INTRODUCTION

(A) Setting the Limits
(B) Defining the Term
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Inspite of the fact that the Critics have discussed at length the philosophical formulations deployed by Saul Bellow for understanding the general crisis of the Post-War Western Societies which constitutes the centre of his novels, no full length study of how the Bellow protagonist is involved in a ceaseless struggle to keep his human dignity intact, has to my knowledge been so far attempted. The aim of the present thesis is to interpret the novels of Saul Bellow in the particular context of the resistance and revolt of his protagonist against the contemporary forces which tend to undermine his dignity or destroy his humanity. These forces may be pressing upon him from outside or even more importantly may have become active within his own self. The struggle of the Bellow protagonist invariably involves an attempt on his part to rise above the ordinary level of consciousness and make life meaningful in a universe which apparently looks absurd and meaningless. This resistance and confrontation of the hero to realise his 'authentic selfhood' in contemporary social milieu through an ultimate transcendence of the limitations imposed by the unavoidable conditions of his social existence is specifically analysed and understood in the present study.
Almost all the protagonists of Bellow experience the nightmarish character of their existence in the midst of forces of disintegration working against human survival at different levels. These protagonists are caught up in a diabolical world—a world full of anarchy, betrayal, selfishness, violence, sexuality and an ideology which poses a great threat to the identity of the individual. There is denigration of human dignity in modern society and the sensitive individual is hopelessly being pushed into a state of despair and alienation. Realising this burden of existence in an Inferno-like situation and feeling utterly disenchanted with the crucial conditions of living, a Bellovian hero ultimately resorts to defiance and revolts against the forces which disorient his vision of life and produce in him a sense of emptiness in a world which does not seem to respond to human urges. In such hostile and strange conditions where the protagonist finds himself alone and helpless, he fashions his philosophy of life by adopting the strategy of survival on a pattern which has close resemblance with that of the Camusian rebel hero. The formulations of Camus with regard to the rebel may not tally completely with the intuitive understanding and clear statements the Bellovian protagonist makes with regard to his own response to his predicament but they are certainly very helpful in...
understanding the broad pattern of experience of the Bellow protagonist on account of the essential similarities which exist in the two cases. Both the Camusian rebel and the Bellovian hero believe that it is only through struggle that they can break new grounds and make life a meaningful odyssey in the face of the silence of the universe and the ironies of human existence.

But before making an examination of how the experience of a Bellovian protagonist conforms to the Camusian concept of the rebel hero with regard to facing the conditions and circumstances which tend to push him towards a position of nihilism, it would be pertinent to give a brief critical survey of the various critical studies of Bellow's novels that have been made so far. When these studies are examined, it becomes evident that the struggle for dignity in which the Bellow protagonist is involved under the conditions mentioned above has not been placed in the right focus. Critics have generally concerned themselves either with the theme of affirmation, particularly the affirmation of faith in a benignly working universe and a mutually co-operative and inter-dependent mass of humanity or they have emphasized Bellow's ultimate commitment to a humanistic vision or his belief in the power of intuition in comprehending the teasing riddles of the world. A sizeable segment of Bellow criticism deals with his Jewishness. Some critics have mainly devoted attention to the stylistic subtleties such as myth and imagery, sarcasm, irony and satire; some
have called him a great realist following the naturalistic
tradition of writers like Lewis and Dreiser. None of the
critics has, however, endeavoured to explore fully the
moral-philosophical challenges in which his protagonists
invariably feel involved in the context of the Camusian
philosophy of rebellion. Allen Chavkin, for instance,
shows Bellow's debt to the English romantics for
formulating his artistic creed in the wake of an ongoing
struggle between man and the impersonal agencies which
push the individual self to a state of marginalisation.
Molly Stauk Wieting discovers in Bellow's novels the use
of the pastoral mode as opposed to the studies made on
Bellow's Jewish urban milieu, keeping the two cities - New
York and Chicago - in the background. In Bellow criticism
which appeared in the 80's, Ben Siegel makes an intensive
study of Bellow's critical attitude towards American
educational system and the functioning of universities as
primary agencies for shaping modern American culture.

Malcolm Bradbury and Judie Newman differ sharply
with the established critical opinion about Bellow's
concept of history. While prominent critics such as John
J. Clayton, Keith Opdahl and Tony Tanner have been silent
in regard to the thesis that a sense of history is central
to Bellow's novels, Newman in her study of Bellow as a
novelist of the Nietzschean Sixth Sense also emphasizes his
retreat from the notion of history as an unfolding of
progress into a notion of "history as nightmare, as
tragedy, as farce, as black comedy; the retreat into myth
or into the heightened presence of the crisis mentality". Newman discovers in Bellow's work the echo of "tension(s) between the timeless and the time bound". Daniel Fuchs in his examination of Bellow's thematic concerns in the context of modernism concentrates on Bellow's disagreement with a number of Freudian constructs and sees in his work a "systematic deconstruction of Freudian modes of thought." \(^1\)

Tony Tanner, showing concern with man's sense of alienation in a highly urbanised social set up, observes that Bellow "has shown an increasingly profound understanding of the dilemmas and vexations of the alienated intelligent man in his modern urban milieu, explored the complex problems of self and community, and insisted on the need to move beyond the mood of alienation and discover more fruitful attitudes." \(^2\) Tanner draws our attention to Bellow's acute awareness of the threat that present day society, with its growing materialism and its abundance of things, poses to the very existence of sensitive individual and to his simultaneous affirmation of the defiant spirit asserting itself in a few selected individuals and impelling them towards a frantic search for human values:

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"Society may move towards its death with the false concepts of progress and prosperity - but somewhere, somehow, the human spirit will start to disengage itself, to protest, to assert its need for true values, for real freedom, for genuine reality."

