Chapter II

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SUFFERING AND COMPASSION

The widening gulf between what man is and what he ought to be has created a shocking awareness. This has prompted the Jewish writer to think in terms of moral regeneration. Accordingly, an idea of new life based on compassion, love and humanism has to be evolved.

From Biblical times to this day, the Jew remains the legendary figure of the Eternal Wanderer. The entire annals of the afflictions that have befallen the Jews during their exile are voluminous. In his attempts to project himself as conspicuous and unique, the Jew remains aloof, isolated and a suffering figure. Most of the post-war American - Jewish fiction is suffused with the figure of the suffering Jew.

Malamud never asserts that he is the champion of the Jewish race. However, he admires the Jewish belief which wholeheartedly accepts suffering as an invaluable experience. Throughout his work, he insists that an individual can, by suffering, compassion and self - scrutiny assert his humanity.

Malamud is not interested in the superficialities of Jewish life. But he is deeply interested in capturing the spirit of Jewish life and moral experience seen in suffering and compassion. His moral
vision is shaped by his Jewish heritage which is blended by realism and lofty idealism. Malamud has succeeded in creating a distinctive fictional world that is the embodiment of ‘Jewish’ humanism. This is his greatest achievement because he is both an artist and a moralist. He believes that man is good if he does not make people suffer. This is the only measure by which goodness in man can be measured. Goodness exists in the feeling of understanding and compassion.

In *The Assistant*, Morris Bober, the poor grocer and his gentile assistant Frank Alpine suffer for the sake of others. Morris is compassion incarnate. Frank suffers with Morris in the store. Even after the death of Morris, Frank loves the family of Morris out of compassion. Thus Malamud’s characters are symbolic representations of suffering. They suffer either for their fellowmen or for the Jew or for all. When Frank asks Morris why Jews like to suffer, the latter says:

If you live, you suffer, some people suffer more, but not because they want. But I think if a Jew don’t suffer for the Law, he will suffer for nothing (106).

Transcending all sectarian understanding of suffering, Malamud finds suffering as the fate of the entire mankind. This can only be reduced when all men accept responsibility for each other. Jewishness lies in suffering for one another. This is an essential principle of compassion. Morris Bober’s suffering becomes meaningful in view of
his commitment to his family and compassion to fellowmen. Similarly, Frank without being a Jew, has taken the place of Morris by assuming the latter’s role, responsibilities and commitments. He has thus vindicated compassion for which Morris suffered all through his life.

The theme of suffering forms the dominant and recurrent part of the Jewish movement. The purpose of suffering is to redeem both the sufferer and to a certain degree those for whom he suffers. The heroes of Malamud suffer intensely, but they are also secular men whose suffering is not always taken entirely for exalted reasons. Malamud is really concerned with the social and moral aspects of suffering as they impinge upon personality.

Suffering occupies a central position in Malamud’s moral vision. It is not only the redemptive but also the only means to define the basis of humanity. If a man does not suffer, he never grows inwardly. Without such inner or inward growth, man cannot understand life and his relationship with others. While Morris suffers, his fellow Jews remain indifferent to his economic problems. Frank suffers for his mean conduct and Helen suffers in order to actualize her dreams of happiness. Thus through suffering, the values of love and justice are highlighted for Morris, Frank and Helen. It ultimately helps them to understand their humanity.

According to the Jewish belief, God makes people suffer in order to bring out the goodness in them. Suffering first leads to
self-knowledge and then it communicates with others. Finally it becomes a power which contributes to the fulfilment of life. This is in fact what happens to Yakov in *The Fixer*. Yakov is tortured for no fault of his own. He resolves to suffer, live and guard his race as far as he can. This is the new consciousness wrought on him by suffering which becomes a healing power through love and compassion.

Suffering does not have a negative effect on his characters. On the other hand, it has clearly shown the opposite effect of strengthening the determination of man to face the hard facts of life tenaciously. For example, the protagonist Yakov Bok faces unlimited persecution with strict fortitude. The greater the suffering, the more is the redemptive effect.

Compassion comes from the expression ‘Compassio’ meaning ‘to suffer with’. Rollo May, a psycho-therapist, defines compassion in these words:

Compassion is the name of that form of love which is based on our knowing and understanding each other. Compassion is the awareness that we are all in the same boat and that we all sink or swim together. It arises from the recognition of community. It realizes that all men and women are brothers and sisters, even though a disciplining of our own instincts is necessary for us even
to begin to carry out that belief in our action (Rollo May 1972: 251).

Compassion carries with it a sense of community and fraternity. It recognizes the fallibility of man. Moreover, it is within the reach of the human agent since it is born of understanding. Since it emerges from understanding, it is sustained in the act of suffering.

Compassion has shaped the imagination of many Jewish writers. Among them Philip Roth, Saul Bellow, I.B. Singer, Bernard are a few well-known American Jewish writers. Referring to them, Knopp observes:

All of them in their concern for other men, in their compassion and emphasis upon right and moral action, are responding to the principal tenets of Mentshlekhkayt and thus to a uniquely Jewish view of the world (Knopp 1975: 16).

It is only compassion that brings about a whole I-Thou relationship. Then compassion, in this sense, becomes an act of humanism and shares with it the concern for the dignity of man. The essence of man can be understood only with the reality of the mutual relation between man and man. Ultimately it is one's capacity for empathy that makes one compassionate.
The vision of suffering in Malamud’s works has its roots in the Old Testament. Job, a pious man, suffers without trying to know why but realises the fact that suffering is a part of the mystery of life. In the Jewish opinion, man possesses the capacity to sin but redeems himself by his own effort. Redemption is possible for man since it is in his hands.

Malamud’s attitude to suffering is not nihilistic. It educates and brings in moral courage and spiritual triumph. The Assistant affirms the redemptive value of maintaining faith in the goodness of the human soul. Morris Bober suffers a lot in his grocery, first for himself and then for his family and for others too. He is an isolated loner who has the potential for achieving moral transcendence through suffering and compassion.

Materialism has failed. Man’s vaunted power over nature threatens to engulf him and annihilate the entire civilization. In this materialistic world, good and honest men like Morris Bober are something rare. Analysing his character, Richman beautifully remarks: “Morris Bober suffers for all. He is a receptacle of pain without which humanity would suffocate”. (Richman 1967 : 70).

Malamud is for humanism and against nihilism. He, according to Lasher, says: “My premise is that we will not destroy each other. My premise is that we will live on. We will seek a better life. We may not become better, but atleast we will seek betterment” (Lasher:7).
No other writer in the history of American literature has shown such a positive attitude towards suffering as Malamud. His spirit of humanity extends further and seeks the meaning of existence in suffering for others. For example, Morris Bober tells his assistant Frank Alpine: "I suffer for you" (106).

The ideal of compassion, says Camus, lies in showing solidarity with the person who suffers. This can be applied to the heroes of Malamud who basically strive to be men in the real sense of the world. Their sanctity does not lie in private communion with God, but in communion and total involvement with their fellow-men in order to understand and share their suffering.

Suffering chastens Malamud’s protagonists who mellow under its cathartic effect. Their suffering becomes objectified when they suffer for the sake of others. They learn invaluable truths through their suffering. In his first novel The Natural, Malamud writes:

"Experience makes good people better"

"How does it do that?"

"Through their suffering" (148).

Similarly, Iris Lemon tells Roy Hobbs that suffering brings people towards happiness.
Yakov Bok in Malamud's novel The Fixer comes to realise the value of suffering. This realisation occurs to him during the darkest time of his terrible ordeal. He, out of despair and disgust, almost yields to the temptation of suicide. But he changes his mind when he realises:

What do I get by dying, outside of release from pain? What have I earned if a single Jew dies because I did. Suffering I can gladly live out, I hate the taste of it, but if, I must suffer, let it be for something. let it be for shmuel (245).

It is very interesting to find Malamud's deep interest in suffering. In his interview with Lasher, Malamud observes:

If the experience is as intense as suffering, then it's wasted on the human being, if he doesn't get something out of it that causes him to reflect upon his values and to reflect upon the significance of his life (Lasher : 7).

