Chapter I

Introduction
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INTRODUCTION

The United States, in its history of less than two centuries, has produced remarkable literature to deserve recognition and attention. It has a distinctive literature which undoubtedly takes its place with the great literatures of other times and other peoples. It has particularly experienced a highly valuable and significant literary period. The writings of Saul Bellow, Bernard Malamud, Salinger, Arthur Miller, Norman Miller and some others are recognized throughout the world as masterpieces of contemporary world literature. American literature is no longer a branch of British Literature as its variety and richness clearly show that it has been thoroughly de-colonized.

The contribution of ethnic writers has certainly provided the American Literature complexity and variety. Of all the ethnic groups, the Blacks and the Jews have been largely concerned with the problems of a pluralist society. The first reaction of native Americans of English origin to the new immigrants of non Anglo-Saxon stock was one of suspicion and fear. They feared that their social dominance would be threatened. However, this hostility gradually began to diminish owing to the liberal progressive era.

Immigrants, after a bitter and long struggle, succeeded in adapting to the new environment of America and changing it. This
melting-pot was essentially assimilationist. "It stipulated that the culture of each ethnic group would be blended into the culture of the host-group and would thus create a new fused society and culture." (Bandyopadhyay : 58).

Of all the different cultural and sub-cultural groups, the Jews moved slowly but steadily from the circumference to the centre of the American social structure. They, by and large, succeeded in achieving a general balanced relationship with the host culture. They, in fact, achieved this cultural adjustment with the predominantly protestant ethos, without sacrificing their Judaic heritage.

Emerging from a twelve-hundred year darkness, known as the Middle Ages, the Jews rose to new intellectual heights in modern times. Though they are a minority race oppressed by the majority, they have shown remarkable resilience and tenacity. This will-power has enabled them to maintain their ethnic identity successfully in their fight for survival. Max I. Dimont says in this connection: "No matter how poor a Jew is, he always feels there is some one poorer than he, and a Jew living on charity sees nothing incongruous in giving some of his charity mSoney as charity to some one else" (Max I. Dimont 1964 : 124)

Unlike the black rebels, Jewish writers from Sholom Aleichem to Malamud have depicted victims who accept suffering as a possible good and welcome their burdens. In the years since six million Jews
died in Hitler's Holocaust, Jews have had to face questions crucial to their identity. Writers like Saul Bellow, Philip Roth and Bernard Malamud have found signal inspiration in the life of the American Jew.

Ever since their first settlement in America, the Jews have resisted the torture and the tyranny to which they were severely subjected by the outside world. Their past history taught them not only suffering but also compassion as a way of life. Their tradition as represented by the old prophets like Amos and Hosea emphasizes universal justice and compassion as cardinal virtues of moral life.

The central tradition of American fiction has been moralistic and often allegorical. The value system carried within this tradition has usually been broadly humanistic rather than narrowly religious. It emphasizes such concerns as the liberation of the individual human spirit and the need for love, faith and respect in human relationships.

The major concern of the American Jewish novelists is their pre-occupation with the complex fate of being a Jew in America. Saul Bellow considers himself a Midwesterner and not a Jew. Roth, on the other hand, severely condemns orthodox Judaism. But Malamud differs from these writers in the sense that he neither condemns orthodox Judaism nor flouts Jewish moral principles. In fact, the stamp of Jewishness is invariably assigned to the creative genius of Malamud. But his novels and short stories do not offer such a view, though
Jewishness has been a source of his moral and imaginative sustenance. He proclaims:

I'm an American, I'm a Jew, and I write about Jews, when I write about Jews, because they set my imagination going....

(Stern : 56).

From the thick concreteness of Jewish moral experience, Malamud gets at "the dilemmas and decisions of the heart generally". (Theodore Solotaroff : 90) This provides a universal significance to Malamud's handling of the Jew who is as real as any man. His Jews are more than mere types or metaphors.

