Chapter V
Conclusion
CONCLUSION

Despite the evidence of human misery and conflict, Malamud manages to affirm his faith in man. He succeeds in finding the vision through which the elusive and enigmatic sense of life’s possibilities counter man’s fall from grace. He regains the vision which consists that where there is no hope, man will continue to hope, where the spirit cannot endure it will continue to endure. Frank N. Magill says:

Malamud’s work may be understood in the context of mid-twentieth century American Literature. When he arrived upon the literary scene, he disagreed with the period’s twin pillars of negativism and nihilism and his work is a reaction to this prevailing trend (Magill 1979: 1567).

Both in Literature and History, there is a tradition of community guilt in which the entire group must suffer for the individual transgression. In the old Testament, it is said that in the days of David, there was a famine for three years. When David wanted to know the reason, the Lord said that it was for the soul. Oedipus practised patricide and there came plague on all Thebes as punishment. The original sin has tained all generations descending from Adam. Yet men have not given up violence, aggression, bloodshed, and murder.

The world at present needs compassion, tolerance and understanding. These qualities alone can save man from man himself.
In the world of Malamud’s fiction compassion, love and humanism which are human values rather than physical circumstances, give meaning and strength to one’s life. Malamud’s approach to the inevitable human suffering is positive. Barrett says.

Positivist man is a curious creature who dwells in the tiny island of light . . . while the whole surrounding area in which ordinary men live from day to day and have their dealings with other men, is consigned to the other darkness of the meaningless (Barrett 1958 : 19).

Malamud’s protagonists renounce desires like status and security and discover after bitter experience that love, responsibility and compassion make life more purposeful than wealth and fame. Capturing the bitter reality of suffering, Malamud shows the possibilities for spiritual growth through such suffering. It is because of their concern for others, protagonists like Frank Alpine, Seymour Levin, Yakov and Fidelman become human beings in the real sense.

Those who accept suffering not as Fate has fixed it, but as part of life, will find life purposeful and meaningful. Such people may suffer materially but they are spiritually higher and richer. Morris Bober in The Assistant and Yakov in The Fixer are men who stoically but without grudgingly accept self - transcendence and become morally superior. Their capacity for renewal cannot be blocked by their adversity in life.
Malamud, a life-long New Yorker, is a writer of genuine accomplishment. He wrote at a time when few writers succeeded in understanding and describing the bizarre facts of contemporary life. He must have thought and thought and worried about what might be called the old Testament questions - “Why should we be good, when there is no reward for goodness? How can we have faith, when there are no signs to confirm our faith? How can we have love, if our love is met only with scorn or violence?” (Richard Astro and Jackson J. Benson : 17).

Malamud is a writer who is able to touch the conscience and excite the visual imagination through his odd, twisted stories of fateful trivial happenings. His great achievement as an artist and as a moralist has come from his success in creating a distinctive fictional world that is embodiment of his ‘Jewish’ humanism.

Malamud does not agree with the view that men are born vicious and cruel, but circumstances turn them to become bad. For instance, Frank Alpine, the Italian Jew hater, fails to understand the value of shared suffering, poverty and sorrow. Aspiring dreams and harsh realities tear him to pieces and he miserably fails to see himself clearly. Similarly, Roy Hobbs in The Natural finds Iris Lemon’s beauty marred by her status as a grand-mother. But S. Levin decides to stick with Pauline Gilley and no longer lusting after her under the spell of romance.
Freedom, in its real sense, does not mean running away from responsibilities and relationships. In fact, Malamud in all his novels have time and again revealed that real freedom means accepting obligations and relationships despite the adverse situations in life. Levin, the protagonist of the novel *A New Life* has realised that “life is holy” rather than happy and human failings place man beyond redemption.

Malamud expects a writer to recognise and release what is human in man. To re-create man’s humanity and to hold up the “mirror” to that inner “mystery” is vital to the writer’s art. The writer alone, Malamud insists, reminds man that by striving, he invents “nothing less than freedom”.