Malamud's first novel The Natural, published in 1952, is related to his other novels and stories since it studies the growth of inwardness and the value of suffering. It is the only non-Jewish novel which deals with the story of Roy Hobbs, who aspires to become a baseball champion. His career marks the typical Malamudian hero's trial that
changes a man into mentsch. Compassion is the leading power behind such an act of transformation.

The novel The Natural focuses on the growth of Roy Hobbs from his selfish infantalism of spirit to moral forbearance. It is divided into two sections. The first section called "Pre-Game" deals with the adventures, triumphs and fall of the hero. This section serves as a kind of prologue to the novel.

In the second part of the novel, Roy Hobbs's weaknesses are more or less expanded. He dislodges the reigning champion "the Whammer" when the novel begins. Thus he begins his career as a new champion in baseball. He becomes indispensable for the knights. After the death of Bump Bailey, Roy is regarded as the only hope of his team. But at the end he is dislodged by Herman Youngberry, a young and inexperienced lad from the country. Thus history becomes a myth.

Inspired by an Arthur Daley column in the New York Times, Malamud's first novel The Natural traces the rise and fall of Roy Hobbs, a phenomenally gifted baseball player from his teens to his mid-thirties. The history of Roy Hobb's attempts to win fame and fortune as a big-league ball-player is fused together out of scraps of Homer's Troy, Malory's Britain and Ring Lardner's New York.

The Natural belongs to a pattern of development which has been curiously consistent from first to last. The half-rube, half-knightly
Roy Hobbs of *The Natural* gives way in *The Assistant* to a Jewish grocer and his helper. They are superseded in Malamud's next novel *A New Life* by a Jewish college instructor. These three protagonists are drawn together by the form of their struggles and by the nature of their limitations.

*The Natural* introduces Malamud in his first extensive struggle with technique. Out of the book, its failures, even more than its successes, emerge the materials of his later novels. In shaping the action of the work in terms of the language of myth, Malamud has supplied the reader with an outline of his moral imperatives. Formally *The Natural* is "divided into two sections. The first part deals with the adventures", triumphs and defeat of the nineteen-year-old Roy Hobbs. His bat, hewn from a lightning blasted oak tree, serves throughout as the symbol of his potential for rebirth. The second part picks up the narrative years later when Roy Hobbs returns to the big-league intent on a new start.

Though uneven in size, the events of the first part of *The Natural* clearly parallel the events of the second. Taken together, they recapitulate the mythic formula of Initiation, Separation and Return. The repetition, serves to dramatize the author's belief that the way to redemption lies partly in the hero's reactions to his own part and partly in his ability to understand it. The experiences of part one lead the protagonist only into similar extended misfortunes in part two.
and so into failure. Roy Hobbs tells himself on the final page, "I never did learn anything out of my past life, now I have to suffer again" (222).

Roy Hobbs, the protagonist in *The Natural*, like his Jewish counterparts in the other novels, is a victim of fate and circumstances as well as a prisoner of his own prejudices and illusions. His mad pursuit of money, fame, sex and his inability to come out of the shell of egotism lead him to his moral disintegration. Suffering ultimately makes him realise the value of love and compassion. It is compassion that is the driving force behind the act of transformation in all the protagonists of Malamud.

*The Natural* begins with the journey of Roy Hobbs to Chicago to make his career as a baseball player. It is Sam Simpson, a one-time baseball catcher, who initiates Roy into baseball career. Sam is compassionate to Roy. He reserves a berth for Roy while he himself sleeps in the ordinary compartment:

You take the bed, Kiddo, you're the one that has to show what you have got on the ball when we pull into the city. It don't matter where I sleep (12).

Sam Simpson introduces Roy Hobbs to Walter Wambold, the leading hitter of the American League on the train. Sam sees in Roy Hobbs the promise of his own salvation. He arranges Roy's first knightly joust. Walter serenely accepts the challenge from Roy. Sam
bets that Roy can strike Walter out with three pitched balls. The encounter between Roy and Walter is described in mock heroic style. Roy wins and makes his debut in the baseball career.

The duel is held beside the tracks when the train is mysteriously stopped. The duel becomes a grotesquely meaningful confrontation for batter and pitcher hold out to one another the form of their own fears. To the untrained and untested Roy, the Whamer assumes the shape of a giant. To the suddenly apprehensive Whammer, the young pitcher has all the features of a youthful undertaker sent to punish the batter for his own limitations. This meeting serves as a clear prefiguring of the final battle in the book.

The role of Sam Simpson suddenly comes to an end when Roy's ball hits him fatally. Before dying, Sam gives his wallet to Roy and thus shows that one's happiness lies in the happiness of others. The death of Sam makes Roy pursue his quest alone. Roy fails in his quest since he fails to learn the value of compassion from the life of Sam. He has an excessive sense of pride and thinks that he is "due for something very big" and some day he would "break every record in the book for throwing and hitting" (31).

Roy's weaknesses from the beginning of the novel are his egotistic overambition, and pursuit of sex. Harriet Bird,
the silver-eyed mermaid shatters his glorious dream of becoming an excellent pitcher. His response to her from the beginning has been sensual. Except baseball and sex, he is unable to understand or think of any other thing in life. Harriet Bird, in the role of “destructive mother” herself danced on her toes around the stricken hero” (39).

Despite his shattering experience with Harriet Bird, there is very little change in him. He is still over-confident and egotistic. Sure of leaving his mark in baseball, he says: “To hell with my old age. I’ll be in this game a long time” (61). He makes a wrong choice when he opts for Memo Paris, the selfish money-minded temptress. His association with her brings him bad luck.

Invited to a party by Memo, Roy eats gluttonously. This causes severe pains in the stomach and is taken to hospital. When he ignobly sells out to the diabolical trinity of Judge Banner, Memo Paris and Gus Sands, his moral degradation is complete. Under the impact of Memo Paris, a selfish and cunning woman, the natural in Roy Hobbs is destroyed.

Memo Paris is virtually an evil force of darkness surrounding Roy’s life. When he says to Pop, “You might as well know that I love her”, the latter tells Roy sadly: “Does she feel the same to you” (120). Pop’s comment throws adequate light on the conduct of Memo. She
is a moral pervert who is bent on destroying him. When Roy is mentally upset, his performance in the game gets affected: “As his hitlessness persisted, everyone was astonished. It didn’t seem possible this could happen to a miracle man like Roy” (124).

Memo Paris hates Roy for his prowess and for his responsibility in the death of her lover Bump Bailey. Joining hands with Gus Sands and Judge Goodwill Banner, she manipulates Roy’s hunger beyond endurance. She executes this with a strange mixture of feminine blandishments and Medea-like magic. From every encounter with her, his art of playing the game suffers. His pain proceeds due to lack of integration. He is the image of the unintegrated man, the hero, who acts incorrectly in spite of his awareness.

Caught between the way of spirit and flesh, there is nothing but agony for Roy. The miracle player, thus, undergoes an appalling fall. For the next several weeks, he either goes hitless or manages a few weak dribbling singles. The New York knights lose their cohesiveness and sink downward in the league standings. Roy tries to hide the guilt he feels for his past and present failures. He becomes progressively more desperate, while matching his insatiable greed for Memo Paris and for success.

It is at the very bottom of this dark period that Roy Hobbs gets an opportunity to redeem himself. When Roy enters Chicago stadium for a night game, he is met by a man called Mike Barney. He begs
Roy to save the life of his hospitalized and hero-worshipping boy by hitting a homer. Roy pities the man and wants to help him. He tells him: "I will do the best I can if I get the chance" (134).

There arises a bitter struggle in Roy between his sentimental and selfish attachment to Wonderboy and the impulse to help the worried father. Finally he decides to "give up" his bat for the sake of the boy. For the first time, Roy sacrifices something of his own for others, and recognises the value of compassion.

Roy's initiation into the redeeming moment is, however, brought forth by Iris Lemon. With her, *The Natural* finds its normative centre. She functions as the exempler of human potential, the living actuality that one can win through suffering to a larger and more meaningful life. Roy sees her standing in the audience and hits the ball with glorious success.

Roy circles the bases like a Mississippi steamboat, lightslit, flags fluttering, whistle banging, coming round the bend. The knights poured out of their dugout to pound his back, and hundreds of their rooters hopped about in the field. He stood on the home base, lifting his cap to the lady's empty seat (139).