Irving Malin, continuing this line of argument about man being an alienated creature caught in the vast mechanism of anti-human forces, remarks that human values and human feelings occupy a central place in Bellow's fiction. Another important critic on Bellow, John J. Clayton, looks upon the writer, not as critic of the mainstream ideas and values, but primarily as a "spokesman for our culture, as a defender of the Western culture tradition, "2 one who can reorient cultural chaos without entering it and can examine cultural nihilism without sharing it. While pointing out certain interrelated contradictions inherent in Bellow's fiction, Clayton feels that though Bellow stands firmly against the cultural darkness of the twentieth century, and against the denigration of human life in modern society but simultaneously he also discerns in Bellow a state of depression at the increasing loss of real values and the emptiness of modern life. Bellow, feels Clayton, is hostile to the devaluation of the "separate self" in modern literature and he places individuality very high. Yet at the same time, he discards individuality in novel

1. Ibid., p.5
after novel because he feels that the individual is insignificant in the face of the terrible forces and, moreover, individuality is undesirable, a burden which makes a person egoistic and keeps him away from love. Though Clayton reveals certain aspects of treatment of society in Bellow, particularly his attempts to trace the contradictions involved in it yet he prefers to call him "a psychological novelist before he is a social novelist or moral spokesman."¹

Jerry H. Bryant, while dealing with the existential view of man in Bellow's novels, discusses the way in which the individual human being can become himself by undergoing two extreme reactions which Bellow perceives. In the first reaction, the individual is likely to become, what Herzog calls a "snarling realist" when he concludes that it is impossible for an individual to fulfil his hopes and aspirations. The other reaction is that of the man who clings to hope till the last leading to his alienation from society and from himself. Since he feels that he is unjustly treated by reality and is denied his hopes so he seeks to elude the responsibility pushed upon him by life. Bryant says: "In the first seven novels he has written to date his condition is that the solution lies somewhere in the middle ground between the two extremes. The 'wholeman' neither abandons hope nor seeks

¹. Ibid., p.4
to resist nature. He arrives at a higher consciousness."

The Critic feels that Bellow - protagonist makes frantic efforts to free himself from the limits of his conditions so that he can achieve a 'superior life', some 'higher fate' or 'grand synthesis' and therein lies the basic pattern of Bellow's novels. The present study will closely examine the validity of this understanding of the fate of the individual in the crisis-ridden Western society and develop further the seminal insights contained in such comments.

Keith Opdahl draws our attention to the yawning gap in Bellow's novels between human expectations and his achievements in the midst of cruel realities of the world. Opdahl feels that this conflict between the two contrary attitudes towards the world constitutes the "centre" of Bellow's fiction: "Admiration for militant struggle and insistence upon a less willful and defenseless joy. To control or to give, to master or to revere, to survive or to enjoy, to will or to love - the centre of Bellow's fiction lies within this general tension." These opposing visions are clearly reflected in the character of the protagonists who crave for community but the community

portrayed by Bellow demands destruction of individuality as its price of admission. Opdhal traces a shift in Bellow from social issues to the ultimate problems of evil and death. This gives the struggle for dignified existence waged by the Bellow protagonist a new form. The individual versus society conflict is raised to a metaphysical plane as is now projected as a conflict between Man and Destiny. The inner division in the protagonist is also looked upon as a similar locking up between two eternal forces using the personality of the protagonist as a site for an intensified contest. Like Donald Heiney, Lenthiel H. Downs and Chester Eisinger, Opdahl does not consider Bellow as a social novelist. Bellow, according to these critics, is primarily a psychological novelist moving from "public to private" issues and then raising them to a 'metaphysical' plane.

As a matter of fact, Bellow is a novelist engaged in a quest for meaning in life which has unfortunately been lost in the context of a scathing encounter with the forces of destruction active in the contemporary social scene and the harassment and paranoid frenzy which they have produced. His primary concern is with what it means to be a human being in the midst of cultural chaos and loss of values in the Post-war situation. His initial response is to think of man as a passive victim mauled by the naturalistic forces which have taken him in their grip but the sheer intensity of pressure of these forces,
paradoxically, awakens his faith in an individual's capacity to retrieve his dignity and affirm his humanity through active resistance. He shows that man has the power to 'overcome ignominy and complete his span of life' by rising above the inadequacies of self and social environment. His dignity is retrieved through this determined bid to transcend the limitations imposed on him by life and drive out what is non human, irrational and dark within his own self.
Camus's concept of rebellion can only be understood in the light of his idea of absurdity in that the awareness of the absurd is, per se, a form of revolt. To experience the absurd is to develop an intolerable sense, not only of the futility and terror of life as it is being lived, but also of its total irrationality and arbitrariness. The absurd thus involves an awakening of the mind which reveals the inconsistencies and gaps in what was taken under the common sense view as perfectly sound reason. To speak of the absurd at all is to have rebelled in the sense of having said "no" to some state of affairs which implies "yes" to certain other state of affairs; in other words, it implies affirmation of certain values in the individual, which though not very clear, yet are crucial to make our existence worth living. The theme of absurdity thus serves as a precursor to understand the Philosophical premises of Camus' concept of a rebel hero.

