Chapter 6

Towards Peace

Looking for a solution to the dilemmas and difficulties of humankind, Bellow allows his Jewish conscience to guide him and emerges as a champion of Jewish Humanism and religious teachings.

Religious traditions are commonly presumed to inculcate peace and serenity by bridging humanity and divinity. In the same way, the Hebrew Bible, also known as the first testament, is often used as a basis of efforts towards peace and reconciliation. A close reading, however, reveals that the biblical literature uncovers the paths strewn with struggle, violence, and terror in the life of believing communities with the frequency and intensity that may conjure up the illusion of the reign of terror in biblical times. Danger and peril were indeed no strangers to the biblical world, but the Hebrew Bible does not let fear be the final word… the biblical traditions deconstruct the grip of terror in the world, explores measures to bring the reign of terror to an end, and envisions the state of shalom that shines upon not only the liberated oppressed but also the redeemed oppressors. (Erickson and Jones 66)
The Jews believe in improving themselves through strife and prefer tolerance to revenge. Sammler in *Mr. Sammler’s Planet*, gets very angry when his daughter Shula-Slawa tries to defend black criminals on the basis of their background of oppression and discrimination. Mr. Sammler himself, along with his daughter is a Holocaust survivor, but he has spent his life as a good citizen and human being, in spite of having lost one eye and his wife to Nazi madness. The Jews have been killed in large numbers at various occasions over the centuries, but they have risen back from the ashes to reach the highest levels of accomplishment in almost all possible fields.

Bellow’s protagonists are psychological studies and his works have been categorized as “stream of consciousness” novels by some of his critics. While Herzog remains ever anxious, cribbing about his past and Joseph worries for his tomorrow, the importance of the present moment is emphasized in *Seize the Day*. The idea is to live in today, forgetting both yesterday and tomorrow, as the past cannot be changed nor the future predicted. “Only the present is real--the here-and-now. Seize the day.”

Swinging from past anxieties to present reality to the
significance of the universal, Bellow himself has grown along with his characters. It has been his own journey more than any of his characters’; he has found out his own soul and significance, his place in the universe, going through the process of writing and exploring individual and collective psyche of the world. “The character’s conflicts with others or society always stem from a conflict with self. In past ages, men escaped self through the church or commonly held values. In the post-Freudian world, we take hold of the self and attempt to wrestle it into submission. In Bellow’s world, people physically escape to learn of themselves.” (Bancroft) Augie goes to Mexico with his lover, Thea, to help train an eagle to hunt iguanas, but the venture fails when the eagle, upon being bitten, fails to chase its prey. “The symbolism is not lost on Augie,” who “begins to see himself more clearly and realizes he must make his own gestures toward life. The corrective vision appears in *Mr. Sammler's Planet.*” (Bancroft)

Arthur Sammler, a septuagenarian, who has survived the Nazi holocaust, is the “one stable force in a maelstrom of characters.” His daughter steals the manuscript of “The Future of the Moon” from an Indian scientist, Dr. V. Govinda Lal, because she wants her father to
have it. Sammler is maddened by her behavior and wants her to immediately return the manuscript, but she disappears. He makes her return it ultimately, but after going through much trouble. His dying nephew's children impatiently hound Sammler for information about Elya’s money and wills. “Sammler’s objectivity makes him a counselor to all, a corrective to the anxiety of modern life as he observes, ‘Humankind had lost its old patience. It demanded accelerated exaltation, accepted no instant without pregnant meanings as in epic, tragedy, comedy, or films.’” (Bancroft) He prays for Elya Gruner, his nephew:

Remember, God, the soul of Elya Gruner, who, as willingly as possible and as well as he was able, and even to an intolerable point, and even in suffocation and even as death was coining was eager, even childishly perhaps (may I be forgiven for this), even with a certain servility, to do what was required of him. At his best this man was much kinder than at my very best I have ever been or could ever be. He was aware that he must meet, and he did meet—through all the confusion and degraded clowning of this life through which we are speeding—he did meet the terms of his contract. The terms which, in his inmost
heart, each man knows. As I know mine. As all know. For that is the truth of it—that we all know, God, that we know, that we know, we know, we know. (MSP 260)

Elya had fulfilled the terms of his contract, i.e. he had fulfilled his earthly duties and commitments well. With time and his growing age, Bellow has realized that self assertion and the wish to always have one's own way, desire for personal happiness without consideration for one's duties and commitments to others, “debases the self it seeks to glorify.” The only way to safeguard our sense of self is to be good to others. One must fulfill his duties towards others, but at the same time, Bellow also teaches us that “the existential moment arrives for the person who quests. Those who do not quest have chosen the captivity of convention. The irony of American conformity is not lost on Mr. Sammler when he observes, ‘Where liberty had been promised most, they had the biggest, worst prisons.’” (Bancroft)

Human beings are weak and lacking in vision and it is our fault that we allow the world and its materialism take over us, is what Joseph in Dangling Man believes.