Iris Lemon was the victim of an unknown man and became an unwed mother in her teens. Since then, she had devoted her youth to the care of her daughter much against the wishes of her parents. The
child meant everything to her and made her happy. In her letter to Roy, she movingly revealed that the tender feelings she had for her daughter in her heart made up for a lot she had suffered.

The way Iris Lemon analyses the hero as hero is very significant. She and Roy spend an evening by the shore of lake Michigan. This forms an ironic parallel to the evening spent by Roy with Memo Paris near a stagnant pool. Roy, for the first time, reveals his past to Iris, but finds it less difficult to relate than he had thought. He listens to her own analysis of the hero. She says: “I hate to see a hero fail” and remarks: “There are so few of them” (145). She makes him realise that nothing can be done by any one for anyone without giving up something of one’s own.

Harriet Bird and Memo Paris are predatory creatures. But Iris Lemon is full of love and compassion for Roy who is broken inwardly. She sustains him in moments of acute depression and ignominy. Unlike Memo Paris, Iris plays the role of good mother and instils new hope and courage in Roy.

To complete her analysis of Roy Hobbs, Iris Lemon invokes for him the ancient theme of redemption through suffering. This is a significant theme running through the entire Malamudian corpus. The following conversation between Roy and Iris throws light on Malamud’s philosophy of redemptive suffering:
We have two lives, Roy, the life we learn with and the life we live with after that. Suffering is what brings us towards happiness (148).

The true love of Iris compels Roy to decide to win the game he had planned to throw by being a "sell-out". He shows his moral courage, though late, when he refuses the money given to him by his corruptors. Suffering has brought courage and confidence in Roy to endure further suffering. He becomes "an archetype for all Malamud's small heroes, who like their larger Greek and Shakespearean counterparts - fall victim to a tragic flaw aggravated by misfortune" (Ben Siegel: 204).

In portraying Roy's quest for heroism in baseball, Malamud has drawn on folklore of baseball, the pastoral legend, Jungian psychology and Homeric epic. Inspite of the many parallels imposed upon the action, the novel seems meaningful. This is because the novel squarely confronts the moral and psychological problems of man in a society. Thematically, the novel fits into the pattern of Malamud's later work. Neither the baseball nor all its mythic associations are important to Malamud. Baseball has just given him an opportunity to represent larger human issues and probe the drama of moral issues.

The yearning for nature and for sex becomes in Malamud not only a desire for connection but ironically a mode of estrangement. When Roy and Iris Lemon return to the city from their evening at the
beach, Irish asks him to comfort her. Roy simply refuses. This shows Roy's limitations, as well as his moral confusions.

The process which turns the lover into a father generally forms the basis for redemption in the novels of Malamud. Deeply in love, both Frank Alpine and S. Levin resist love with all their strength just as Roy resists it to the end of the novel. It is only in the act of giving love that Malamud's heroes die to self and are reborn in spite of their limitations. The final act of giving love is the final measure of man's capacity for a free act. Roy's moral ineptitude shows that talent and integrity need not go together. His mad pursuit of money, fame and reputation, his refusal to learn from past experiences or suffering and his failure to come out of the shell of egoism, all lead him to his moral disintegration. But he realises, though late, his "tragic flaw" and is ready to face its consequences in further suffering because of Iris Lemon's true love for him.

Roy, like Frank Alpine in *The Assistant* and S. Levin in *A New Life*, proves that "life consists of achieving good not apart from evil but in spite of it" (Rollo May: 260). The message conveyed by Malamud is clear. It is only by the act of succumbing to the good within, by giving up the demands of the world that man may find the way to reattain the world.
In *The Natural*, Malamud exposes the evils of individualism culminating in the American Dream of Success. Roy Hobbs, the protagonist of the novel lacks community feeling. Companionship is an important tenet of compassion. But Roy is averse to companionship, and forgets his gratitude to Sam Simpson who helped him to enter the baseball career. It is only after a long period that he realises the uselessness of his vile pursuits. But he learns to suffer for the sake of others. He becomes guilty conscious on reading the news of his suspected sell-out. He is unable to control his feelings and “lifted his hands to his face and wept many bitter tears” (223).

The most distinctive fact about *The Natural* is that Malamud has managed to blend elements which seem to be incompatible. The best illustration of this, is of course, the very pattern of the work - the cross identification of mythic quest and baseball. It is the poetry of the work that charges the narrative with vitality. Throughout the book, there are passages of idiomatic, tense and slangy prose which alternate with passages of lyrical power. As often as not the two styles are perfectly integrated: “The long rain had turned the grass green and Roy romped in it like a happy calf in its pasture. The Redbirds, probing his armour, belted the ball to him whenever they could, which was often because Hill was not too happy on the mound, but Roy took everything they aimed at him” (80).

From the beginning to the end, *The Natural* is a poetic and symbolic novel. As such, it is a prologue to Malamud’s later work.
Considered apart from The Assistant or A New Life, it is, in fact, impressive in its handling of paradox and in its use of fractured style. It is only in relation to Malamud's later work that The Natural appears in any way lacking.

The failures of Roy Hobbs remind the human beings of their limitations. But at the same time, his near success reminds them of the untapped resources for triumph which lie within. Roy Hobbs becomes an archetype for all the protagonists of Malamud who fall a victim of a tragic flaw caused by misfortune.

Life, on the whole is a struggle towards self knowledge and redemption. Malamud believes that it is only through experience that one can learn the necessary lessons to give life true substance. One, who fails to learn anything from one's past experiences, cannot lead one's life meaningfully. For example, towards the end of the novel, The Natural, Roy Hobbs acknowledges the truth that he has not learnt anything out of his past life and has to suffer again.

Though the novel happens to end on a sense of loss, there is an indication that man still has something in him to redeem himself from his moral degradation. It is this invaluable message, a message of hope, for humanity that gives Malamud's work special strength and richness. Above all, as a study of the growth of inwardness and the value of suffering, The Natural is related to the other novels of Bernard Malamud.
The Fixer. Malamud’s fourth novel was widely praised on its appearance in 1966. It won him a second National Book Award and a Pulitzer Prize. Based on an incident of anti-Semitism in Tsarist Russia, the novel gives a strong expression to Malamud’s commitment of humanism. All the Jews in the novel are not good and all the Christians are not detestable. This clearly shows that Malamud’s intention is not to justify Judaism on disparage Christianity.

The Fixer forcefully depicts a heroic struggle and the marvel of human endurance. It brings home the truth that suffering lends a true substance to human life and becomes an agent of compassion in the evolution of man. It also remains unique in the fictional world of Malamud for its imaginative treatment of history.

The novel is based on an actual historical incident of Jewish persecution. Mendel Beiliss was tried in Kiev in 1913. He was falsely accused of murdering a Christian child. The novel delves into human psyche and evokes pathos most poignantly. It transforms the story of torture and humiliation into a parable of human triumph. According to Alan Warren Friedman, in this novel, “it is the seeking after living that is affirmed, and in Malamud’s theme, one undeniable characteristic of human living is human suffering” (Alan Warren Friedman: 933).

The Fixer is a sombre historical fiction set in Tsarist Russia. The persecution of the Jews in Russia echoes Biblical events and foreshadows modern genocide. The theme of compassion is movingly
expressed in this novel. It offers a treatise on suffering. The gradual evolution of Yakov Bok highlights the chastening value of suffering.

The novel begins with the familiar quest in Malamud’s protagonists for a ‘new life’. Yakov Bok, the protagonist, is a Jew by birth. Like all protagonists, he had a miserable past. He suffers right from his birth. After the death of his parents, he “lived in a sinking orphan’s home barely existing” (9).

Yakov marries Shmuel’s daughter Raisl but she cannot conceive and bear any child. He is economically poor. To make matters worse, Raisel, his wife runs away with a stranger. Deeply shocked and pained, he decides to leave Shtetl once for all. He loses faith in God and feels that the world is full of happiness for everybody except him. He is alive but worse than dead. Burdened with the feelings of remorse and depression of abject poverty, he leaves Shtetl.