The condemnatory note in the writings of the British "Angry Young Men" generation of playwrights and novelists had a deep impact on the mind of American writers of the fifties. The young American writers and intellectuals were horrified by the drudgery and boredom of various socio-political and intellectual institutions around them which they found to be awfully absurd and repugnant to what Joseph in Dangling Man terms as the "ideal constructions" of a man necessary for him to come
out of the state of imprisonment of the self. Being shorn of all the religious, moral and political illusions of the past, these writers and thinkers had no hope of getting any panacea for ameliorating the existing intolerably boring and grinding condition of man. In such a situation they found the whole universe meaningless, illogical and frightening. Sensitive individuals, according to them, had lost the means of communication with each other and as a result had become outsiders or strangers in the midst of innumerable homo-sapiens. During this phase of intellectual and spiritual crisis, American writers looked for insights towards the philosophical writings of Heidegger, Sartre and particularly Camus who exerted the most formidable influence, perhaps because his works are deeply rooted in time and reflect with exceptional intensity the concerns of a historical period which was drowned in terror, bloodshed, anxiety, despair and nihilism. Deeply perturbed by the havoc and destruction of the Civil Wars, the two World Wars, and the terror unleashed by Hitler, Camus could scarcely find anything to rely upon except the 'obstinate negation' that pervaded all around him. In his speech of acceptance of the Nobel Prize, Camus examines the age in which he was 'condemned to live' - the age of 'moral and intellectual confusions and convulsions'; he, nonetheless, eventually rejects such nihilism in his consistent endeavours to find some 'law to live by'. His works deal primarily with this existential crisis of the individual; the man who is
struggling as a lonely exile for happiness and meaningfulness despite the immense burden of a senseless existence he carries on his shoulders.

His essay on Sisyphus is the result of his being tempted by nihilism whereas The Rebel explores how he overcame this temptation. In this world bereft of faith in God, the question Camus poses is: what is to be done when once this sense of absurdity and nihilism has dawned on man with full force? Should he then commit suicide or should he still 'hope' inspite of everything? The logic of absurdity impels the awakened individual towards suicide as the only form of affirmation of his dignity, the only consistent and meaningful choice, he feels, he can make in an exercise of his freedom in this senseless world which attaches no importance to it. But suicide, in the final analysis, proves to be an act of cowardice and of bad faith. Camus, in a strong bid for the affirmation of life, categorically rejects the option of suicide both physical as well as philosophical suicide calling it an attempt to escape from the miseries of life and a denial of the struggle with the evil forces of the mind and of this world. Camus declares that the real honour and dignity lies in facing life squarely without resignation and without the aid of any falsely reassuring belief in eternal values. Values, says Camus, are not 'given' in this world; they have to be created from the conditions of living and are to be accepted along with the sufferings born of the limitations of the human condition including
mortality. Camus asserts that these limitations, implicit in the conditions of our life, offer a hope of creation when they are accepted on proper terms of revolt as an exercise of one's liberty and passion for life. In other words, the question is not merely to live life passively while accepting its absurdity, rather one has to conquer it through daily defiance by denying it as the only and final truth of our existence. Only this act of simultaneous experiencing in an acute form the ache of absurdity and defying its claim of being the final truth can one create one's own meaning and values in the very midst of the desert.  

Camus believes that in the absence of God, man is left all alone in this world - forever a stranger to himself and to the world at large. His faith in the "other life" - in the better life to come after death, would have offered some "hope", some consolation and it would have been easy for him to endure the sufferings on this earth. But in the absence of such a "hope", life assumes an altogether different character and man has to do whatever he can in this very world and in these very conditions. His endeavours must bear fruit within the limits of his finite existence. Hence he insists upon familiarity and clarity of the universe. But he is confronted with a contradiction right in the beginning in

his effort to distinguish the true from the false. There is a big gap between "what we fancy we know and what we really know." In fact, there is not even a single thing, feels Camus, which man can claim to have complete knowledge of: "This heart within me I can feel and I judge that it exists. This world I can touch and I likewise judge that it exists. There ends all my knowledge and the rest is construction." This perceiving "self" can not be defined with sufficient clarity and there is certainly an unavoidable incompleteness in our knowledge of ourselves. So far as the outside world is concerned, this incompleteness of knowledge is even greater. All the knowledge on earth is insufficient for a man to apprehend the world and regard it as his own. Man wants everything to be explained to him but this desire is met with impotency of reason and with contradictions and confusions: "The world is peopled with such irrationals. The world itself, whose single meaning I do not understand, is but a vast irrational ... Nothing is clear, all is chaos, all man has is his lucidity and his definite knowledge of the walls surrounding him." Man thus is left with no other option but to face this situation of anxiety, disappointment and estrangement with lucidity and clarity. The existence of the dilemma and confrontation

1. Ibid., p.23
2. Ibid., p.24
3. Ibid., p.31
between the "human need" and the "unreasonable silence of this world" and the fact of its persistence must be realized and accepted by man.

Faced with a universe "suddenly divested of illusions and lights," man is left with the crucial problem of how he should live — a problem which is of central concern to Bellovian protagonists as well. Camus asserts that the only alternative lies in the preservation of the paradox of the absurd where the individual, through his daily struggle, finds himself so closely involved in his conflicts and tortures that they become the potential source of meaning and value. He is told that there is nothing worth living in the world, but this at least is a certainty and certainty is a kind of affirmation of man's ability to give meaning and coherence to his experience and a tangible evidence of his exercise of freedom. An absurd man is concerned only with such concrete certainties, even if they are of a minimal nature. The situation in this way gets reversed. Whereas previously it was a question of finding out whether or not life has to have a meaning in order to be lived it now becomes clear that it will be lived with even greater intensity if it has no meaning since the need to create meaning remains perpetually undiminished and a concentrated effort to create meaning becomes a mode of intense living. So absurd instead of being a conclusion, is only a starting
point for Camus and the daily struggle involved in the maintenance of the absurd becomes the real task before man.

The absurd, for Camus, is a relationship of non-confirmity between the individual and the world in which he has to live and as such it cannot strictly be claimed as something absolute and universal. Camus infact takes the absurd to be something which is closely related to our subjectivity, that is, our emotional feelings and experiences. As such the sense of the absurd is not strictly confined to literature alone but can often be experienced in our daily conversation and our ordinary contacts with people. Usually, however, the feeling of absurd is born as in our mechanical life a day comes when suddenly the chain of daily gestures is broken and in that odd state of soul in which a void is created, man begins to question the value and purpose of his existence:

It happens that the stage-sets collapse. Rising, tram, four hours in the office or factory, meal, tram, four hours of work, meal, sleep and Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday and Saturday, according to the same rhythm - this path is easily followed most of the time. But one day the 'why' arises and everything begins in that weariness tinged with amazement."