The theme of suffering and compassion is of central concern in Jewish literature. The Jewish tradition stresses on universal justice, love and compassion as the basic principles of moral life. The Jewish prophets and philosophers like Philo, Amos and Hosea considered Judaism as an instrument to achieve moral perfection. Malamud, who is not a religious Jew, strongly believes that Jewishness consists in suffering for one another. This principle forms an essential quality of compassion. The two novels *The Assistant* and *The Fixer* bring out this golden principle more effectively than Malamud’s other novels.

Malamud’s novels gain significance since almost all of them affirm man’s ability to realise himself even in trying circumstances. Frank
Alpine, an anti-Jew, exploits the generosity and innocence of Morris Bober who saves him from hunger and pain. But working his way from cynicism, Frank undergoes physical as well as mental suffering and proves that he is not a human being without grace and compassion. He even deserts his own religion and becomes a Jew and remains loyal to the family of Morris Bober. Along with The Fixer, and The Assistant forms an integral part of Malamud's moral vision.

Malamud never individualises but universalises suffering which forms an important and inescapable reality of human experience. It may be even said without hesitation that Malamud is the only writer in American Literature who has glorified the finer aspects of suffering and compassion. When all human beings, instead of detesting and trying to escape from suffering, whole-heartedly accept it for the sake of others, it becomes meaningful and purposeful. Morris Bober, the simple and good-hearted Jew in The Assistant and Yakov in The Fixer suffer not for themselves but for the sake of their fellow-men.

Compassion is within the reach of the human power since it is born of understanding. Lack of compassion is the root cause of all problems in the modern world. Every religion invariably teaches human values of suffering and love for others. As the quintessential spirit of Jewish humanism, compassion has inspired many Jewish writers. But Malamud alone makes suffering and compassion authentic human experience in his works. Dogged by misfortunes and
injustice, his characters try to seek redemption through love, sacrifice and understanding.

Malamud expresses deep concern at the growing decay of compassion which alone binds the human beings together. His novels may be called parables of possible regeneration of the self. They squarely deal with man morally as well as psychologically. The modern man's predicament is movingly brought out in these lines:

We are lonely ..... We've learnt to pity one another for being alone. And we've learnt that nothing remains to be discovered except compassion (Jacob Bronowski: 161 - 162).

A careful study of Malamud's works reveals the fact that he is a writer with commitment. To him, man is the vital source. In man there is an abundant source of goodness and capacity to rise above from the ocean of his sufferings. Man, of all the creations of God, is supreme and has the ability to transform himself from adversity. When human values vanish not only from literature but also from life itself, Malamud strikes a positive and optimistic note by showing that man's capacity for renewal cannot be blocked by the adverse situations in his life.

No writer has shown the brighter side of suffering which is potentially beneficial to humanity. It makes one learn to accept
one's burdens with dignity and find in them inner growth and fulfilment. Advancement. Suffering makes human beings matured and experienced and puts them in proper perspective. By accepting suffering and learning to be compassionate, man attains self-transcendence, moral growth and spiritual advancement. Suffering as well as compassion, brings understanding for Roy Hobbs, Frank Alpine, Yakov and Levin who finally learn the great values of life. Compassion shapes Malamud's moral vision in his works. The real spirit of compassion lies in the innate, not imposed, sense of responsibility of man for the fellow-sufferer. Compassion makes life richer in experience and better in morality. This affirmative vision is the unifying force of Malamud's novels as well as his stories.

It is possible to say with authority and assurance that the protagonists of Malamud have suffered sufficiently to realise the true value of life. For example, in the novel A New Life Levin's "new life" has compassion as a motivating force and it humanises him to life when he readily accepts Pauline and her adopted children. Roy Hobbs in The Natural realises towards the end of the novel that he has not learnt anything from his past experience. Iris Lemon, his female mentor, who is capable of love and affection, makes him realise the value of the experience of suffering, and ultimately he realises that he has 'to suffer again'.