The world comes after you. It presents you with a gun or a mechanic’s tool, it singles you out for this part or that, brings
you ringing news of disasters and victories, shunts you back and forth, abridges your rights, cuts off your future, is clumsy or crafty, oppressive, treacherous, murderous, black, whorish, venal, inadvertently naive or funny. Whatever you do, you cannot dismiss it… The failing may be in us, in me. A weakness of vision…. Perhaps that we were the feeble-minded children of angels. (DM 137)

Bellow has always been considered a city novelist, but nature plays a more important role in his novels as well as in the lives of his protagonists, who find respite from urban disorder and decay, the “nightmare peopled by freaks,” in the lap of nature. Molly Stark Weiting observes:

Just as the chaos of city life mirrors the personal fragmentation of Bellow’s characters, a ‘version of the pastoral’ to borrow William Empson’s phrase, symbolizes just the opposite – the wholeness of spirit, order and peace. Like the earliest writers of the pastoral form, Bellow takes his characters away from the city to a simpler environment – or has them long for such a place – in order for them to undergo a temporary learning experience away from their more sophisticated surroundings.
Nature appears at times, as a metaphor and at others, as a symbol and sometimes it simply forms the background. The states of mind of Bellow protagonists are reflected in their surroundings. Nature acts as a companion to Herzog in his seclusion, “Tall bearded grass and locust and maple seedlings surrounded him in the yard. When he opened his eyes in the night, the stars were near like spiritual bodies. Fires, of course; gases-minerals, heat, atoms, but eloquent at five in the morning to a man lying in a hammock, wrapped in his overcoat” (H 1) and the “frost scorched drooping tomato vines” are akin to his state of mind and condition. Cyclamens come to Corde’s rescue, making him forget his problems, even if momentarily. “There were flowers here, all cyclamens. There wasn’t light enough to distinguish their colors. The plants had been placed on the floor. Here they thrived like anything—low temperatures; just what they wanted.” (DD 172) Corde has immense love for nature, especially flowers and plants. Cyclamens absorb him completely when he sees them in his mother-in-law’s house. He used to treat the cyclamens with love. “He watered them from beneath, setting the pots in bowls of water.” (DD 79) Gigi noticed his interest and “said to him, ‘There is not much to
offer you. The one thing we can be lavish of is these flowers.’ He wondered what it might mean about him as a ‘serious adult’ that the flowers should claim so much of his attention.” (DD 79) He noticed other forms of nature too, but only cyclamens had the power to mesmerize him thus.

On some mornings the sun shone – clear winter blue. He looked through the ivy twigs on the porch side of the room. Small frozen berries, dark blue, fell from them. Pigeons descended. They must have been fed by the old ladies. But he was not greatly interested in the birds. It was the cyclamen plants that absorbed him hypnotically – the dark cores of the pink and the more purple circles of the white, the petals turned black, the leaves mottled in many shades of green. They were said by Larousse to belong to the primrose family. They grew from corms. Someone had once suggested to him that these green beings produced their leaves and flowers in a state of sleep, perfection devoid of consciousness, design without nerves. Put a handful of dirt in the pot, and they came up with this beauty. Who had said that, about the sleeping life of plants? Brooding over the cyclamens on the table, he often dozed; he felt too hazy
to remember anything. He thought, if you had enough of these plants in a room and watered them with a Nembutal solution, they might cure insomnia, make a dream atmosphere. (DD 55)

Corde finds a way of escape into an ideal world through these beautiful beings that create themselves during sleep. Similarly, man can transform and metamorphose into a spiritual being and a higher form by becoming oblivious of the material world. Mr. Sammler, on the other hand has “no longing for an escape to nature” and when he does reminisce his encounter with nature, he remembers himself as a “wild, gaunt, decaying” beast, who “coldly killed a man and took his clothes and food.” But later on, exhausted and fed up of the excesses of the modern world, he considers a possibility of life on the moon, hoping that it would “reduce the fever and swelling” on earth, fulfilling man's desire for “boundlessness and wholeness.” His message for humanity is; “Humankind, drunk with terror, calm itself, sober up.”