Out of this moment, when he begins to ask 'why is it so?' the consciousness of the absurd is born. This absurd moment of consciousness may come in different

1. Ibid., p.19
circumstances: it may, for instance, arise from the sense of time as the destructive element, or it may also emanate from a sense of dereliction of purpose and meaning of existence which an individual experiences, while living in the midst of the denseness and strangeness of the world, a feeling which we discover in Pascal and Kierkegaard as well as among modern existentialists. Lastly, the absurd may be experienced due to our acute sense of isolation from other human beings felt at the sight of apparently mechanical and hollow gestures that people make towards each other in their normal pattern of life. Howsoever different the circumstances of the absurd may be, the consequences remain the same: man becomes detached from his environment. A sort of "who cares\" attitude develops in a man since inspite of all the knowledge in the world, inspite of vast domain of philosophy, religion and science, he is not able to understand clearly the meaning of his existence.

Camus's notion of the absurd may initially seem nihilistic but this apparent nihilism merely lays the foundation of the absurd. Subsequently the absurd has a chance of going further since through the awareness of the absurd and persistent struggle between 'intention' and 'reality' an individual is so closely tied to absurdity that it becomes something worth living for. The absurd thus serves as the source of one important value - truth; the truth of the absurd itself which the individual now
comes to attain through his persistent endeavours. This attainment of the truth of the absurd demands that one should maintain and defend any truth that one discovers. Thus the notion of the absurd leads one to the consideration of the individual. Individual alone and not individual in the society is essential to the absurd. But Camus is concerned not just with any absurd individual but one who courageously fights the absurd at every moment of his life and refuses to be tamed by it. This attitude of "refusal" to be inactivated or paralysed by the thought of the absurd is what Camus calls "revolt". The absurd man has no other option but to drain everything to the bitter end and deplete himself. Camus states that "the absurd is his extreme tension which he maintains constantly by solitary effort, for he knows that in that consciousness and in that day-to-day revolt he gives proof of his only truth which is defiance." ¹

The absurd in Camus, thus, ends on an apparently affirmative note. The absurd man comes to the realisation that it is in living life to the utmost that he can assert his essential humanness and dignity. The wisdom and honour of the absurd lies in a man's "dogged revolt" against his conditions requiring a persistent struggle along with an acute awareness of the limitations life imposes on him. It is due to this characteristic of determination and defiance to the bitter end of the futile

¹. Ibid., p.55
struggle in the form of continued maintenance of the conflict between 'intention' and 'reality' that absurdity serves for Camus as the basis of his concept of rebellion. The despair and nihilism in absurdity born of the death of God and humanist values is one aspect to give a direct call to revolt, the basis of which is 'a continual insistence on the fact of human responsibility'. David D. Galloway holds that "the absurd hero is by definition a rebel because he refuses to avoid either of the two components on which absurdity depends - intention, which is his desire for unity; and reality which is constituted by the meaninglessness of life ... revolt alone becomes revelatory of human values giving the dimensions to human experience once provided by Christianity; the call to revolt is a call to humanise, to transform the inhumanity of the world."  

In the world of the absurd, there are no absolute values, therefore Camus stresses  

nature, human solidarity or linking of all men in a common bond of the absurd. In Camus's own words: "Although apparently negative because it creates nothing, revolt is positive in a profound way since it reveals those elements in man which must always be defended." ¹

Camus's concept of rebellion has the same spiritual strength which the Greeks had displayed when they affirmed the human spirit as a measure of all things. It is, however, not spiritual in any religious sense because it sees no divine purpose permeating human existence. It is in the philosophy of The Rebel that the theme of Sisyphus finds its full implications, particularly the justification of revolt as an assertion of the congruity of the mind in the face of the incongruity of the world. The rebel by definition is a non-conformist and a critic of the society. He finds the whole socio-cultural pattern decadent and totally inhospitable to the upholding of human interests and values. Finding himself to be a "misfit" in the society, he devotes himself to fighting out against the forces which threaten his identity. A rebel in Camus's sense of the term is a man who categorically refuses to submit to his existing

conditions, not only because he finds them "intolerable" but also because he feels deeply convinced that he is "justified" in his act of defying these conditions. In Camus's words, a rebel is "a man who says no: but whose refusal does not imply a renunciation. He is also a man who says yes as soon as he begins to think for himself."¹

Camus illustrates his philosophy of revolt through the example of a slave who suddenly refuses to take orders from his master by firmly saying "No" which, in existential terms, affirms the importance of his being a man like his master. His "No" implies that he has tolerated his master's ruthless authority for a particular limit but would not do so any further since he has now gained an awareness of freedom being the necessary character of his humanness which he would not henceforth allow anybody to infringe upon. In other words, his "No" affirms the existence of a "borderline" in the domain of his existence as a human being which he wishes to preserve at all costs: "He stubbornly insists that there are certain things in him which are worthwhile .... and which must be taken into consideration."²

From the established and "objective" viewpoint of the master, the rebel in this case is a "turncoat" acting

² Ibid., p.19
under the fear of his master's beatings, but when all of a sudden he turns to face his authority, it shows that he has chosen "what is preferable to what is not". Rebellion issues forth from this activation of our sense of those minimal attributes of our existence as human beings which are definitive and can not be abrogated under any conditions. It is this awakening of conscience, which constitutes the first stage in the process of the philosophy of rebellion. Rebellion is falsified if it involves no value system which means that its real basis is the affirmation of life - the rebel can willingly accept death but not the loss of his freedom. He holds that it is better "to die on one's feet than to live on one's knees." The rebel bases his philosophy on the values which imply "a transition from facts to rights", "from what is desired to what is desirable". He declares through his act of rebellion: "This is how I want things to be" and gives a clear signal that he is no longer prepared to accept any definition proffered by others about "this is how things should be." The attitude of "All or Nothing" that the slave now adopts, demonstrates that rebellion is not individualistic. Though Camus's rebel, through his act of defiance demands respect and pride for his own self, this act carries significance only in so far as he invokes through it the idea that all human beings have a similar claim to self respect and dignity, and through his rebellion he has assumed the role of being a

1. Ibid., p.21
spokesman for all humanity. The values he wishes to defend are embodied, not merely in his own self but in humanity at large. He is willing to stake his own personal existence for the sake of a common good - which now is more important to him than his personal predicament. The rebel may not be at this stage clear about the values or the cause for which he rebels but he feels that what is necessary for his own self as a human being is equally necessary for all men.