There is no doubt that Jewishness has been source of Malamud's moral and imaginative sustenance. The tragedy of the killing of six million Jews has definitely upset his sensitive mind. But in his novels he rises above the regionalism and ethnic barriers while depicting human suffering and complexity of life. The struggle of a Jew for a life of love and compassion, according to Malamud, could be anyman's struggle in the twentieth century. Malamud himself confesses:

"Personally I handle the Jew as universal man. Everyman is a Jew though he may not know it. The Jewish drama is a symbol
of the fight for existence in the highest possible terms. Jewish history is God’s gift of drama” (Leslie Field and Joce Field. 1974: 7) His heroes, mostly Jews, except Roy Hobbs in *The Natural* and Frank Alpine in *The Assistant*, become “the symbols of struggling humanity, partaking in its ambiguous fate” (Ihab Hassan, “Bernard Malamud” : 876).

When Malamud affirms that “we will not destroy each other .... we will live on” (Ihab Hassan : 15) the world view projected by him in his work is thus qualified by his moral vision. Malamud’s compassionate vision spreads to villains like Hitler-Morality, in his own words, “begins with an awareness of the sanctity of one’s life, hence the lives of others - even Hitler’s to begin with - the sheer privilege of being in this miraculous cosmos, and trying to figure out why”. (Daniel Stern : 51).

The Eastern European Jewish community came under the influence of a religious movement called Hasidism in the 18th century. This movement condemned selfish pursuit of one’s own salvation and insisted on living for others. Martin Buber explains the pursuit of Hasidism in these words :

To begin with oneself, but not to end with oneself; to start from oneself, but not to be preoccupied with oneself (Buber : 31-32).
Christianity considers each man’s salvation his highest aim. But Judaism believes that “no soul has its object in itself, in its own salvation, but in those of others”. (Ibidem : 33-34) The Sabath and Festival Prayer Book, used in most of the synagogues by the Jews has a prayer which reads: “I am a Jew because in all places where there are tears and suffering, the Jew weeps”. (304)

Compassion is not something that is impossible. It is within the reach of the human agent because it is born out of understanding. Rollo May beautifully explains:

Understanding, in contrast to ideal love, is a human possibility - understanding for our enemies as well as our friends. There is in understanding the beginnings of compassion, of pity and of charity. (Rollo May : 258)

Compassion, as the basic principle of Malamud’s humanistic vision, permeates his whole creative output. Malamud depends on compassion and not on the covenant. H.E. Francis aptly remarks:

... it is compassion, not theology, which allies his Christian and Jewish characters. Malamud’s own humanity can be felt in them as they sympathise with each other in their tragedy. (Francis 1961 : 96)
In the first four novels of Malamud, there is a gradual emergence of the theme of responsibility as a conflicting idea to the theme of suffering. They throw light on the fact that suffering is the necessary condition of compassion and it is a way of reaching Heaven. This is dominantly portrayed in all the novels of Malamud.

Since Malamud asserts that he is not a religious Jew, it is clear that he is not a champion of the Jewish race. He accepts suffering as an inescapable reality of human experience. His Jewishness is a type of metaphor for anyone's life - both for the tragic dimension of anyone's life and for a code of personal morality and salvation that is more psychological than religious.

Rising above all sectarian understanding of suffering, Malamud strongly believes that suffering can only be reduced when all men accept responsibility for each other. Jewishness lies in suffering for one another. This is an important principle of compassion. For instance, the suffering of Morris Bober in The Assistant becomes meaningful in view of his commitment to his family and compassion to fellowmen. Morris universalizes suffering when he stresses one's suffering for others. This forms the essence of every religion.

Suffering can be redemptive and stir up a ray of hope for the goodness of man. The purpose of suffering is to redeem both the sufferer and to a certain extent those for whom he suffers. Mentshlekhkayt,
the Jewish moral code, encompasses the sense of community and compassion. Redemption is sought in an ethical uprightness. In the world of chaos and suffering, Mentshlekhkayt becomes a compensation for suffering. The inner spiritual strength of characters comes out of their compassion.

Malamud is essentially a humanist who is seriously concerned about the degradation and loss of human dignity in the modern world. Expressing his anguish at the devaluation of man, he says:

I am quite tired of the colossally deceitful devaluation of man in this day; for whatever explanation: that life is cheap amid a prevalence of wars; or because we are dragged by totalitarian successes into a belief in their dehumanizing processes.... (Granville Hicks : 32)

According to Malamud, man is better than he is. "There is a zone of goodness, a conscience, bequeathed from the humane traditions of the past which can be proof against the present" (Richman 1966 : 23). It is this belief which formed the subject of Malamud's acceptance speech when he received the National Book Award for The Magic Barrel.