Henderson physically travels to Africa in order to get rid of his unpleasant routine and surroundings. His wife, his children, his maid, his friends, all annoy him. He is dissatisfied most of all, with himself, his own nature, his clumsiness and his pig farming. He is terribly in
need of a break and gets a golden chance to go on an African Safari with a honeymooning couple, whom he leaves soon after reaching there. Accompanied by Romilayu, a simple tribal, he ventures on this African safari, which turns out to be extremely eventful and testing for him, a real adventure. Romilayu's simplicity and naivete win him completely. Exploring and venturing into the “depths of the African continent,” he ends up discovering his own inner nature and spirituality. By the time he ends his journey, he is a changed man, much more accommodating and positive than he had ever been. Herzog too wants to transcend the physical world and “communicate with the spiritual” and so does Citrine.

Bellow almost specializes in the journey narrative and interestingly, as mentioned earlier, the journeys taken by his protagonists find a parallel in his own journey as an author. Not unlike his heroes, he started off as a pessimist, following the modern trend, eventually turning towards a relative romanticism. Although he is not entirely in league with the 19th century English romantics, yet he has a lot in common with them. Most importantly he is a humanist and believes in the power of the imagination. “It converts to actual. It sustains, it alters, it redeems,” celebrates Dahfu in *Henderson the Rain*
“Henderson’s journey culminates in his awareness of man’s nobility, largeness of heart and power of mind” and Herzog, attempting to assert his individuality, ends up realizing the importance of community and accepting “that to be inescapably closed up in a world of one’s own making is hell.” Bellow protagonists try to “look inward and purge their consciousness” and “reminiscence becomes a modus operandi for his people, a means of self-inventory and sometimes a mea culpa.” (Kakutani, Saul) Henderson’s African adventure is taken up in search of tranquility and Herzog and Sammler go on mental trips searching for their peace of mind. All of them return enriched and enlightened from their respective travels. Herzog’s mental letters acquaint him with himself and Henderson’s African safari brings him face to face with his own defects and flaws.

There is a definite shift in Bellow’s later fiction, towards spiritual and transcendental pursuits. “Bellow, like Bloom, privileges an ideal community of men in the Platonic mode who meditate on the ‘permanent concerns of mankind,’” observes G. Neelakantan. He has even been referred to as an apocalyptic writer by some of his critics, but Bellow’s apocalypse differs from that of his contemporaries “in
rigor and in the mode employed in engaging the question of whether the human race will eventually prevail.” (Neelakantan)

Bellow was initially optimistic as in Herzog, his protagonist said, “We must get it out of our heads that this is a doomed time, that we are waiting for the end, and the rest of it ... we love apocalypses too much, and crisis ethics and florid extremism with all its thrilling language. Excuse me, I’ve had all the monstrosity that I want.” (H 317) But eventually he turned from his anti-apocalyptic views to the apocalypse of The Dean’s December. G. Neelakantan notices, “The Dean’s December is an apocalyptic text that articulates the author’s neoconservative take on the urban decay and the racial conflicts that characterized America in the 1970s and early 1980s” and Frederick Glaysher believes that Bellow is the only American writer, along with Isaac Balshevis Singer, who addresses the problem of the modern soul.

Albert Corde in The Dean’s December craves for connection and feels that human beings in spite of communicating among themselves all the time could not form real connections.

Even Corde’s name serves to convey his urgent quest for
connection: the ‘cord’ that binds him to all that he sees and the heart—‘cor’ in Latin—that registers this connection. In the writings of Aquinas, Owen Barfield points out, ‘verbum cordis’ signifies the ‘inner, unspoken word’ within each person, which is directly ‘related to the word (vox) that is actually vocalized.’ It is Corde’s own, unspoken sense of connection--the ‘verbum Cordes,’ if you will--for which he (and his author behind him) seeks a viable language, or voice. (Pifer 166)

Corde sees boundaries and confinements as blessings rather than as hindrances. Relationships and connections between human beings and their links with other forms of life, make it easier for each of them to set new goals and to attempt and achieve them.