Having gained an awareness of his absurd existence, Camus' rebel sometimes goes to the extent of showing an active concern for the reform of the socio-economic and political environment in which he is located. This does not mean that he assumes the role of a political revolutionary and starts propagating any specific political ideology. His act of rebellion is sometimes wrongly interpreted as a form of political revolution. His only concern is to challenge the existing value system and the established social order in so far as it obstructs the growth of his individuality as a human being. The territories of rebellion and revolution may partly overlap but each has its own distinctive features, motive forces and modes of expression and development. The rebel's strategy of survival differs from that of a revolutionary who is concerned with overhauling the whole existing socio-political system, while a rebel is interested in bringing about only a change in the functioning of the
established order to the limited extent of provision of a space for his own self which is necessary for the affirmation of his own humanity. A revolution aims at bringing about a total change from one form of government to another; the act of rebellion, on the other hand, is a form of 'spontaneous protest' intended to bring about a limited change in the functioning of the existing system without a corresponding change of government. Unlike revolution, which strives for total happiness and freedom as a final and decisive instalment of corrective action, revolt, Camus feels, is based on the idea of "limitation" and "moderation": "In order to exist, man must rebel but rebellion must respect the limits that it discovers in itself - limits where minds meet and, in meeting, begin to exist."\(^1\) Camus philosophises that submission to the state of service is alien to the nature of a rebel and on the issue of the crisis of existence, he is not prepared to surrender his individuality or compromise with the forces controlling his destiny. At this stage, the rebel develops an anguish and an awareness that for him freedom is supreme and needs to be preserved at all costs for the maintenance of the authenticity of his self. Before this awakening, the rebel remained passive. His biological urges had a free play while his mind did not become active. After the moment of awakening which comes as a shock of recognition suddenly and abruptly, the next stage in the evolutionary process of rebellion is the choice of

1. Ibid., p.27
an appropriate course of action. He is conscious of the fact that no external forces should be allowed to affect his mode of rebellion. His philosophy of rebellion is to be fashioned in the light of the factors guiding his inner self and not the external socio-cultural and economic norms of life. His rebellion has a morality of its own. Unlike Sade's anarchic affirmation of the absolute negation of all values, the rebel insists on a life of meaningful existence in a world which makes it almost impossible to do so.

Camus recognises the historical dimension of the situation which compels the rebel to choose the path of revolt, although this historical factor is perhaps not given weight it really deserves. The primary factor in the creation of the situation of relationship is, of course, the element of the absurd which is rooted in the contradiction between what man wants and what the world does not permit. This element is an ineradicable part of man's existence, but the intensity of the absurd, Camus seems indirectly to acknowledge, can increase or decrease depending on the particular circumstances produced by history and at a specific conjuncture like the one confining writers like Camus in their time, the intensity of the basic element of the absurd increases to such an intolerable point that produces an awakening in some individuals. The primary factor of the absurd is, of course, not a product of history. According to Camus,
when we consider the rebel, it is not merely a question of the revolt of the slave against the master or that of the poor against the rich; it is a metaphysical revolt, the revolt of man "against his condition and against the whole of creation .... Metaphysical rebellion is the justified claim of a desire for unity against the suffering of life and death - in that it protests against the incompleteness of human life, expressed by death, and its dispersion, expressed by evil."¹ Camus terms the rebellion of his protagonists as "metaphysical rebellion" because it transcends particularities of the individual situation or of the social context when the actual point of revolt has been reached. The rebel protagonist is not blind to the fact that a rebellion devoid of values will create an environment wherein crime and disorder will have the upper hand and he carries the awareness with him that even "the most elementary rebellion, paradoxically, expresses an aspiration to order." As such, he confronts a "shattered world to make it whole."² We should not confuse the history of metaphysical revolt with that of atheism. When the metaphysical rebel chooses to defy God, it does not mean that he is denying God's existence: "The rebel defies more than he denies."³ It is actually a form of dialogue, though not a polite one, between two equals. The rebel's position in relation to God is explained in these terms by

1. Ibid., p.29-30
2. Ibid., p.30
3. Ibid., p.31
Camus: "When the throne of God is overthrown, the rebel realizes that it is now his own responsibility to create the justice, order, and unity that he sought in vain within his own condition and, in this way, to justify the fall of God." ¹

In order to have a clearer perception of the precise meaning of Camus's concept of rebellion, we shall have to keep in mind the historical context of its emergence. It is imperative to look back at the socio-religious and moral crisis which was directly responsible for creating such circumstances in which man was left with no alternative save rebellion to discover himself and guard his essentials of humanity. The holocaust of war, the failure of the promises made by men in power, the gradual encroachments of the bureaucratic and military apparatuses of the modern state into the private space where the individual used to define his identity as an autonomous being producing in him a feeling that, he is being reduced to the status of a mere automaton and the collapse of belief in institutionalised faiths created despair and induced a sense of utter meaninglessness and absurdity of social existence. As this impression about social existence intensified further, it got extended to a feeling that the universe itself was meaningless and chaotic where man could justify

¹ Ibid., p.31
his humanity by choosing to live without any illusions or evasions. All external norms derived from religion, morality, art and culture had to be discarded as it became imperative to look for a purposeful existence entirely in terms of one's own subjectivity. The individual faced an acute crisis of identity when he felt trapped historically in a set of conditions where he could neither be a part of the society nor dare to overhaul its structure. In the background of such a deep and apparently insurmountable crisis created by the total set of circumstances prevailing at that particular historical juncture, the metaphysical revolt of the rebel seemed to be the only viable response which could rescue the individual from the trap of nihilism.

