

## CONCLUSION

The foregoing study of the role and significance of minor characters helps correct some of misreadings of Malamud's fiction as a result of critics' heavy dependence on the study of hero. No doubt, the hero is an important figure in the writer's works but the minor characters also have pivotal and significant roles to play. The critical imbalances arising out of near-total neglect of the minor characters need to be rectified and only then we can arrive at a full understanding of the writer's vision and art. The profundity and the richness of the writer's view of life and the wide reach of his concerns have escaped the attention of the critics and therefore, he has often been dubbed as a "Yiddish teller of tales" (Roth 5) whose range is limited to the Judaic world. Roth observes that "His thematic range, even when it deals with characters of non-Jewish backgrounds, is unmistakably Hebraic" (7). The reality is that it is not the Jewish faith or religion or outlook of life that Malamud is concerned with. There is not even a single character in the whole of his oeuvre who performs Jewish rituals. If there are Jews in *The Assistant*, there are also Gentiles. *The Fixer* has only three Jewish characters and the others are all Christians. There is hardly anything Judaic in the world of *A New Life* or *Dubin's Lives*. This imbalance has arisen out of the critics' heavy dependence on the study of protagonists in Malamud's fiction. They make wrong observations and arrive at half truths because for them all the protagonists, except those of *The Natural* and *The Assistant* are Jews. If his Jews are honest, they are crooked as well. If Morris Bober, a Jew, is honest and suffers because of his honesty, then the Karps, who are also Jews, have stooped to the most dishonest and unethical practices to become successful. Bober gives bread to the Polish lady knowing that he will never be paid for it, there is Louis Karp who will flinch even his kindest benefactor. The reality is that Malamud has been presented as merely a writer of Jewish themes because the critics have systematically and doggedly neglected the role and significance of minor characters. Had these critics studied Bober and Karp in *The Assistant*, such distorted readings would not have been possible. Such examples are galore in Malamud's fiction. He even lambasts censures or even ridicules his Jews. Even Bober, the ultimate Jew, is not the ultimate ideal of human kindness.

Malamud never approves of his passivity and berates Ida for being a nagging and racially-biased Jew. Malamud himself explains that a “Jewish community never enters into his books, except as the shadow of a vestige of a specter” (30). A writer writes of people and the world he knows. Malamud himself explains: “I write about Jews because they set my imagination going. I know something about their history, the quality of their experience and belief, and of their literature” (Rajagopalachari 24-25). Afro-American writers write of the blacks, in America, Shakespeare writes of England of his times and Thomas Hardy of Wessex. The ultimate success of a work of the artist lies in the fact that it leaps beyond the particularity of a people and a region and attains universality. Malamud’s achievement lies in that his Jews transcend the narrowly defined territories of ethnicity and achieve universality. Malamud’s Jew is an Everyman who becomes the emblem of humanity. Thus, the study explodes the myth of Malamud only being a writer of ethnicity or of racial relations. His works are still relevant and will remain so and will be read by generations to come.

The problem with literary criticism is that a few influential critics make same observations about a writer’s vision or art and those observations become the gospel truth to speak against which will tantamount to blasphemy. A careful examination of **Shakespeare criticism** from Coleridge to Bradley reveals that they have read Shakespeare’s plays as stories of his heroes only, thereby ignoring the significance of other characters. *Hamlet*, for instance was read only as a story of Hamlet and the critics failed to appreciate that *Hamlet* without Ophelia, Claudius, Laertus and many will be reduced to only a meditative play. Another critical fallacy which is also universal is that the critics take the vision of the hero as the vision of the writer. The same is true of **Hemmingway criticism** which has assumed the status and proportions of an industry. **Hemmingway criticism** from Carlos Baker to Earl Rovit to Philip Young divided all their attention on the study of **Hemingway hero** and the result was that Hemmingway was dubbed as an **“unintellectual” writer (Dahiya 5)** with the “theme of war, the theme of the end of human relationships, the theme of death and void,” or as the “most important spokesperson for the Last Generation” (Dahiya 5). It was only with Sheldon Norman Grebstein and Bhim S. Dahiya that the attention was shifted from the hero and the writer’s biography and the result is that Hemmingway is