The Tenants makes a powerful plea for a better understanding and harmony between the blacks and the Jews. It shows
Malamud’s deep concern about the lack of compassion in a world of growing nihilistic tendencies. In Dubin’s Lives, William Dubin struggles to uphold his commitment to life. He at last returns to his wife and children after admitting his failure as a loving and responsible husband and father respectively.

Malamud affirms everything that is human. He is extremely pained and shocked at the devaluation and degradation of human life in the modern world. He is genuinely and seriously interested in bringing out man’s “hidden strength” in the resources of the spirit. The intense reverence for man and his dignity forms an essential and integral part in Malamud’s moral vision. In an interview, he says:

If you don’t respect man, you cannot respect my work. I’m in defense of the human (Haskal Frankel: 40).

Malamud portrays his protagonists who are constantly engaged in searching for a better life. His characters fall a prey to endless evils. After endless suffering, they gain the experience to realise the meaning and the value of life. A total change takes place in their outlook on life. This search for a new meaning in life forms a common code of conduct for Malamud’s protagonists.

In the novel The Natural Roy Hobbs, the hero falls a prey to acquisitive individualism. He does not care for community feeling, his fellow - players, team-spirit and above all for his nation.
He is totally bereft of humanism. Only after suffering for long, wisdom dawns on him and he ultimately comes to realise the uselessness and futility of his sensual pleasures.

Malamud highlights the value of humanism and compassion in the novel The Fixer. Yakov Shepsovitch Bok, the protagonist, longs to become a man of fortune. He finds life dull and drab. To make matters worse, he has no issue. He becomes disgusted in life and loses all faith in God and His working. He shows no concern for his wife Raisl. He deserts her and turns a deaf ear to his father-in-law’s advice. He is totally devoid of compassion for his father-in-law and his life. Fate continues to torture him and he is imprisoned for murdering a young Christian boy in Russia.

Yakov is subjected to many a physical torture in the prison. The jail authorities pump blood out of his phallus with a machine especially meant for the purpose. He cries with pain. “My Lord, what have I done to deserve such tortures” (.68). He, thus, becomes a victim of Christian plot against the Jewish. He realises that his ambition of seeking better opportunities is just a wild goose chase. The scenes and episodes which present Yakov’s miserable condition for nearly three years of imprisonment form the major part of the novel The Fixer.

Yakov gradually learns that only by giving up one’s self more freely, self-worth and dignity are won. He also learns from
sufferings, fantasies and dreams some intuitive and prophetic knowledge of his fate and its agents. His dreams not only sharpen his awareness of his true plight, but also strengthen his determination to fight for justice.

The process which turns the lover into a father, is in Malamud's novels, the basis for redemption. Before the hero can win through, he must submit to a final trial by love, which is by all odds, Malamud's fundamental subject. His heroes are mostly displaced failures, and escape their harsh realities only in fancy and imagination. Intending his novels and stories to be parables of possibility, Malamud reiterates his commitment to redemption and renewal through suffering and compassion.

Malamud is a writer who is committed to human values. He has intense reference for life and affirms it inspite of all the misery that attends it. He condemns the life-negating factors like absence of communication and affirms a positive view of life. Compassion redeems and transforms man and makes his life meaningful and better. This affirmative vision is the unifying power of his novels and short stories.

Malamud's characters are urban and Jewish people. They struggle to survive facing the hardships of modern existence. Their survival depends on their ability to combat life's inevitable suffering by breaking through the barriers of personal isolation and finding human contact, compassion and faith in the goodness of others.
To suffer out of love and principle is to see the ego die and the self - dissolve in the terror of complete dispossession (Richman 1967:70).