However, Camus's concept of metaphysical rebellion, due to certain inherent weaknesses in its nature, serves only a limited purpose as far as affirmation of human existence is concerned and falls short of bringing about any significant transformation in the existing social conditions. Since Camus believes that man by nature is solitary and asocial, the struggle of the rebel protagonist is strictly confined within the boundaries of his own self and his own individualistic experiences. Instead of making any endeavours to resolve or change the conditions which he believes to be absurd and meaningless, the most important task that a rebel is faced with consists in living "authentically within those futile
conditions" by maintaining the tension and conflict involved in them. This form of 'defiance' against the nihilistic forces no doubt makes the rebel protagonist more aware of his individual freedom and dignity but the overall situation around him remains unchanged. Camus himself, in one of his interviews, has confessed that the real task before man today lies in accepting the times "as it is," since we can not "essentially" change it.

For Camus, it is the struggle itself and not its achievements that really count for man. Rather he holds that any attempt to bring about any radical change in the socio-political system through individual or collective action is bound to result in the destruction of mankind as, feels Camus, is revealed by the experiences of the past. Rebellion is, thus, by its very nature, limited in scope and does not lead to any definitive and conclusive results. Seen in its social and political context, rebellion is no more than an "incoherent pronouncement" which believes that the fight against human suffering is an endless process since sufferings and sorrows shall always prevail on earth as long as human life is there. So the only alternative left before a rebel individual is to create values for his own self from his conditions of living so that he can find the way to transcend nihilism within the bounds of nihilism itself. Thus by delinking the individual's fight from larger human goals, Camus reduces the boundaries of his rebel's struggle to subjective existence and satisfaction. The bare survival
and false happiness - a kind of self-deception of the rebel protagonist is assumed to be the limit of fulfilment and achievement. It is a solitary rebellion and all collectivity is viewed with doubt and anxiety. Hence it is too gloomy and pessimistic; for the task of bringing about reforms in the whole system becomes superhumanly enormous due to the barriers caused by the individualism and due to lack of sufficient faith in the fellow human beings and their collective endeavours.

This view of the rebel protagonist as an isolated and 'lonely' being in his unending struggle with the hostile and 'alien' forces of the world, sets the tone for Camus's ultimate condemnation of all history and historical revolutions as 'totalitarian' and 'nihilistic', and culminating in either 'rational or irrational terror'. All individual actions and beliefs are historically created and determined in the sense that they are invariably influenced by the particular historical circumstances of that period. But Camus regards these actions and situations as solely 'human' and 'predestined', thereby cutting them off from all kinds of social processes and social developments. This reduction of concrete historical and social realities into a 'notion' leads to their abstration and makes them 'static'. Camus's rebellion denies any faith in the future and in the amelioration of human conditions in the times to come. He rather contends that injustice and
suffering shall always be there till the survival of last man on earth and man, inspite of his best efforts can not hope to eliminate them from the world:

"Man can master, in himself, everything that should be mastered. He should rectify in creation everything that can be rectified. And after he has done so, children will still die unjustly even in a perfect society. Even by his greatest effort, man can only propose to diminish, arithmetically, the sufferings of the world. But the injustice and suffering of the world will remain and, no matter how limited they are, they will not cease to be an outrage. Dimitri Karamzov's cry of 'Why' ? will continue to resound through history; art and rebellion will only die with the death of the 'last man on earth.'"

Such a belief in the eternal continuation of sufferings renders all human activity futile and devoid of all meaning and hope. Man, here, is defeated in advance - in the sense that even before he begins with his struggle, he is aware of the fact that nothing substantial or 'worthwhile' will come out of it. All contemporary ideologies and actions, holds Camus, invariably lead to murder: "Every dawn masked assassins slip into some cell; murder is the question today." This repudiation of all action and ideology, not taking into account the sharp differences in their content, their basic aims and objectives and the means of achieving them, reflects Camus's lack of faith in the contemporary human capabilities to develop something meaningful and beneficial on this earth. Under such circumstances any

1. Ibid., p.267
2. Ibid., p.12
active struggle for collective happiness and justice is discarded as a mere 'utopia' or a 'prophecy', which, Camus believes, deprives man of the present individual meaning and happiness in life in a false hope of achieving them in the future for one and all.

After a thorough probe into Camus's concept of rebellion, we are in a position to examine as to in what respect a Bellovian hero shows his affinity with and departure from a Camusian rebel-protagonist, especially with regard to the implication of the affirmation of life and transformation of the world. The protagonist in both, Camus and Bellow, is primarily concerned with the existential crisis faced by the modern man: how to live a meaningful life in the midst of the world which speaks largely through "taverns, movies, assaults, divorces, murders"? The question that Joseph is constantly confronted within the Dangling Man - "How should a good man live; what ought he to do" - sums up the fundamental anxiety that runs through their works. The protagonists in Bellow's works, as that in Camus's, are projected as 'isolates' and 'aliens' with empty emotional lives, each one pushed entirely upon himself alone which puts 'the very facts of simple existence' in doubt for them. Convinced of the disjointed and irrational environment around them, they confine themselves to a solitary place
in order to derive a personal value system vis-a-vis society. One finds in them all the same quest for clarity and the same difficult inner battle to comprehend and to come to terms with the vehement forces of the modern world. There is Joseph in Dangling Man who rarely leaves his room and has no one but his own self to communicate with; hence he feels necessary to keep a journal. Tommy Wilhelm in Seize the Day, painfully depicts the 'modern plight' of a lonely man, who, when the night comes feels like "howling from his window like a wolf". Wilhelm cries in despair: "You had to talk with yourself in the day time and reason with yourself at night. Who else was there to talk to in a city like New York?" Herzog, for want of communication at human level takes to writing letters to all and sundry which are never mailed.

