions of the camp in which people like Ivan had to survive. Living in the camp was claustrophobic and the survival was dependent on the will power of the victims. The author convinces the audience that common Russians were brave and strong. Although they encountered many deadly events but their stamina helped them to handle the misery (McDonough, 1975).

The story of Ivan is also used by the author to claim that Russians cared about morality. The moral duty of the central character becomes visible in his decision of survival. This is because he accepted the role of nature and religion. Despair is against the ideology of faith so Ivan managed to stay hopeful in all conditions. he mentions, “Shukhov has "never given or taken a bribe from anybody, and he hadn't learned that trick in the camp either” (Solzhenitsyn 48). This reflects attempts of the author to show that Russians irrespective of tragic situation managed to keep their moral values. Ivan had never been involved in corrupt practices that reflects his simplicity and purity at heart.

Solzhenitsyn's literary style allows him to provide an in-depth analysis of the situations faced by the common people. To add clarity to his argument he has created the settings of camp that have relevance with the labor camps of the Soviet Union. The era of the 1950s brought significant destructions for the people of Russia that remains unknown to the world. Another significant part of the Russian author's is the use of their personal experiences for narrating the incidents of the past. The author transmits the harsh realities by stating, “the mess was its usual self frosty air streaming in from the door, men at the tables packed as tight as seeds in a sunflower, men wandering between tables, men trying to barge their way through with full trays” (Solzhenitsyn 250). The settings transmit the themes of misery and demise. The purpose of Solzhenitsyn is to provide evidence to his claims that Russians were at the losing end. Common people suffered the unintelligible decisions of the state.

Solzhenitsyn's writing reflects a literary miracle by creating the character if Ivan who exemplifies the traits of the simple Russian man. his resistance to evil and power portray his hardy, cunning and kind nature. The role played by Ivan depicts that he is a jack of all trades. The settings portrayed by the author reveals that common Russians were victims of the Soviet convention. This becomes more evident in the Stalin labor camps that caused pain to the innocent. The purpose of Solzhenitsyn is to explain the audience that not all Russians enjoyed the power during Soviet rule. The masses, including common people, were the victim themselves. The author has used his thoughts for transforming the beliefs of the world that make people think that Russians are dangerous. The role taken by Solzhenitsyn in the novel is to convince readers that an innocent and a positive side of Russians existed even during the Soviet rule. However, it remained hidden from the worlds due to the socio-political factors. The Russians have been misrepresented by the media because they were inclined to blame all people for the powerful role played by the state. The world remains unaware of the facts that the Soviet Union caused the worst damages to Russian people (Salisbury, 1963).

Through the central character, Solzhenitsyn attempts to highlight the psychological implications. The principle paradox explains the transformation process performed by the state at a psychological level. The power structure influenced people negatively because it removed hope and faith. There are still people who are strong in character like Ivan who learn to see hope in the darkness. The author has tried to recreate the reality of Stalin camps and its effects on the people. The ability of Ivan to see positivity in the darkness reflects his firm belief on faith. He didn’t complain about the situations, instead accepted the reality and managed to survive. Hence the purpose of Solzhenitsyn is to appreciate many Russians who endured the brutality of the labor camps during Soviet rule. Through the character of Ivan, he transmits the belief that many simple Russians were brave and searched for freedom.

Freedom remains another significant aspect of Solzhenitsyn’s writing. The author has tried to shed light on the concept of liberty and how common Russians lacked it. The author has attempted to transmit the realistic themes that freedom was unattainable due to externally imposed constraints. In the novel, the author mentions, “quite inadequate to save us" and is valuable only as a means to a higher goal” (Solzhenitsyn 18). The writing of the author thus conveys the oppressed state of the simple Russians.

The overall analysis of the book depicts that the Russian author emphasized on recreating the settings of forced labor camps for changing the perceptions of the world about Russians. The themes of the story exhibit the moral duty of self-sacrifice and self-restraint. The role taken by Solzhenitsyn in the novel is to convince readers that an innocent and a positive side of Russians existed even during the Soviet rule.

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