Yakov reaches Kiev where he sees and experiences poverty in its naked form. He wanders in the street looking for some job. He comes across Nikolai Maximovitch Lebdev, an anti-semitic, who is lying in a drunken state and saves him from death. Nikolai feels grateful to Yakov. He employs him for painting and repairing the rooms of his empty flat. Later on Yakov becomes a supervisor to look after the accounts of his brick works. Nikolai also provides Yakov
accommodation in his house. Yakov conceals his identity from Nikolai and justifies his action:

Who could afford to say no to forty roubles - a tremendous sum? Therefore why worry about returning? Go, and do the job quickly, collect the money, and when you have it in your pocket, leave the place once for all and forget it. After all, it's only a job. I am not selling my soul. When I'm finished, I'll wash up and go (41).

While working in the flat, Yakov is involved in an affair with Nikolai's daughter Zinaida. His identity could have been revealed but he luckily escapes from being detected. He keeps an eye on the workers of the brick-kiln to prevent the thievery of bricks. His strict vigilance irritates many workers. However, Nikolai honestly praises Yakov's sincere efforts to fight corruption.

One day Nikolai's daughter Zinaida one-day forces Yakov to have sexual intercourse with her. She appears to him an older woman, perhaps twenty-eight or twenty-nine years old. He refuses to cohabit with her. He tells her:

'Zinaida Nikolaevna', he said, 'excuse me for asking you this question, but I don't want to make a serious mistake. I've made share of them - every kind you can think of - but there are some I don't want to make again' (50). But Zina insists time and again and asks him to pity her since she is a lonely woman. Yakov calls her unclean
since he sees “a dribble of bright blood run down her crippled leg” (51). She says that the flow of blood stops the moment they begin to cohabit. But Yakov refuses.

When the workers engage themselves in a witch-hunting campaign against Yakov, Zina also joins hands with them in retaliation. Moreover, things turn worse for Yakov who comes to know that a boy named Zhenia Golov has been stabbed to death possibly for religious purposes. Taking advantage of the blessings of the Tsar, the murder of the boy is exploited against Jews. Yakov plans to escape to Amsterdam. But he is arrested on suspicion, and imprisoned without indictment. He undergoes the severest atrocities in the prison for two years. There seems no end to his sufferings.

Imprisoned in the underground cell, Yakov realises and regrets his mistake in concealing his identity. Confessing his mistake to ‘Bibikov, the Investigating Magistrate, Yakov pleads innocence:

Never! Never! he cried hoarsely. ‘Why would I kill an innocent child? How could I have done it? For years I wanted a child but my luck was bad and my wife couldn’t have. If in no other way at least in my heart I’m a father. And if that’s so how could I kill an innocent child? I couldn’t think of such a thing, I’d rather be dead (69).
Yakov is shocked beyond measure when, of all the people, Nikolai turns against him, despite Yakov's honesty and loyalty to him. Zinaida, Nikolai's daughter rubs salt into his wound by charging that Yakov has attempted a sexual attack on her. However, Bibikov trusts Yakov and recommends light punishment to him for his illegal residence.

Grubeshov, the Prosecuting Attorney, and Colonel Bodyansky, the Head of the Secret Police are determined to send Yakov to his doom. Meanwhile, Marfa Golov, the murdered boy's mother tells the officials that his son has expressed his fear of the Jew to her more than once. She says that Yakov has chased the boy with a long knife. Bibikov's cross examination of the boy's mother does not change the situation for Yakov.

Yakov is taken to the place to show the disinterred body of the boy. Father Anastasy's speech on "ritual murder" incites the crowd and provokes malice on the Jews. Incidents from scriptures and history are quoted to prove the custom of "ritual murder" among the Jews as a re-enactment of the crucifixion of Jesus Christ. Father Anastasy concludes his speech:

... Thus through our blood in their Passover food they again consume the agonised body of the living Christ. I give you my word, my dear children, that this is the reason why Zhenia
Golov, this innocent child who wished to enter the priesthood was destroyed (122).

One day Raisl, Yakov's wife who ran away from him, comes to the prison to see him. He calls her a whore and showers abuses on her. But she keeps mum and listens to his reproaches patiently. Then she tells him that she is no longer sterile and has already given birth to a male child. She pleads with Yakov to father the child in order to save her from shame. She also informs him that a few persons belonging to Jews and non-Jews are fighting tooth and nail for his release because he is totally innocent. Then she goes away.

Yakov undergoes all kinds of tortures, mental as well as physical, in the cell at the hands of anti-Semites. He feels forsaken and abandoned. He is brutalised and dehumanised. He is forced to experience severe beatings, hunger, pain, rats, biting cold and insanity. But like a typical Malamudian hero, he exhibits remarkable tolerance.

Day after day Yakov's tortures continue. He is searched six times a day and is kept in chains. He is offered a chance to get his liberty if he agrees to sign a confession. Despite his frustration and pathetic situation, he declines the offer of freedom and affirms his innocence. Grubeshov, after issuing a severe warning to Yakov of the execution of Jews in the not too distant past makes an open threat:
'You can cry to Bibikov from now to doomsday', he shouted at the fixer, 'but I will keep you in prison till flesh rots off your bones piece by piece. You will beg me to let me confess who compelled you to murder that innocent boy!' (130).

Yakov is determined to undergo all kinds of tortures in the cell which are gruesome and inhuman. He does not want freedom for his own sake by betraying his own race. He is shifted from one place to another and is given a dress which has the smell of sweat. The food offered to him is awfully bad. Malamud narrated the inhuman suffering with such a compassionate and anguished imagination that the readers could be made to feel for this one man what we could not possibly for the six millon” (Granvillie Hicks 1966 :37).

Bibikov, the Investigating Magistrate, sympathises with Yakov. He is an exception in the world of anti-Semitism. He assures Yakov that he will gather evidence and rescue him by all means. He is full of compassion for Yakov and gives him moral courage. He says:

keep in mind, Yakov Shepsovitch, that if your life is without value, so is mine. If the law does not protect you, it will not, in the end, protect me. Therefore I dare not fail you, and that is what causes me anxiety - that I must not fail you (159).

Infact, Bibikov is an oasis of compassion. In his investigation, he found that the boy was murdered by his own
mother and her lover. The boy was grossly neglected by her. When her son came to know of her immoral behaviour and of her association with a gang of house-breakers and criminals, he threatened to expose her illegal activities to the police. At once Marfa Golov and her lover planned to do away with the boy. Bibikov gathered evidence and tried to rescue Yakov who was implicated in this matter.

The surgeon who operates Yakov on is feet treats him with cruelty. He does not administer anesthesia since he hates the Jews:

‘This is good for you Bok’, said the surgeon. Now you know how poor Zhenia felt when you were stabbing him and draining his blood, all for the sake of your Jewish religion (169).”

Leading to self-discovery through self-knowledge, suffering becomes a power and contributes to Yakov in *The Fixer*. Suffering plays a significant role in Yakov’s self-knowledge. Tortured and tormented for no fault of his, he resolves to suffer, live and protect his race. At times when he thinks of committing suicide, he says to himself that it is a cowardly act. He resolves to live and suffer not for him but for others. This is the new awareness wrought on him by suffering through love and compassion. Suffering, thus objectified, becomes a healing power in Yakov whose magnitude of suffering rises to the level of Jesus Christ and Mahatma Gandhi who
sacrificed their lives for the sake of humanity. Malamud exemplifies the theme of compassion in these words of Yakov: "I am the victim, the sufferer for my people" (299).

Yakov feels the sting of anti-semetism even from the fellow-prisoners when they learn that he is a Jew. The torture is so unbearable that Yakov cries pathetically as he is unable to understand why he has more than his share of misery in this cruel world. He curses himself and seems to realise the predicament of a Jew in history. He says:

Being born a Jew meant being vulnerable to history, including its worst errors. Accident and history had involved Yakov Bok as he had never dreamed he could be involved. The involvement was in a way of speaking, impersonal but the effect, his misery and suffering were not. The suffering was personal, painful and possibly endless. (141).