At the centre of Bellow's works is the highly sensitive individual self in conflict with the apparently insensitive and static social environment in which he is placed. There is a huge gap between the 'ideal constructions' of his protagonist and the reality he encounters. This conflict of the individual versus society can be interpreted in the context of the absurdist confrontation between "intention" of the absurd hero for 'unity', 'order' and 'meaning' in life and the

1. Saul Bellow, Seize the Day, Harmondsworth, Middlesex, England : Penguin Books Ltd., p.113
'unreasonable silence' of the world. Joseph's lofty ideal of establishing the 'colony of the spirits' is dashed to pieces in the wake of the 'treasons' operating inside and outside man. Wilhelm's wishful desire to rise above the "anxious and narrow life of the average" by becoming a star in Hollywood, ruins his life altogether; his seven years stay in California could only make him work as an orderly in one of the hospitals. Yet a Bellovian hero categorically rejects any escape from his sufferings and failures and fights consistently against the disintegrating forces of the mind and that of the outside world in an attempt to strike a balance between his ideals and worldly realities, his intellect and emotion, his 'monstrous subjectivity' and objective conditions of the world. "You have to fight for your life", says Herzog, "That's the chief condition on which you hold it." Augie struggles to achieve an 'independent' and 'worthwhile' fate against the dubious designs of various "Machiavellian" characters who want to impose their authority on him. His final "No" to the so called 'destiny moulders" after a temporary inclination towards them, resembles the awakening of consciousness in a Camusian rebel slave who refuses to submit to his master's ruthless authority beyond a certain point. Henderson, in a bid to satisfy his longing for order and harmony which expresses itself in the form of "I want, I want",

undertakes an imaginary journey to the remote jungles of Africa. Herzog's frantic letter writing to everyone under the sun, dead or alive, expresses similar craving for order and stability in the midst of innumerable threats to one's identity and dignity. A Bellow's hero like that of Camus, does not feel overawed by the evil, selfishness and criminality pervading the post war American society, nor is he interested in any escape or evasion of the present state of affairs for something better in some 'other' world; he like Sammler would rather desire 'justice' and 'happiness' on this planet first, the human earth.

Along with the above affinities, a Bellovian protagonist exhibits certain marked deviations, too, from Camus's philosophy of rebellion. Bellow's departure is discernible in his treatment of the relationship between the individual and the community he lives in. Whereas Camus's rebel hero wages an unrelenting battle to assert his individuality and is even ready to sacrifice his life for the freedom of his self, a Bellow's hero goes beyond his individualistic self to recognise the need for social ties as well. His fondness for living is no doubt centred around his own self in the beginning but within the given circumstances, he comes to understand the futility of his abstract speculations and makes honest attempts to define his self in relation to society. This is reflected in Joseph's realisation that "goodness is achieved not in a vacuum, but in the company of other men, attended by
love. Thus the conflict between 'intention' and 'reality' which constitutes the basis of Camus's rebellion, is not sustained till the last by most of the Bellovian protagonists who, for one reason or the other, submit their individuality in face of the social compulsions. When the spirit of Alternatives questions Joseph as to whether he has "a separate destiny", he grows pale and confused and evades any reply: "I am not ready to answer. I have nothing to say to that now." Tommy Wilhelm, in his painful endeavours to assert his individuality, takes a trip to Hollywood against the wishes of everyone around him, to become a star. While there in California, in a strong "bid for liberty" he even drops his father's name "Adler" from his own - "Adler, being in his mind, the till of the species", and becomes Tommy Wilhelm. Yet the realisation of selfhood which he longs for, is not to be achieved. All Herzog's claims to individuality and freedom of self are crushed by the evil designs of various "reality Instructors" which include his wife Madeleine and his best friend, Valentine Gersbach.

Broadly speaking, a close scrutiny of Bellow's novels shows that his protagonists are victims of absurd, inhuman and monstrous forces of the modern American world which results in the crisis of their identity and authenticity of self. The process of confronting this

2. Ibid., p.140.
crisis of existence can broadly be classified in three stages which bear close resemblance to that of Camus's rebellion. The first stage consists of inertness, passivity and indifference of the individual both to the inner and outer world. The individual has a glimmering notion of the 'reality' of the world and of his own 'intention' to create meaning and values in life but the conflict, for the most part, takes place in the realm of mind only. An opening to wriggle out of the state of inertia and participate actively in life, is not within sight. Consequently his vision gets distorted and he loses the sense of discrimination between the ideal and real verging on the loss of selfhood and individuality. The protagonists of Bellow's earlier novels - Dangling Man, The Victim and Seize the Day, in a bid to overcome the chromatic onslaught of inertia and nihilism, wage an unsuccessful battle against the corrupt forces in their own selves and that of the society. Joseph, the protagonist of Dangling Man, is a personification of the modern man who has lost the will to act and live life as it is. He is twice removed away from his self; first by war and secondly by the delay of the draft board to induct him in the army which generates a state of inertia and passivity. For seven long months, he 'dangles' between army and civilian life, which results in the loss of all sense of time for him. His willing submission at the end to the social forces of regimentation, ironically, puts an
end to his chaotic state of suspension and indecisiveness, which he feels is more painful than the loss of his freedom.