now regarded as a writer of ideas, a writer who celebrates all that is health-giving and a writer who unfailingly denounces all that seems to undermine the dignity of human life. And that equally applies to Malamud criticism. To study the hero in isolation and to ignore the role and significance of the characters other than the hero will naturally produce a misunderstanding of the writer's complete vision of life dramatized through a host of characters. If we read *The Natural* only from the perspective of the hero namely Roy Hobbs, we shall tend to conclude that Malamud's vision of the world was focused only on corruption, greed and lust. But if we read the novel in the light of interactions between the hero and other minor characters like Pop Fisher and Sam Simpson, we shall be in a better position to understand that the writer's complex vision encompasses all that is good in life, all that is full of benevolence, love and compassion. Hobbs' career in baseball is made possible by benevolent efforts of Sam Simpson who sacrifices his life for his sake. Pop Fisher, on the other hand, tries to shield the hero from the pernicious effects of self-centeredness and materialism. Actually these minor characters are the representatives of Malamud's vision and philosophy of humanism, philanthropy and altruism.

Another misreading of Malamud's works as a result of the critics exclusive study of the hero to the exclusion of minor character is also sought to be rectified by the present study. Critics have consistently held the position that Malamud belongs to the misogynistic tradition of writers like Norman Mailer for whom "women are low sloppy beasts" (20) whose sole responsibility "is to be on earth long enough to find the best mate possible for herself and conceive children who will improve the species" (Mailer 20), Joel Salzman thinks that women are never at the "dramatic center" (127) of Malamud's works. Women in Malamud's fiction have been described as "unidimensional characters" (Briganti 163) who are totally devoid of complex human feelings. It is true that there is hardly any female protagonist in Malamud's works but that does not mean that the writer belongs to the tradition of misogynistic writers. A careful study of the role and significance of women characters reveals that they are central to the action of Malamud's each and every work. They possess a unique identity of their own and possess complex feelings, attitudes and emotions. They are not the appendage or extension of Malamud protagonists. They have a world

of their own and exist not for others but for themselves. One or two examples for this study will be sufficient to prove this point. In the beginning of *The Assistant* – Helen was an egotistical girl but as the action of the novel develops, we find her totally transformed. We find her moving away from her own cocoon and becoming someone who takes care of others. She is a character of ambivalent and complex attitudes and emotions and she develops and exists in her own right. Her attitude towards people in general and to Frank in particular, education, sex, and marriage undergoes total transformation. Earlier she wanted college education only to get a job and be successful but towards the end education becomes a means of self-exploration and self definition. She discards her own ego and recognises Frank’s love for her. Towards the end of the novel, she does not choose Louis or Nat as her partner though they are rich and ‘successful’ in their own way. Rather she recognises Frank’s love, his sacrifice for her family and herself. Her evolution and development have been totally ignored by the critics because for them it is only Frank who exists and who is capable of self transformation. If we remove such critical blinkers, we are able to see Malamud and his works in new light. Similar is the case with Pauline in *A New Life*. Earlier she was a discontented housewife for whom sex provided outlet from the tedium of her domestic strife and tensions. But in redeeming Levin she redeems herself also. She realises as does Levin that love entails responsibility and that loveless sex is mere animal carnality. She is a woman who is torn asunder by the demands of her marriage and demands of her own feelings. Towards the end, she resolutely decides to bid good bye to her loveless marriage and opt for her new life with Frank. But even in doing so, she takes up the responsibility of her two children though she could very well have left them with Gerald. Now she is a new Pauline who has substituted ‘I-I’ relationship with ‘I-Thou’ relationship. She is definitely not a flat and unidimensional character bereft of any development. Quite the contrary, she is an emblematic, ambiguous and complex personality for whom each experience and each stage of life is a new lesson. Malamud’s critics only harp on Levin’s development and transformation but hardly pay any attention to Pauline. The present study clearly points the idea that women characters are central to the understanding of Malamud’s fiction and his vision because it is through them that he is projecting his philosophy of

love which is the bedrock of his thematic concerns. For Malamud, love is the religion, the philosophy and the essence of love. These women characters are as varied and complex, ambivalent and ambiguous as his male characters. They appear in different roles such as temptresses like Harriet, Memo, Avis Fliss and Nadalee, redeemers like Iris Lemon and Helen, homemakers like Ida Bober, Raisl Bok and Kitty. Women characters in Malamud's fiction appear as teachers, students, wives, mothers, mistresses and beloveds. Whatever roles they play, in whatever forms they appear, they are real human beings, not shadowy figures, having complex and intense feelings, emotions, and passions and the high potential for growth and development. To ignore them is to invite serious misreading and skewed assessment of Malamud fiction.