Capturing the bitter reality of suffering, Malamud shows the possibilities for the spiritual growth through such suffering. Frank Alpine in The Assistant suffers both physically and psychologically in the store. At least his moral growth provides him with saintliness to suffer for the world. He struggles against the old lingering self and at times he succumbs, but he finally reasserts the truth of his transformation. It is pain that gives inspiration to Frank. “A couple of scrawny birds flying around areas his head” (209) symbolises his spiritual freedom.

Yakov in The Fixer relies on his own spirit which is the only resource for him. He learns the value of suffering and becomes sympathetic and compassionate. His moral growth can be seen with his views on the human condition particularly the father - son relationship. In his hallucination, he sees Shmuel dying and cries that he will sacrifice his life for him. He is even compassionate to the bastard child of Raisl. He has attained the status of a father through suffering for others. Thus Yakov’s suffering becomes meaningful and it gives his life a purpose.

Suffering places a man in a proper perspective and brings moral growth and hope for the goodness of man. It makes a man strive
towards perfection through self-transcendence. Malamud once said, "My nature is optimistic". In an interview when he was questioned about his theme, Malamud said: "Derived from one's sense of values, it's a vision of life, a feeling for people - real qualities in imaginary worlds. (Stern 1975: 62).

Malamud continues to emphasize the fundamental value of life and the possibility of humanity. His style, characterised by the imaginative, mystical and symbolic, reflects his moral optimism. When denigration and nihilism have become the fashion, it is indeed remarkable human suffering. Regarding the nature of the suffering of his protagonists, he says:

I do feel that if the nature of life is to produce as much suffering as it does, then it should be the nature of the human being to learn from his experiences and to make something better of his life (Lasher: 104).

Malamud is an affirmative writer who believes in the mystery of the human personality and its power to remake itself. His fiction throws light on the fact that man's struggles to acquire wealth or to keep it makes him insensitive, highly selfish and unloving. It also suggests that there is no joy except in loving others. In all his works, Malamud focuses on man's ability to realise himself in the midst of deprivation and disaster. To sum up, in his fiction he movingly pleads for
developing man's inner resources in order to love a decent and meaningful life.

Facing against all odds and tribulations, his characters do not fail to demonstrate their capacity for living a new life. Suffering should not be viewed as a curse, but as a boon which brings out the best in man under trying circumstances, possessing immense vision of human life. Malamud brings out the fact in his writing that one should accept one's burdens and try to see in them inner growth and fulfilment. He also highlights in his works that love, compassion and responsibility are more vital than position and comfort in life.

Malamud is generally considered one of the most important American writers. His reputation is not only enormous but also international. He has regained in his finest work the tragic vision which has been central to Jewish expression for ages. his imaginative understanding of Jewish issues is shared by a host of fellow writers. But Malamud remains outstanding among them for the fact that he, in his writings emphasize such concerns as the liberation of the individual human spirit and the need for love, faith and compassion in human relationships.

It is evident from the foregoing analysis of his novels, that Malamud's protagonists struggle hard to find an escape
from the inextricable tangles of their lives. The more they try to get rid of the tangle, the more they find themselves ensnared and entrapped in it. Only after tasting the bitter experience of life, they realise its true remeaning. Finally they come to believe that noble living is nothing shorter than Heavenly Bliss on earth.

Malamud, in his novels, stresses the point that man should be free from the clutches of the triple evils - fame, wealth and sexual pleasures. He adopts liberal outlook towards life and firmly believes in the liberty of the individual. He is equally liberal in his religious views and concepts. To him the world is a globe of man who can reach one another only with good will, love and humanism, In short, he emphasises the imperative need to overcome the inimical forces which endanger human values and even life itself.

Malamud's work will definitely stand the test of time, since it reveals a profound reverence for human dignity. He approaches life with compassionate attitude which is in keeping with the Jewish tradition and history. It is fervently hoped that the thesis “Transformation and Redemption through suffering and compassion in the novels of Bernard Malamud” will provide the necessary stimulus to further research in future.