Whereas *Dangling Man* examines the meaning and role of freedom in relation to absurd individual, *The Victim* mirrors another human condition which Bellow spins out from the burden of guilt and responsibility, dread and racial prejudices and the deadly urges such as greed and success – myth which characterize the contemporary social reality in the American way of life. Bellow dramatizes through 'Asa Leventhal - Kirbee Allbee' relationship the value of man's existential human responsibility for his acts; the individual is to be held responsible not for what he does for himself alone but also for the demands of the outside world. In the absence of this realization, human consciousness is dimmed and man regresses into his primitive unconsciousness.

The third novel of this group *Seize the Day*, shows some positive apprehension of 'what it means to be a human being'. Tommy Wilhelm comes closer to a reconciliation first with an unsympathetic society, devoid of heart and communication and then with the self; there are other truths, he feels, about man (other than passive acceptance of isolation) which needs to be explored. It is in unison with mankind that one can find himself and save the self from the forces of dissolution. Fighting out the state of inertia in a densely populated lower middle class section
of New York City, Wilhelm is a victim of a father image, first in Dr. Adler and then in Dr. Tamkin to whom he gives his last savings in the hope that its promising returns would make him overcome his current financial crisis. Tamkin's sudden disappearance along with the money accidentally takes Wilhelm to a funeral parlour where the sight of the dead man makes him learn the deeper reality of the self which is closely linked with suffering, sorrow and death. The only way to face the dilemma of existence posed by the sense of mortality, feels Wilhelm, is to 'seize the day' or live life cheerfully when the course of human life in future is clearly marked.

In the second phase, the protagonist is led towards the affirmation of his self when he gains realization of the existing situations around him and the possible means to overcome the stifling barriers of the initial stage. The protagonist realizes that it is only through the struggle and involvement in life that the problem of existential dilemma can be surmounted. Unlike in the first stage, where the 'victim-heroes', obsessed by their isolation and sufferings, confine themselves to a single room, the protagonists in this stage are more active, more open and less victims of the absurd forces of the universe they inhabit. Bellow, in this stage, concerns himself primarily with the potentialities and will of the absurd man to transform his conditions; that is why the protagonist here discovers a meaning in life in revolt
against the very conditions of living knowing fully that it is the stance of defiance against the present absurdity that will save him from defeat and despair. His realisation seems to be similar to that of a Camusian hero: "I rebel - therefore we exist."¹ The protagonists of Bellow's next two novels, Adventures of Augie March and Henderson the Rain King, while pursuing the line of the rebel hero, consistently struggle to assert their individuality against the various social and materialistic temptations, but what they apparently suffer from is the lack of clear insight and discovery in their vision of selfhood. Augie is Bellow's new kind of picaresque like hero, who does not share Joseph's condition of dangling, nor is he a victim of circumstances like Asa Leventhal. He instead, struggles from place to place and person to person in search of an "independent" and "good enough" fate. Heraclitus's dictum that "A man's character is his fate" becomes Augie's path-finding strategy; the protagonist aligns himself to the 'axial lines of existence' which is tantamount to the rebel's creation of an alternate world of truth, love, peace and harmony. A new light dawns on him: "We are born not to be condemned but to live." But due to his non-commitment and continual uninvolved existence, he loses sight of his purpose and direction and in the end is deprived of both - love as well as the freedom to seek his true being.

¹. The Rebel, p.28
Henderson's metaphorical journey to the mythical Africa is symbolic of his quest to learn the secrets of life by way of confronting and experiencing it at all levels. The philosophy of life that he comes to learn through his two visits to Africa, that man is neither god nor animal but perhaps there is a little of both in him, is that of pragmatic acceptance of life with all its joys and sorrows. The persistent call in his heart "I want, I want, I want" - symbolises human cry for clarity and truth and the will to live in face of the dilemma of existence. Having satisfied this call in the jungles of Arnewi and Warriri, Henderson returns home with peace and contentment because "the sleep is burst, and I've come to myself."

The third stage in the process of rebellion is of transience. The protagonist rises above the petty materialistic consideration of life; its vulgarities and inadequacies no longer stand as a barrier to frustrate his wish for a meaningful life. A silver lining becomes discernible, a vision is evolved with the belief that even in the face of utter senselessness of the universe and the resultant feelings of nihilism and absurdity, life has got to be affirmed and lived in the midst of confusions, human betrayal, deceit, falsity and other disvalues of a mass mechanistic and highly computerized social set up. This view of reality as evolved by the rebel protagonist gets reflected in the last two novels of the Sixties that constitute the domain of the present thesis. Herzog and
Sammler are seen frantically and desperately clinging to every bits of experiences which they encounter in the course of their lives but at the end they stamp their superiority of the self by reinforcing their belief in "human occupancy" and value of the "power of human contact" in forging a live connection with the universe.

Herzog, a Jewish American scholar, is a victim-complex of human betrayal. He is twice divorced and cuckolded by Valentine Gersbach, a man who has been one time his nearest friend. His travels between New York and Chicago are symbolic of both - of his inner turmoil and quest to get at the ideal vision 'how should a good man live?' Madeleine, his second wife, divorces Herzog on the plea that he has grown insane. He himself admits of having 'mismanaged' everything in life and of his subsequent ruination. His redemption lies in coming to terms with his nature and accepting the facts of life without any escape or illusion.

Arthur Sammler, a seventy four years old Polish Jew, faces the same question which troubles Herzog: how to stay human in face of the persistent attempts of the absurd world to tear man of his sanity? The symptomatic seeds of decay in American culture become discernible first in the undue interruption and use of abusive language in the course of his lecture by one of the University students and then in an American pickpocket who warns Sammler not to indulge with him by shamelessly
displaying his genital before him. But Sammler is not interested in making any escape to some other planet as suggested to him by Dr. Govind Lal, because he has learnt that the moral beauty of living life is to issue from a pragmatic view of life rather than looking at it with illusory temptations.