Yakov learns from Bibikov that "the purpose of freedom is to create it for others" (286). Something inside him has changed and he comes to realise that he is not the same person once he was. The death of Bibikov who was the only hope for Yakov, intensifies his agony and loneliness. He weeps like a child in great desperation: 'Mama - Papa', he cried out, 'Save me!' Shimuel, Raisl - anybody - Save me! Somebody save me!' (166).
The knowledge of Spinoza and his ideals do not come to Yako's rescue. At times he recalls Psalms he heard in his childhood and recites them loudly. He gradually loses his faith in God. Feeling sick of the Jews, he curses his fate: "What was being a Jew but an everlasting curse?" (206). He even turns a Christian in his mind and tries to capture the true spirit of Christianity. But he wonders: "How can any one love Christianity and keep an innocent man suffering in prison" (210).

When the priest asks Yakov to embrace Christianity to view his case sympathetically, Yakov declines the suggestion. Gradually he wakes up to pity the history of Jews and their sub-human life. Though he is not a religious Jew, he identifies himself with the Jews and their fate.

Yakov's moral transformation is quite clear when his wife Raisl meets him in the prison. Though he blames her for her elopement, he admits his failings pointed out by her. He says "I've thought about our life from beginning to end and I can't blame you for more than I blame myself .... Also, it takes me a long time to learn" (259).

He writes in a piece of paper that he declares himself to be the father of Chaim, the infant son of his wife Raisl Bok.
Similarly when he refuses to sign the papers of confession through his wife, his moral steadfastness is evident.

The dramatic moment of the novel arrives when Yakov, instead of signing the confession, writes: “Every word is a lie” (262). Tony Tanner rightly remarks: “Yakov refuses to betray his people in the interest of personal comfort, and he willingly takes on the role of a father to a child not his own. In the Malamud world, this is the heroic moment”. (Tony Tanner: 337).

Conscious of the change in him, Yakov feels of Bibikov in a vision: ‘Something in myself has changed. I’m not the same man I was. I fear less and hate more. (286). His hatred for the Tsarist officials is motivated by his deep concern for the wronged Jewish community. He indicts the Tsar for his lack of humanism, lack of charity and lack of compassion. He shoots him with his revolver for the injustice he heaped on the innocent people. His killing of the Tsar cannot be termed as a murderous act but a positive act. He realises that there is no freedom without fight. He becomes a fiery revolutionary and strongly pleads for justice and human values. He shouts: “Death to the anti-Semites’, Long live revolution! Long Live Liberty” (299).

Yakov responds to history with a feeling of responsibility towards the Jews and his existence acquires meaning. Rising above his own scepticism and the deficiencies of his nature, he discovers the ways of Mentshlehkhkayt. His compassion for others has made him a Jew in
the real sense. Though the novel is placed in a Jewish Shtelt in the Russian area, the central impulse, “transcends the Jewish framework to defend the interest of all humanity” (D.R. Sharma : XIV).

Yakov’s awareness of his responsibility for his community is suggestive of a recurring theme in Malamud’s fiction. After his deeply traumatic experiences in the prison cell, he is finally redeemed by his conviction that his sufferings have not been in vain. He has suffered to justify millions of other Jews who might have been similarly falsely indicted by an oppressive state.

What provides the essence of Malamud’s novels is the moral and spiritual growth of his characters through suffering and compassion. He strikes a positive note when he affirms that life is truly worth living despite its horror, pain and suffering.

The Assistant, the most well - known of Malamud’s novels, was published in 1957. It elaborately renders Malamud’s theme of suffering which occupies the entire Malamudian corpus. It movingly portrays the travails of Morris Bober, a Jewish grocer, who is crushed by the frustrating effects of Depression and anti - semitism. It deals with the mysterious “hidden strength” of man that makes him endure colossal suffering with his uncompromising sense of value.

Morris Bober is a poor Russian Jew struggling to run a grocery store. He “is a victim of fellow Jews who forget the primary
role of being a Jew in a competitive social order” (D.R. Sharma : XIX). He forms the ethical centre of the novel since he embodies in his life the basic spirit of Jewishness and of humanity. Malamud, thus, describes Morris Bober in these words:

He laboured long hours, was the soul of honesty - he could not escape his honesty, it was bedrock; to cheat would cause an explosion in him, yet he trusted cheaters - coveted nobody’s nothing and always got poorer. The harder he worked - his toil was a form of time devouring time - the less he seemed to have. he was Morris Bober and could be more fortunate (13).

*The Assistant* affirms the redemptive value of maintaining faith in the goodness of the human soul. Through the character of Morris Bober, Malamud makes the most significant point that despite being poor, one can be good. Morris Bober is a symbol of ‘ethical’ man and his grocery of ‘Prison’. The store is the source of his bitterness, suffering and frustration. His compassion is coupled with his honesty. He believes that man must treat man in a spirit of equality. The more Morris Bober suffers, the greater is his suffering. He is an isolated loner who has the potential for achieving moral transcendence through suffering and compassion.

Morris Bober basically embodies a certain life - affirming set of values. Though Helen Bober, Malamud shows the reader
what her father lacks in this commercial world. According to Helen, her father was honest, but what was the good of such honesty if he couldn’t exist in this world? Her critical appraisal of her father is not based on her hatred. It is, on the other hand, tempered with love. She tries to portray her father as a discriminating person, though her life is a series of expectations and failures.

Morris Bober, who is sixty years old, sticks to his store without any hope of improving his condition. If he thinks of selling his store, he at once feels “where will I go without a roof over my head?” He is, therefore, forced to live death - in - life existence in his tomb - like store. His pecuniary has embittered his wife Ida and his daughter. The only consolation he has is that “When a man is honest, he don’t worry when he sleeps” (70).

Morris shuns the idea of dishonest dealing even with Podolsky. He has been severely victimised by his partner Charlie Sobeloff who manipulates all the store’s accounts. Frank Alpine, his assistant, steals money from his cash - box, removes milk, butter and other eatables from his store to appease his hunger. Still, Morris Bober does not hand Frank over to the police, nor does he turn him out of service. When Frank says to him “What do you suffer for, Morris’? he calmly remarks, ‘I suffer for you’. Frank again asks Morris, “What do you mean”? Morris replies : “I mean you suffer for me” (106).
Morris Bober has the endurance and forbearance of job. He suffers first for himself in order to earn money and to flourish in business. Then he feels the need to educate his daughter and earn for his wife. This further extends to Frank and his customers. Thus his moral sensibility is universalised as he suffers for others unknown to him.

Morris is not only noble and kind in his business dealings, but also equally fair in his inter-personal relations with people. That is why on the occasion of his funeral, the rabbi tells the mourners that despite many unjewish actions, the grocer lived like a true Jew by doing good to others and enduring sufferings with hope.

In *The Assistant*, the suffering protagonist Frank Alpine is a cynical anti-semitic youth. He struggles to reconcile moral dilemmas, to act according to what is right and good and to come to grips with his existence. In the beginning he is a hold-up-nick, thief and liar. Mentally tormented, he wants to expiate his guilt. However, he continues to steal from the cash-box.

Morris Bober takes a sympathetic view of Frank’s pilferage as a recompense for slave wages for workman’s services. He doubles Frank’s wages out of compassion. From the very first appearance as a robber, there is something hopeful in Frank throughout the novel. This is because of the influence upon him by St. Francis since his childhood.
Frank is attracted by Morris who sees in Frank his own son Ephraim. Morris discerns the potential of goodness in Frank who is young, tough, seemingly unscrupulous, but endowed with inner goodness. Helen ignores him, and Ward ridicules him as "a goddam salvation Army Soldier" (62). But Morris accepts him.

Malamud chooses for his young protagonist the Jewish backdrop of Morris Bober's family and exposes Frank to suffering. During his stay with the Bobers, Frank comes across the stark realities of life. At the same time, he is also acquainted with the noble aspects of life. He is impressed by Morris Bober's unyielding honesty, the will to suffer for the sake of others, dogged endurance and the beauty of love. Frank often discusses with the Jew the doctrine of suffering. Suffering, he realises later, is a universal human condition and is not confined to Jews alone.

The thematic thrust of the novel *The Assistant* hinges on Frank Alpine's gradual transformation and redemption through suffering. It is Frank Alpine who provides energy and depth to the basic narrative design of the novel. He gradually transforms from being an egocentric, from lust to love and from his unreasonable hatred for Judaism to his deliberate but significant conversion to it.