The study also **brings to the fore** Malamud's versatility and maturity as a writer. The wide reach of his thematic concerns with which he colours his fictional canvas ranges from America's commercial world in *The Assistant* to the sports world in *The Natural*, from the world of artists in *The Tenants* and *Dubin's Lives* to the world of academics in *A New Life*. The study reveals Malamud's strong denunciation of America in every field. In this society, corruption is rampant, values are fast **disappearing**, cheats and cheapskates are thriving and sincerity and commitment have become peddlers wares to be hawked in the streets. It is a world of exploitation, social hatred and jingoism. It is no more a land of transforming dreams into reality, no more a land of opportunity and realisation of one's potential and personality. The commercial world denies sincere and hardworking people like Bober opportunity to live and lead a seemingly decent life. The fact of the matter is that America has degenerated into a land of exploitation of women, criminalisation of the youth and denial of academic freedoms. Malamud objectively diagnoses the ills of American society. His work, in fact, is a running commentary on and strong denunciation of the ills of America in its historical, social and cultural framework. America, once touted as the earthly **paradise denies** and throttles every possibility of individual self-development, spiritual growth and freedom of conscience.

But still he is not a passive and morbid brooder of life. He has inherent faith and belief in man's realisation of his self and potential despite the hovering clouds of

despair and sorrow. The study clearly underlines his healthy outlook on life. His fiction is a testimony of inherent possibility of man's development and regeneration. He is a strong votary of liberal humanism which leads to the possibility of self-development in which body, mind and soul all proceed toward spiritual ends without loss of material functions of living. His is not a bleak world; it may be dark like Bober's store but it is illumined by mutual love, faith and understanding. He is vehemently averse to the nihilistic extreme of lostness and cynicism. Minor characters like Bober, Sam and Fisher act like tutors to such tyros as Frank and Roy. They may not be materially affluent but they are spiritually rich and their moral idealism leads the tyros to redefine and redirect their lives. Malamud affirms life and castigates all those forces which deny it through their minor characters. He strongly and vehemently declares that man can be defeated but not crushed. His own remarks reveal the stifling social, political, historical, philosophical, economic and cultural events of the world in which he lives. But his entire work is a beacon of hope in such a dismal and bleak world. The study confirms Hemmingway's own remarks when he said that fiction is "an idea of dedication to the human. That's basic to every book. If you don't respect man, you cannot respect my work. I am in defense of the human" (Frankel 21).

The study also underlines the use of irony and paradox, antithesis and ambiguity in the works of Malamud. Only when we are able to appreciate the dramatic structure of his works we shall be able to identify and signify warring and contrary feeling, emotions and attitudes of different characters to arrive at a balanced view of Malamud's genius and vision of life. Different minor characters offer different prospective on life. The Karps offer a self-seeking perspective on life as contrasted with the soul-enriching perspective offered by Bober on Fisher. Malamud uses the device of irony to expose and ridicule all the evils like sex, violence, greed, and mere carnality that afflict not only the American society but also the whole human society. He satirically exposes and analyses the causes and consequences of such evil and that amply prove his profound social concerns. He deftly makes use of humour in his works to laugh at and ridicule all such practices as deviate from reality—be it in thought, speech or action. He creates bawdy situations and uses witty

dialogues not only to create humour but also to laugh at the absurdities of his characters' thinking and behaviour, whatever deviates from normative behaviour is held to ridiculous laughter by Malamud. In *A New Life* the comic structure of the novel can be properly studied only when the protagonist is studied in tandem with minor characters. The way Sadek runs with the discarded clothes of his rival lovers leaving them half-naked, the way Levin runs after him shouting all choicest abuses is indeed price of high comedy.

Levin's attempts at all-chastisement, and his odyssey to enjoy sex with Nadalee indeed raise boisterous laughter but all these episodes have serious thematic function. These comic episodes serve to expose Levin's obsession with drinking and womanising which poses a serious challenge and threat to his quest of new life. Fairchild's obsessive habit of equating a whiskered person with a drunkard and Bucket's frequent, even inappropriate use of quotations from Sterne, the writer on whose works he has written a dissertation, create humour in a rather dismal world of 'scholars'. Malamud rails and scoffs at every kind of deviation from normal behaviour and thinking. Oddities and eccentricities of his characters become source of bawdy humour and comic situations. It is by focussing our attention on the study of minor characters that we can be initiated into the proper understanding of the lofty and serious purpose of humour in his novels. Besides providing comic relief, Malamud's use of humour is geared towards re-affirming his set of value. His humour, ranges from innocent laughter to cynical satire, is never without the bedrock of a humanist and a liberal outlook on life which informs all his fiction.

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