Like many of his fellow Jewish American writers, Malamud speaks for those who have hardly anything in common with themselves and who are seeking through a maze of social and philosophical
blind - alleys for a reattainment of self. As he points out again and again in his fiction that Jewishness is not a necessary ingredient in this success. In his first novel *The Natural* there are no Jewish characters. Yet, the myth of salvation which dominates his fiction generally is more clearly indicated in it than in any of his later novels.

Malamud is for humanism and opposes nihilism. There is a broad humanistic concern in all his stories about Jews. He is not satisfied with a mere sociological study of the Jews. To him, the Jew is a dramatic symbol of man's endless struggle in the modern world which lacks compassion and understanding.

In Malamud, the liberal humanist traditions find their most eloquent and fullest expression. He gained from the liberal outlook adopted towards life and developed humanism of a high order. In all his novels, he grapples with a series of searching efforts, all urbane, scrupulous, traditional, tentative and even sceptical problems about the purpose of life and civilization. In short, his fiction is a plea to man to develop his inner resources in order to live a dignified and meaningful life.

In the period after the First World War, man's outlook on life came under severe pressure. It came to be regarded as a good old philosophy without any relevance to humanity. But the American writers have constantly waged a war against all those forces such as anarchic individualism, materialism, over industrialisation,
dry scientism etc., which are questioning the validity of humanity's faith in humanistic principles.

At this juncture, it is indeed worthwhile to discuss the importance of Malamud as a writer of humanity. According to Ihab Hassan, the impression of Malamud's work,

Is of an imagination working through small quotidian events, through human quirks and quidities of history, through the confined places of the spirit, through the entrapments of art or money or sex or guilt of race - pressing always toward liberation into some universal human space (Richard Astro and Jackson J. Benson : 16).

Since his second novel The Assistant in 1957, Bernard Malamud has easily maintained his rank with Saul Bellow as one of the leading novelists of contemporary America. Since the 1970's, readers of Malamud, Bellow, Roth, Salinger and Mailer have been less attentive to the ethnic hyphen that links them. Thereafter, they have become more concerned with their wide divergence as literary artists.

Benefitting from this enlarged focus, Malamud's work is seen as that of an American novelist in the tradition of Hawthorne. He drew upon Jewish material as component elements of his larger design and achievement. Malamud himself has said that as a writer he has been influenced by Hawthorne, Mark Twain, Henry James, and Hemingway more than he has been by Sholem Aleichem and H. Peretz.
To look upon Malamud as a mere purveyor of ethnic ideas is contrary to the evidence offered by his novels and stories. In them, he neither condemns Judaic orthodoxy nor flouts Jewish normal conventions. Jewishness is one of the main sources of value in his work. But he does not regard the Jew as ‘a specialist in alienation’ (Isaac Rosenfeld: 69) because it would imply that Jews are prone to pain, sorrow and bad luck.

Malamud’s secular and humanistic vision fails to be deflected by different religious or ethnic peculiarities. He writes of human suffering without propagandistic overtones. He attempts to bring out the recurring aspirations of even his most dubious, characters to become better human beings. For instance, Frank Alpine, in *The Assistant*, impresses Helen by his ‘staying power’ and brings out the value of love and compassion.

A tone of resigned and humorous wisdom and unsentimental cultural compassion unifies Malamud’s writings. There is a universality in his work that elevates him above the level of local colonist or mere ethnic writer. There is depth and humanism in his writing. His Jewish heritage, which blends spiritualism and realism, gives vitality and reality to his broad moral vision.

A study of Malamud’s novels and short stories reveals that his protagonists or anti-heroes persistently “search for a qualitatively ‘new life’ to acquire a foothold in life”
In his first novel, *The Natural* (1952) its protagonist Roy Hobbs, after a series of bitter struggles, learns that it is suffering for the sake of others that brings happiness. This realization occurs in him, though late, through Iris Lemon who is capable of love and compassion. Towards the end of the novel, he has grown conscious of a different realm of values and he grows inwardly. Thus, this novel is related to Malamud’s other novels and stories since it poignantly studies the growth of inwardness and true value of suffering.