The full significance of Morris Bober's views on life and Judaism becomes clear to Frank only after the death of the
grocer. As a typical Malamudian hero, he is caught up between aspiration and appetite. He realises the extent of his own self-degradation when he thinks of his acts of mendacity and stealing. At the same time, he remembers the warn human treatment that he received from the old gentle grocer. His realisation of the grocer's generous behaviour deepens his self-hatred. His transformation is subtly suggested through his reading of the Bible and the image of St. Francis.

It is during his intense self-questioning that Frank yearns to acquire a beginning with Helen Bober. He wants to expiate himself through his dedicated service at the store after the death of Morris Bober. There is also a gradual and steady change in Helen who begins to appreciate Frank when he sincerely tries to salvage her family. The concrete evidence for this change in her for him lies, when she openly breaks away from Nat Pearl.

Morris Bober's store acts as a testing ground for his ability to retain his moral behaviour. Moreover, it becomes a training centre for Frank. Morris tells Frank that a store is a prison. But Frank does not flee from it. He comes to understand that imprisonment is necessary if he wants to achieve his moral and spiritual possibilities. He requires imprisonment in the store to attain self-discipline.
Frank Alpine's flaws in character gradually disappear when he willingly and wholeheartedly shares the misery caused to the family of Morris. He climbs a ring higher in morality. He even tells Helen that he will go to college in order to become more gentle. His taking on Morris's mantle of morality makes him a new person and start a fresh and meaningful life. It is indeed symbolic that he becomes the son of Bober Ephraim by taking his position as caretaker of the family to which he owes a lot.

Wavering between guilt and remorse, Frank wants to lead a life of morality and discipline. Unlike Roy Hobbs in *The Natural* who fails to learn from his experience, Frank tries to overcome his weakness with great effort and struggle. In all his conflicting motives and actions, he is guided by his singular passion for Helen Bober. In the beginning, his passion for her is sensual but ultimately it becomes purely selfless in the end. He is ready to work in the store without wages for two reasons. He is partly moved by his guilty-conscience and partly by his interest in Helen.

Though he is full of gratitude for Morris, he finds it very hard to give up his habit of stealing. Sometimes he tries to justify his act.

There were times stealing made him feel good. It felt good to have some change in his pocket, and it felt good to pluck a buck from under the Jew's nose. He would slip into his
pants pocket so deftly that he had to keep himself from laughing (71).

After saving Helen from Ward Minogue who tries to molest her, Frank himself forces his own passion on her. Helen strongly protests:

They sank to their knees on the winter earth. Helen urgently whispering please not now, darling, but he spoke of his starved and passionate love, and all the endless heart-breaking waiting. Even as he spoke he thought of her as beyond his reach, for ever in the bathroom as he spied, so he stopped her pleas with kisses.

Afterward, she cried, 'Dog - uncircumcised dog (144).

Frank's carefully built relations with Helen receive a severe jolt as a result of his stupid attempt to seduce Helen. He does not make the seduction attempt wantonly. However, this incident makes Helen change her passionate longing into violent hatred for Frank. She has even wanted to marry him though he is a non-Jew.

Frank deeply regrets for his rash behavior towards Helen. From this point, a remarkable change occurs in him. He cries, "Oh my God, why did I do it? Why did I ever do it? Why did I do it"? (148). His penitence increases his debt to the Bober family. He rescues Morris who is caught in the gas-filled
chamber. Ida, Helen’s mother expresses her gratitude to him. But Frank modestly replies: “Any way I feel I have a debt to him for all the things he has done for me . . . . That’s my nature, when I’m thankful I’m thankful” (155).

Helen, however, feels a violent self-hatred for trusting Frank. From the very beginning, she had sensed that he was a person not to be trusted. She did not know how she could have allowed herself to fall in love with anybody like him.

She was filled with loathing at the fantasy she had created, of making him into what he couldn’t be - educable, promising, kind and good, when he was no more than a bum. Where were her wits, her sense of elemental self-preservation (150).

Frank assures Ida that he will not bother Helen any more. He decides to do anything for the sake of Helen and prove his sincerity and loyalty to the family. He sincerely apologises to her and says: “Nothing can kill the love I feel for you” (158). But Helen turns a deaf ear to his words and tells him that love is a dirty word in his mouth.

Frank willingly accepts the role of a sufferer in order to do his best for the Bober family. The Norwegians open a new store. The business of Bober’s store dwindles. Frank sacrifices all that he
can to improve the business. Working day and night, he adds money to the store’s account gradually. He secretly watches the Norwegians to learn their tricks of the trade. Besides, he takes up the night assignment of counterman at a Coffee Bar. He works almost for twenty four hours like a penitent saint. Morris Bober’s earlier exhortation “I suffer for you” and “you suffer for me” forms the essence of Frank’s practice.

It is very unfortunate that Morris Bober asks Frank to leave the store at a time when Frank honestly makes his confession about his role in the hold up.

‘Morris’, Frank said, at agonizing last, I have something important to tell you. I tried to tell you before only I couldn’t work my nerve up. Morris, don’t blame me now for what once I did because I am now a changed man, but I was one of the guys that held you up that night. I swear to God I didn’t want to once I got in here, but I couldn’t get out of it . . . . (168).

Frank’s honest confession makes no impact on Morris Bober who sternly orders Frank to quit the place. Though he pities the clerk, he does not want a confessed criminal around. He refuses to give one last chance to Frank. Before leaving, Frank writes a note to Helen expressing his genuine regret for what he has done to her.

Suffering brings a change in Frank’s attitude to life. After seeing him as a worker in a store at night sh’ft, Helen notices
the inner change in him. He becomes "groggy from overwork, thin, unhappy". This sight marks the beginning of a change in her attitude towards him. Frank, too wants to do something for Helen’s education. The sisyphean task that he has set himself to is not only a heavy load but a rocky load on his head. Yet “he had to do it, it was his only hope; he could think of no other. All he asked for himself was the privilege of giving her something she couldn’t give back”. (202).

Frank’s extraordinary selfless compassion under the most difficult situations surprises Helen. When she realises what he is offering her, she is deeply moved by his selfless suffering and compassion:

His staying power mystified and frightened her, because she felt in her self, since the death of Ward Minogue, a warning of outrage. Although she detested the memory of her experience in the park, lately it had come back to her how she had desired that night to give herself to Frank, and might have if Ward hadn’t touched her. She had wanted him. If there had been no Ward Minogue, there have been no assault. If he had made his starved leap in bed she would have returned passion. She had hated him, she thought, to divert hatred from herself (203).
By getting himself circumcised, Frank's carnal desire is punished ritually. In embracing new faith, he not only learns its doctrines of suffering and compassion but also learns to involve intensely and share in the suffering of others. The spirits of St. Francis of Assisi and of Morris Bober assimilate in him and make him an "everyman" who understands the meaning of existence through suffering. About his suffering, Richman observes:

"Frank struggles against the lingering claims of the old self. "At times he succumbs but finally he reasserts the truth of his transformation" (Richman 1967: 71).

Optimism and pessimism, hope and despair, humour and pathos, transcendence and entrapment find place in The Assistant. Similarly, there are good and bad situations and characters in the novel. Through Frank Alpine and Morris Bober, Malamud stresses the golden truth that irrespective of religion or race, the reciprocal responsibility of man towards man should be acknowledged. Suffering leads an individual to humility and compassion.

The entire novel sums up the significance and the great value of suffering and compassion. Suffering has chastened Frank and has fostered the values of understanding and charity. In Morris Bober and Frank, Malamud has evoked the theme of
compassion most effectively. The Assistant and The Fixer are the two novels which are crucial for understanding Malamud's concept of compassion.

From his initial hatred of Jews, Frank attains a stage where he becomes one with the Morris family and twins a Jew literally. He, thus, upholds the principles of interpersonal responsibility and compassion for which Morris Bober worked throughout his life.

The Assistant dramatises Frank Alpine's "successful initiation into a new spiritual life" (Robert Solotaroff: 440). Once Frank begins his work as Morris' assistant in the store, he begins at the same time his spiritual apprenticeship in his search for a new life. He tries to reveal something of his struggle for meaning in life. He tells Morris: "I've often tried to change the way things work out for me but I don't know how, even when I think I do. I have it in my heart to do more than I can remember ...." (30).