The publication of his second novel *The Assistant* which won the Rosenthal Award in 1957, brought Malamud national acclaim. It introduces his claustral immigrant world of dark tenement houses and dim shops. Deft caricatural figures such as Breitbart, the light bulb peddler, flesh out Malamud’s symbolic society. Its primary figures are Morris Bober, the kind-hearted grocer, and his young assistant Frank Alpine who is a thieving drifter, and anti-semitic. The goodhearted Morris saves and employs him in his shop only to discover him stealing from the till and insulting his daughter.

Malamud traces the emergent self of the youth against the diminishing powers of the old man. Frank works his way from cynicism through uncertainties to grace, which, in Malamud, always means moral commitment to others. After the death of Morris Bober, Frank stays on to run the store in the midst of difficulties. He understands
the meaning and value of suffering and helps the family of Morris. He even converts himself to the old man's religion.

Malamud won the first National Book Award for *The Magic Barrel* which contains thirteen stories. Some of the stories are reminiscent of situations in the earlier novels, particularly *The Assistant*. Most of the characters portrayed in these moving stories are the victims of tyranny and injustice. Irrespective of its ethnic diversities, the book as a whole tries to be ‘an affirmation of man’s ability to realize himself, even in the face of deprivation and disaster’ (Granville Hicks Saturday Review : 32).

A casual reading of Malamud’s third novel *A New Life* gives the impression that it has little thematic link with the first two novels. But a closer study of the novel reveals that it tries to “extend and recreate those moral concerns that are the centre of Malamud’s previous works” (D.R. Sharma : XIII). Though it is an academic novel which attacks the trivial and infantile minds of educators, the interest of the novel in the main lies in Levin’s evolution from selfish love to selfless compassion. Jonathan Baumbach says: “Love is sacred in Malamud’s universe; if life is holy, love is a holy of holies. At the end of the novel, Levin achieves a kind of unsought heroism in sacrificing his career or the principle of love, a love in itself dormant, a memory beyond feeling”. (Jonathan Baumbach 1965 : 105).
The Fixer is a sombre historical novel set in Tsarist Russia. The persecution of the Jews in Russia echoes Biblical events and fore-shadows modern genocide. This novel movingly portrays how suffering and compassion become meaningful in the evolution of man. It is a probing study of Yakov Bok who becomes the victim of anti-Semites. Suffering chastens Yakov who realizes that he should not commit suicide, but should live and die for others. Death may liberate him, but that should not pave the way for others’ death.

Malamud’s next novel Pictures of Fidelman deals with an American Jew’s futile experiments with art and sex in Italy. There is a gradual development in Fidelman whose consciousness provides unity to the narrative. Fidelman acknowledges his failings in which lies his redemption. When he returns from Europe to America, it signifies the change from pretence to reality. He ultimately learns the golden truth that since he fails to ‘invent art’, he must ‘invent life’ through love.

In The Tenants and Dubin’s Lives, Malamud’s heroes are professional writers. Harry Lesser writes his novel in a crumbling tenement he thinks abandoned. But he discovers to his shock and surprise the presence of another novelist also completing a manuscript. Harry seems to be a modernist in the tradition of Flaubert and Joyce. But Wille Spearmint is a militant black writer who writes shocking social truths. The prose art of two New York city generations collides in these last tenants of a crumbling building.
Harry and Spearmint believe that whichever novel is completed first effectively slays the other. As men they are more alike than different in experience and so they do not yield to the other. They kill each other with axe and razor as the novel ends with the slumlord’s scream “Mercy”.

The story is a kind of prophetic warning against religious fanaticism. The beauty of the novel is the message of human togetherness. The conclusion of the novel is starkly realistic. But Malamud, through the mouth of the “Rabbi”, highlights the essence of love and understanding:

Some day God will bring together Ishmael and Isreal to live as one people. It won’t be the first miracle (The Tenants: 164).

One of the questions raised in The Tenants is whether art indeed helps people to be free. Malamud answers this question in Dubin’s Lives quite positively. William Dubin, a prominent biographer of literary lives like Theoreau and Emerson, fails to understand why he is attracted to a life of D.H. Lawrence. Through this novel Malamud attempts to convey the truth that even before worrying about civilization one should try to control one’s life.

Idiots First is Malamud’s second collection of short stories. In these stories, Malamud’s commitment to the value of love
and compassion is considerably revealed. His third collection of short stories *Rembrandt's Hat* deals with the familiar and usual aspects of daily life. Stories like *The Bill* and *Take Pity* are well-known because compassion at the cost of self-effusive suffering is evoked in them. The tragic suffering of Panessas in *The Bill* and Rosen in *Take Pity* becomes meaningful passionate response to the needs of the suffering brothers.

*Idiots First* stresses the redemptive value of compassion. Stories like *The Death of Me*, *The German Refugee* and *The Cost of Living* are moving as they emphasize compassion in the wake of violence and depression. Jeffrey Helterman observes that *Rembrandt's Hat* contains Malamud's "concern with the growth or collapse of the fine bond of compassion that binds human beings together" (Jeffrey Helterman: 302). Spiritual isolation and failure of communication are the two predominant themes which pervade all the eight stories in this third collection.

After the publication of three collections of short stories, Malamud emerged as a full grown writer. His stories exhibit the contexts of suffering and compassion in different situations of life. Troubled by misfortune and injustice, Malamud's characters in his stories strive to seek fulfilment through compassion.

Both as a novelist and short story writer, Malamud has often demonstrated a dedication to his craft that is nearly as rare as his gifts.
If the later works do not have the power of the earlier, many of them are more than promising. Though honesty in Literature gives no guarantee of success, it is, nevertheless, an indispensable ingredient in any success. In all his better works, his pessimism as much as anything else makes his tales of redemption persuasive. However, it is against this pessimism that his most realised characters demonstrate that man's capacity for renewal is not to be denied by his ailments.

Malamud has thus succeeded in bringing to American Literature a note that has long been absent from it. It is a period when the novel itself threatens to disappear under the weight of anti-novels and anti-heroes. Denigration and nihilism have become the order of the day. But Malamud has dedicated himself to tending the resources of human personality which appear to be vanishing not just from literature but from life itself. This undoubtedly is his greatest contribution as a writer to the entire human race.

An individual's greatest misfortune is his suffering which according to Dostoevsky, is always his chief source of self-awareness and self-love. Dostoevsky holds suffering to be a means of purification and salvation. But as far as Malamud is concerned, suffering "is an inexorable affliction to be endured with dignity and resolution" (Richard Astro and Jackson J. Benson: 123).

Jewish novelists have learned about human misery from the history of Jews. In Saul Bellow, compassion becomes a subtle form
of expression of his affirmative vision. To him, the moral problem of the writer is to find ways to break the isolation of the self. Saul Bellow observes:

If the writer can convince his readers that the existence of others is a reality, he can then proceed to higher moral questions relating to justice, duty and honour (Saul Bellow, 1978, 42).

Both Dreiser and Malamud find human life as characterized by struggle and suffering. Both reveal a deep sense of sympathetic understanding of human suffering. In all the novels of Dreiser, the dominant consideration is material success and its accompanying rewards. His vision of man is pessimistic as it is limited to man’s existence in a naturalistic world.

But Malamud possesses a vision of human life which is much broader and more inclusive. For Malamud, man lives not only in the naturalistic world but also in the world of human relationships. The world of interpersonal relationships is called “Mit - Welt” by the distinguished existentialist psychoanalyst Ludwig Binswanger. “Mit - Welt” literally means “With - World”.

Twentieth century is an age in which the nature of guilt and punishment, anxiety and suffering are understood in a context deriving from Freudian psychology. Freud’s sources of suffering are physical,
of one’s ownself; from the external world, and, thirdly the suffering that arises from one’s relation to others. The transgressed feeling of guilt expresses itself in self-harming, self-sabotaging and self-frustrating acts. Psychiatrists refer to this as “Psychic Masochism”. That is, one, who derives perverted pleasure from self-induced mental agony and torture, receives partial relief from previous feelings of guilt. This view enables the readers of Malamud to understand his characters who seek suffering as a special need for absolution. They seek suffering consciously or unconsciously in order to lessen evil.