One of the central themes of Malamud in his novels, is the possibility of change in the course of carrying out a human existence. In his interview with William Kennedy in The National Observer, Malamud says: "A man is always changing and the changed part of his is all-important. I refer to the psyche, the spirit, the mind, the emotions" (Richard Astro and Jackson J. Benson: 77).
In Morris Bober one finds Malamud's image of a man who has achieved spiritual fulfilment. Morris is a man who understands human suffering and accepts it as a way of life. For example, his relationship with Breitbart is just an example to show his capacity for seeing another. This is what Martin Buber calls the "I - Thou relation".

When Breitbart first came to Morris' neighbourhood and dropped into the store, the grocer, seeing his fatigue offered him a glass of tea with lemon. The peddler eased the rope of his shoulders and set his boxes on the floor. In the back he gulped the hot tea in silence, warming both hands on the glass. And though he had, besides his troubles, the seven year itch which kept him awake half the night, he never complained. After ten minutes he got up, thanked the grocer, fitted the rope onto his lean and itchy shoulder and left. One day he told Morris the story of his life and they both wept (74).

Morris Bober has little respect for Karp, the liquor store owner or Schmitz, the grocer from Germany. Morris is, infact, fears Schmitz's competition. but he treats them in the "I - thou" relation. Seeing Karp's thriving business, he wished the liquor store would burn to the ground. But he feels ashamed and anguished when Karp's liquor store burns to the ground.

He stood at his bed room window in his long underwear looking down at the pile of burned and broken fixtures on the side walk.
With a frozen hand the grocer clawed at a live pain in his breast. He felt an overwhelming hatred of himself. He had wished it on Karp - just this. His anguish was terrible” (186).

Morris’ capacity to understand another’s suffering or another’s troubles extends to everyone. It extends from the “Drunk Woman” who still gets a measure of credit in the store to Al Marcus, the paper products salesman, who is dying of cancer, but continues his daily life of work.

Everybody knew how sick he was, and a couple of the storekeepers earnestly advised him to quit working, but Al Marcus, smiling apologetically, took his cigar out of his mouth and said, “If I stay home, somebody in a high hat is gonna walk up the stairs and put a knock on my door. This way let him atleast move his bony as around and try to find me” (73).

Frank Alpine and Breitbart, who sells the light bulb continues to practise the way shown by Morris Bober. Malamud objectifies Morris Bober’s capacity for the I - Thou relation in these simple words : “No matter how bad business was, Morris tried to have some kind of little order for him” (73).

This scene comes to an end with the image of Frank in the store, now himself the grocer spiritually and physically.
Frank's evolution from man to mentsch is significant. He finds new life in his authentic human relations with the Bober family in which he is guided by selfless compassion. His fall on the coffin of Morris is symbolic of his role in the replacement of the grocer. After 'Passover', he celebrates his transformation and redemption.

His (Malamud's) vision encompasses human pain and human potential. He conveys hope through the dual vision of Jewish humor; he captures the bitter reality of suffering and shows the possibilities for spiritual growth through such suffering (Hershinow. 1980 : 46 - 47).

Frank learns that shared suffering, poverty and sorrow can unify diverse beings. Uncertain and guilt-ridden, he does not allow others to see him fully. "There was more to him than his appearance" observes Helen Bober. "Still, he hid what he had and he hid what he hadn't ... you looked into mirrors and saw mirrors and didn't know what was right or real or important" (121).

Mirrors, windows and dreams offer the troubled Morris Bober and his assistant opportunities for self-realisation, identity and guidance. Morris Bober reads a newspaper titled The Mirror. It "reflects his daily expectation of finding in the social realities surrounding him some answers to his dilemmas". (Richard Astro and Jackson J. Benson : 123).
Frank is torn by aspiring dreams and harsh realities by high ideals and low fleshly desires. So he very often fails to see himself clearly. His inadequacies and frustrations are intensified when he catches the partly deflected glimpses. Standing before a cracked mirror, he sees a distorted face which suggests to him a warped personality. After sexually forcing Helen Bober, he feels “a nose - thumbing revulsion”. “Where have you ever been he ask(s) the one in the glass, except on the inside of a circle? What have you ever done but always the wrong thing?” (174 - 75).

In nature or the seasons, Malamud’s characters generally find a psychological mirror for their mental or emotional states. They resist the truths conveyed by their reflections and fears. They are mostly losers and opt invariably for defeat or failure. But they take their setbacks in the right spirit.

Malamud reiterates his commitment to redemption through meaningful suffering. Frank transforms himself into a disciplined moral being and models himself after the demise of Morris Bober. According to Malamud, the love or commitment invested in others by an individual measures his own grace. After becoming a Jew, Frank brings together his dreams and realities. As he becomes unified, his life gives him hope.

Like all Malamud loners, Frank gradually but after painful experiences learns that self - worth and self dignity are best gained
by responding to another’s needs. Man would not be man at all without the “I - Thou” relationship. Emerging from the domain of lust to the realm of concern, Frank embodies the spirit of what the priest in Hemingway’s *A Farewell to Arms* (1929) tells Frederick Henry:

“When you love you wish to do things for. You wish to sacrifice for. You wish to sacrifice for. You wish to serve”.

**The Assistant** is “about simple people struggling to make their lives better in a world of bad luck” (William Goyen 1957: 4). The novel can well be called a hymn to human kindness and understanding. It also never seeks to hide evil or shun it and searches for the soul of goodness in it. Simple people like Morris Bober, Yakov Bok and Frank Alpine are undeterred by their sufferings, and preserve their faith in man. According to Malamud, people can be beautiful and happy without losing their ability to dwell on this earth. He rejected the view that evil is man’s natural state. One of his favourite themes is that salvation of mankind lies in the hands of the humble, of whom Morris Bober and Frank Alpine are memorable examples.

The autobiographical element gives additional dimension to **The Assistant**. The acute poverty and the unflinching moral fervour of Malamud’s parentage shapes Morris Bober who lives and dies penniless. In his interview with Daniel Stern, Malamud recalls:

My father was a grocer; my mother, who helped him, after a long illness, died young. I had a younger brother who
lived a hard and lonely life and died in his fifties. My mother
and father were gentle, honest, kindly people, and who they
were and their affection for me to some degree made up
for the cultural deprivation I felt as a child. They weren't
educated but their values were stable. Though my father
always managed to make a living, they were comparatively
poor, especially in the Depression, and yet, I never heard
a word in praise of the buck .... (Daniel Stern : 43).

The Assistant can very well be compared with Kamala
Markandaya's novel A Handful of Rice. "In Malamud's novel, a stray
Christian waif, who comes to steal from a Jewish shop, stays on to help
the shop owner and win the love of the daughter. He is nagged by his
mother-in-law and tortured by poverty. But the shop owner's
sudden breakdown makes him indispensable in the house and the shop.
An identical situation is contrived in Kamala Markadaya's novel when
Ravi breaks into Apu's household. He stays on to become an assistant
to the tailor and marries Apu's daughter Nalini. Apu falls ill and Ravi
takes charge of the house and the business. After Apu's death, he takes
up Apu's daily struggle to keep his home and hearth alive" (K.R. Srinivasa
Iyengar : 445).

The Assistant has too much material to show that Malamud
is a great believer in and upholder of social equality. Morris Bober
who suffers a lot because of his poor business, leads a virtuous life
of an honest and kind-hearted grocer. He believes even those who
deceive him. Frank Alpine, his assistant, steals not only milk rolls from his store but also money from his cash box. But Morris does not take him to task.

The kindness of Morris works as a kind of spark of nobility in Frank's morally deprived soul. Morris, who believes in the principle of 'Social Equality', values interdependence of man as the basis of human relationship. His philosophy leaves an indelible mark on Frank who suffers for others - for Helen, Ida and Morris in their days of acute penury. Morris is honest not only in business dealing but also in his interpersonal relation. "He suffered, he endured but, with hope. He asked for himself little - nothing" (203). The idea of 'Social Equality' reigns supreme in the mind of Helen Bober as well. When Frank gives her a present of a package, she holds it against her breast and feels a throb of desire for him. Both Morris and Helen treat Frank as their equal.