Suffering is potentially beneficial. So one should learn to accept one’s burdens and see in them the promise of inner growth and fulfillment. For instance, suffering brings understanding for Roy Hobbs, Frank Alpine and Yakov Bok who learn the great and essential values of life through it.

The reason for choosing the Jews as symbols of suffering is quite understandable and natural. Jews have lived through the Holocaust, the most shocking campaign of terror in the history of humanity. In Malamud’s works the Jew becomes an isolated loner who symbolises the hopes, fears and possibilities of the twentieth century humanity.

It is true to say that Malamud continually adopts Jewish attitudes, values and responses to life in the portrayal of his
characters and settings. But his greatness as a novelist lies in the way he universalises the Jew's experience by depicting suffering which forms the integral part of the Jew's racial destiny. His moral vision is based on different thematic levels - suffering, compassion, redemption and humanism. His response to the human condition is sensitive and is born of a compassionate understanding.

Committed to defence of life, Malamud's novels bring out the possibility of understanding between man and man. Malamud is neither a pessimist, nor a fatalist but a through optimist with abundant faith in humanity. He never holds the view that Jews are alone prone to pain, sorrow and bad luck. He believes that even non-Jews can become the victims of fate. In short, his broad moral vision is shaped by his Jewish heritage which blends realism and lofty idealism.

Disgusted with the deceitful degradation of man in the modern world, Malamud shows in his works that man's hidden strength can be seen in the resources of his spirit. Man's degradation is due to the fact that concern for others is gradually vanishing from man's heart. The spiritual degradation of man makes him content to live in a world of spiritual dryness. For instance, Harry Lesser, one of the protagonists in Malamud's novel The Tenants, fails to find the elusive essence that will help him complete his work.
Related to the moral - ironic perception is the role of the seasons. For example, in *The Assistant*, the season begins in early November and ends in mid-April. While Morris suffers the long winter of destitution, Helen, also, realises that the month of February can bring the illusion of spring. The seasons in this novel play a symbolic role since they reflect the inner condition of the major characters.

The circular structure adopted by Malamud can be seen in the opening words of the novel *The Tenants*: “Lesser catching sight of himself in his lonely glass wakes to finish his book” (.3). Ironically titled The Promised End, Lesser’s novel traces a writer’s search, for love. It embodies also Lesser’s attempt to instruct his life through his art. Similarly torn between being artist or activist, Willie Spearmint labours to translate the brutalities of his life into fiction.

Self-discovery is central to Malamud’s fiction. His characters are aided largely in their search by visual images which expose to them their most private expectations and guilts. They fail also to understand dream warnings issued by their intuitive or subconscious selves. “Yet these internal signals prove more reliable guides than do their willed judgements. A Frank Alpine or Seymour Levin who grasps this truth seems eligible for better things. A Roy Hobbs who rejects all inner portents invites more failure and frustration” (Richard Astro and Jackson J. Benson: 35).
Malamud’s novels generally seek to clarify and enrich man’s goals, values and ideals. They also seek to achieve man’s full humanness by bringing him into ever deeper and more intimate kinship and harmony with the surrounding life, society and cosmos. This simply means that the entire mankind is related to each other and one cannot live long and happily alone since one’s sufferings are bound to affect others.

Malamud was advised by a teacher called Theodore Goodman to be aware of being dishonest as a writer. By and large, he has stuck to that principle, even if it has meant extending himself beyond the resources of his talent. In many ways, the development of his novels and stories reveal him as a writer, who seems to be defining himself anew with each work.

The Atomic Age, which has alienated man, has forced him to confront the harsh environment, physical and psychological oppression. As a result, existentialism, race culture, and traditional values matter much to the ethnic writers. In this atmosphere of nihilism, art and literature nullify life. The average man can “either internalize his frustration, suffering inwardly as a victim or become a rebel striking out at others. The victim accepts his predicament, elevating pain to a moral virtue” (Avery 1979: 4).

The horrors of Verdun, the Great Depression, Hiroshima and Vietnam have their counterparts in Malamud’s fiction. Backdrops of
Depression hardship, symbolic landscapes of garbage-filled back alleys as in *The Assistant* and collapsing buildings as in *The Fixer*, McCarthyism and anti-Semitic injustice on a large scale have cast their dark shadows over all the fictional world of Malamud. Man has to face malevolent forces so powerful that his very existence as thinking and feeling moral being gets affected. So it is quite understandable that Malamud should prefer the Jews as symbols of suffering because they have lived through the Holocaust, the most horrifying campaign of terror in the history of humanity.

His heroes may be schlemiel or schlimazels. The major trend of much other contemporary fiction depicts man as joke, cripple or cipher. But Malamud continues to emphasize the fundamental worth of life and the possibility of humanity. His characters suffer in order to make suffering meaningful, Frank Alpine, a cynical anti-Semitic youth struggles to reconcile moral dilemmas. His suffering becomes all the more significant as he tries to act according to what is right and good and to come to grips with his existence. He finds grace and dignity in his own identity and the change in him affirms redemptive value and faith in the goodness of human soul.

What supports Malamud’s novels, according to Sidney Richman, is “the theme of redemptive suffering and comic mode” (Richman 1967: 26). In the best of his stories and novels, Malamud has re-created the same disconsolate and hungry world that is found in
the writers of nineteenth century Yiddish folk realism. But with his own unique powers, Malamud has filled it also with spiritual illuminations.

Malamud’s distinctive settings are dark and disconsolate rooms, barred doors, groceries in cellers. They are the tangible signs of their alienation. His ironic perception of life keeps his novels from being called ‘novels of protest’. By choosing to point even serious situations in light colours, he makes a powerful impact on the reader. In his article on ‘Style and Humanity in Malamud’s Fiction’, Ratner says:

The irony is often by juxtaposing realistic description with fantastic incidents, or poetic imagery with ordinary occurrences (Ratner 1964:664).

It becomes necessary to understand both the nature of Malamud’s themes and the art by which he liberates them. At the Princeton Symposium, he maintained that the direction of the novel of the future lies in a fusion of realism and symbolism. The avenues of romantic redemption - nature, romantic love, power, individuality are all echoed in his works and all are painfully discounted.

Nearly all the major works of Malamud end inconclusively. Moreover, they point to a future in which the struggle is not arrested but in a way is only beginning. His style beautifully renders
sorrow and fantasy as well as suffering and comedy in *The Assistant*. He depicts characters and situations and switches to interior monologue to impart greater depth to this novel.

Malamud's moral earnestness is consistent in his writings. But a few critics like David Stevenson are not happy with his emphasis on moral behaviour. According to him, Malamud's concentration on moral behaviour has limited his position as a writer. David Stevenson's complaint need not be totally correct. Though Malamud focuses strongly on "moral or thematic concept", his people never stop probing their deepest motives, acts, hopes and dreams. These are those basic urges which comprise their "private destinies" and "darker blinder" inner forces.

Malamud's novels ensure optimism in human life. His heroes are often lower-class, economically marginal. Their homes and shops are depressing places which are often described as 'tombs' and 'graves'. They have possibilities for materially improving their lives. But they reject opportunities which provide them comfort in life and sacrifice them. They choose suffering for the sake of humanity. They discover that love, compassion and responsibility are more essential than status and comfort in life.

Malamud emphatically asserts that there is a broad humaistic concern in all his stories about the Jews. Philip Rahv
observes while referring to the Jewish quality in Malamud's writings:

Jewishness as he understands and above all feels it, is one of the principal sources of value in his work as it affects both his conception of experience in general and his conception of imaginative writing, in particular.

( A. Malamud Reader, Newyork, 1967, VIII)

Writers like Saul Bellow, Bernard Malamud and J.D. Salinger have exhibited a deep moral concern based on compassion in their works. Man's potential, according to Malamud, lies in accepting suffering and in learning compassion in order to attain self-transcendence, moral growth and spiritual upliftment. About his protagonists, Malamud observes:

Suffering educates them, obviously they have gained something that they didn't have before (Lasher: 104).

The thesis is a perceptive study of Bernard Malamud's novels. It attempts an incisive analysis of his novels, focussing on the redemptive role played by suffering and compassion in the life of the contemporary man. Malamud's pre-occupation with the theme of suffering and compassion is so effectively consistent that it deserves a detailed study.