This chapter, clearly shows that suffering and compassion play a vital role in the works of Bernard Malamud. In *The Assistant* Morris Bober, who is full of compassion for others, suffers materially. But his suffering is meaningful in the sense that it transforms a morally bad man like Frank Alpine into a compassionate and dignified human being. Again, Yahov Bok in *The Fixer* becomes the personification of forbearance and compassion. Through Iris Lemon, Roy Hobbs, the protagonist in *The Natural*, understands rather
belatedly the value of love and compassion. He, too, becomes a changed man, though he has to learn a lot from his sufferings. This chapter emphasises the fact that there is still some inner spirit in man which has the power to redeem him from his moral failures. This is Malamud's invaluable message of hope to humanity.

Bernard Malamud has achieved distinction not only as a novelist but also as a renowned short story writer. His stories are remarkable both for his technique of story-telling and for his concern for morality and ethics. The compassion which shapes his moral vision in his novels is also evident in many of his short stories.

To Malamud's credit, there are three collections of short stories. Dogged by misfortune and injustice, his characters strive to seek redemption in compassion. His stories, like his novels, create a lively atmosphere moving as they do from fantasy to realism. They reveal the contexts of suffering and compassion in different situations of life.

The Magic Barrel, Malamud's first collection of thirteen stories, won him the first National Book Award. The citation reads: "Compassionate and profound in its wry humour, it captures the poetry of human relationships at the point where imagination and reality meet" (Granville Hicks: 32).
The stories are unified by a tone of refined and humorous wisdom and compassion. Stories like *The Bill* and *Take Pity* draw the attention of the readers because compassion at the cost of self-evasive suffering of Panessas in *The Bill* and Rosen in *Take Pity* become meaningful in their compassionate response to the needs of the suffering brethren.

Most of the stories deal with Jews and Gentiles living in New York and a few have an Italian background. The division of stories into groups would certainly limit their dynamic connection with one another. Besides, such a division would hinder the organisation of a complex response to the variety of experience. The book, on the whole, reveals the fact that man has the ability to realise himself in the face of deprivation and disaster. In short, the stories in this collection bring out Malamud’s belief that man can subordinate his self-interest to larger human issues.

The story *The Bill* shows how in a ruled by the ineluctable demands of economics and accidents, even the good people become bad. Though poor himself, Panessa readily helps Willy Schlegel who is a poor janitor. Out of his faith in humanity, he helps Willy. But Willy, exploiting the innocence of Panessa, buys all his needs from the shop only on credit even when he has money.

When the credit comes to eighty dollars and odd, Willy stops coming to the grocery. One day Mrs. Panessa sends a note to Willy
requesting him to pay at least ten dollars since her husband is ill. Unable to repay that amount, Willy hides himself in a cellar and remains there for a day. But the next day he changes his mind and decides to give ten dollars by pawning his coat. When he goes to Panessa's house, he finds that he has passed away.

Willy experienced an intense despair. He "tried to say something but his tongue hung in his mouth like dead fruit on a tree and his heart was a black-painted window" (139). The story comes to an end with the following words: "Mrs. Panessa moved away to live first one stone-faced daughter, then with the other. And the bill was never paid" (153).

The story is only eight pages long, but its impact is powerful. Though the relationship of Willy Schlegels and Panessas forms the dramatic centre, the story really belongs to Willy, observing the progress of the story, he broods upon the disconsolate weariness of his life in an East side wasteland.

When he cannot pay, Mrs. Panessa offers it and says:

... because after all what was credit but the fact that people were human beings, and if you were really a human being you gave credit to somebody else and he gave credit to you (146 - 47).
The story is not just about goodness alone and not even about particular forms of Jewish goodness. It may be viewed as one which depicts the manner in which soul descends into an embittering nightmare when the need to extend goodness is denied.

In *The First Seven Years*, the aged Feld is the real centre of the story because of the special moral demands imposed upon him. Like Morris Bober, he is partly the victim of his goodness. Agonising over memories of his youth in a Polish Shtetl, he, a shoemaker, swears to create for his daughter Miriam a better life than he has known. He is not aware of the fact that his daughter is loved by Sobel, a refugee, who five years before had saved Feld from ruin. He arranges a date for his daughter with Max a young accounting student. For this action, he loses his infuriated assistant and, for his guilt, his own sense of well-being.

But Miriam, who has already been won by Sobel, is convinced that the budding accountant is an inveterate materialist. When a new assistant proves a thief, her father in despair takes to his bed with a damaged heart. He is driven by a complex of needs. The old man rushes to Sobel's cluttered rooming house. He listens to Sobel's moving declaration of his love for Miriam. Feld shuttles from exasperation to a compassion which proves his undoing:

Watching him, the shoemaker's anger diminished. His teeth were on edge with pity for the man, and his eyes grew moist. How
strange and sad that a refugee, a grown man, bald and old with his miseries, who had by the skin of his teeth escaped Hitler's incinerators, should fall in love, when he had got to America, with a girl less than half his age. Day after day, for five years he had sat at his bench, cutting and hammering away, waiting for the girl to become a woman, unable to ease his heart with speech, knowing no protest but desperation (15).

What sustains The First Seven Years most effectively is what sustains Malamud's second novel The Assistant. Feld makes Sobel promise that he will wait for two more years till his daughter becomes twenty one. Sobel agrees and continues “Pounding leather for his love’ (20). The intensity of Feld’s emotion, the fragments of youth and the grotesque beauty of Sobel provide the story with the suggestion of human mysteries and human miracles.

The Mourners narrates an incident in the life of a sixty five year old retired egg candler. He tries to end his life closeted in a miserable little flat at the top of an East Side tenement. Kessler, the poor tenant is driven out of the flat and the passers-by are indifferent to him. He freezes almost to death in the snow. Even then there is nobody to help him. An old Italian lady, who lives on the top floor is horrified at the sight, comes to his rescue. Kessler realises his own guilt to his wife and three children. He had abandoned them long back. He is torn by grief for his lack of compassion. Gruber, the landlord, agonizes over
his guilty conscience for the way he had treated the old man. He feels that "the mourner was mourning him it was he who was dead" (28). He wraps himself in a sheet and drops to the floor as a fellow mourner.

Entitled Take Pity, the story is narrated in a sustained and brilliant Yiddish idiom. The story fails because the author’s own voice is missing. But in this story, Malamud employs, for the first time in his career, extended first person narration. The story suffers from an abrupt conclusion and it is not clear how a man who has turned the gas and put his face in the store can tell his story.

Idiots First is Malamud’s second collection of stories. As D.R. Sharma observes, these stories widen the area of observation and provide an understanding into Malamud’s acute awareness of Man’s inhumanity and of racial prejudices between blacks and Jews. The German Refugee and The Jewbird expose the horror of anti-semitism.

It is evident that the author’s themes in this work directly echo the themes of the earlier stories. There are no remarkable stories like The Loan and The Bill which represent some of the most impressive achievements. Only two stories in this collection The Cost of Living and The Death of Me employ the folk-tale perfected by Malamud in his first volume. The Cost of Living recounts how Sam Tomashevesky, an old and kind grocer, was ruined by a neighbouring super
market and guilt wracked landlord. The Death of Me deals with an old clothier's efforts to reconcile his two rival assistants.

The heart-breaking attempts of Sam Tomashevsky in the story The Cost of Living recall the fate of Morris Bober of The Assistant. The opening of a new grocery store in the neighbourhood dashes Sam's dim chances of survival. Sam tries his best to open a shoe instead of the grocery, but he fails in his attempt. Above all, the auction of the grocery store does not given him the required money to clear his debts. He does not even dare to return to look at his store and leaves the place with his wife.

In the collection of stories Rembrandt's Hat, Malamud continues his concern for compassion which binds human beings together. The Letter is the shortest story, deals with the predicament of insane father and son. My Son, the Murderer is about a father who begs his callous son to refrain from the deeds which endanger his life. Man in the Drawer brings out the agony of a writer to communicate his ideas.

Talking Horse is "an existential statement on man's search for identity and freedom" (Robert Phillips : 245). Levenspiel's cry in The Tenants "Hab rachmones" (Have Mercy) epitomises Malamud's philosophy of compassion which makes life better and meaningful. This affirmative vision is the unifying force of his novels and short stories.