What confines us, he suggests, defines and safeguards our temporal existence--keeps us from losing our balance in the physical world and from cutting short our tenure in it. Both the “porch rail” and the finite boundaries of perception thus appear, in Corde’s liberated view, a necessary condition--local rather than absolute. His intimation is not of escape from this mortal condition but of connection to transcendent reality. (Pifer 177)
The “internal fact of connection” transcends the “raw fact of death” and the fact of physical distance too. When individuals living far far away, individuals who have never known each other, whose circumstances and surroundings are entirely different from one another, think and talk like each other, it means that everything in the universe is governed by the same set of principles.

What transcends the raw fact of death, then, is the internal fact of connection: Buber’s intersubjective relationship of ‘I—Thou’ is, to recall Gilson’s phrase, evident to a soul, not to a mind. As King Dahfu has told Henderson, “You are related to all. The very gnats are your cousins. The sky is your thoughts. The leaves are your insurance, and you need no other. There is no interruption all night to the speech of the stars.” Although Albert Corde’s perspective is as far from Dahfu’s as the Dean’s sixteenth-floor Chicago apartment is from the tribal chieftain’s rustic palace, the two characters appear to speak the same language. Through them both Bellow articulates the processes of intersubjective perception and knowledge, ultimately taking his readers—in every sense including the colloquial—“far out”: beyond the familiar coordinates of space-time and the ruling
premises of contemporary thought.

That an eminent member of the intellectual establishment, a college dean, arrives at a vision of existence as “far out” as the “daffy” African king’s is itself telling. Bellow having devised Dahfu’s colorful speech beneath the protective shade, and within the sheltering obscurity, of a mythical forest, has in subsequent novels brought his “primordial” language to bear directly upon the iron realities of twentieth-century urban life. The difficulties of such a task, itself an arduous effort at connection, may account for the subdued, at times even exhausted, tone of “late Bellow.” (Pifer 178)

Henderson goes on an African safari in search of himself, and continually compares his culture with the life of the tribals, their backwardness strikes him first and then their spiritual advancement in comparison to modern America. *Henderson the Rain King* is a typical novel of escape and the pun on “rain” which is a homophone of “reign” is quite obvious. Henderson is made Rain king by the Wariri, but that is not what he wants. He wants to hold the reigns of his life and wants to be his own king, and that is precisely why he left home for this African safari; to know himself and find out what he really
expects from himself and others, to finally silence the voice “I want. I want. I want.” inside him.

Henderson’s impulsive acts are fueled by an admixture of ambition, pride and longing for spiritual salvation. When, with characteristic impetuosity, he resolves to lift the Wariri’s statue of the goddess Mummah, the connection between the ambition and his fateful conduct among the Arnewi is overtly drawn: “I burned to go out there and do it. Craving to show what was in me, burning like that bush I had set afire with my Austrian lighter for the Arnewi Children.” His expressed confusion of technique with spiritual salvation comically underscores his need for enlightenment. After he succeeds in lifting the Mummah, Henderson becomes the Sungo, or Rain King, of the Wariri. But as he later discovers, it is the duty of the Rain King to lift the statue each year until, having failed to do so, the Sungo is killed. (Pifer 102)

This highlights the plight of a king, and of being powerful, in general; you will have to lift the weight always, until you fail and are thrown out of power, by those who crowned you themselves. But Henderson’s aim was to unburden himself and “anxious to simplify more and
more,” he had “laid off one of the men and had a long conversation with the remaining African, Romilayu,” (HRK 44) arriving at an understanding with him that if Henderson wanted to see some places off the beaten track, he could guide him to them. Henderson’s desire to venture into places off the beaten track and leave everything unwanted behind, is an attempt at escape. He is tired of his mundane existence, of all the give and take. He needs relief and that is why he chooses to spend time with a simple tribal who would not judge him and instead, take him on a tour that would help him forget everything he wants to erase from his memory, even if temporarily. He is running away from a society whose expectations do not match his desires for himself. In a world of materialism, if you are not worldly enough and do not look for material success, you are doomed.

Pig farming is not a very decorous profession, nor is studying medicine at a late age a thing to be proud of. Ultimately, frustrated as he is, tired of Lily and the kids, the dirty house, Lily’s crazy endeavours for the family portrait, the school not approving of his daughter’s bringing up an unknown child, and finally his maid’s death due to his own screaming, he leaves home. He reaches Africa with his honeymooning friend, Charlie and his newly-wed wife, but leaves
them soon to roam about Africa with a native to guide him. He unburdens himself of all the extra baggage, including the couple who brought him to Africa. Romilayu takes him on a tour deep into the heart of the African forests and Henderson is thoroughly enjoying himself in the extreme heat of Africa. “The place was certainly at baking heat,” (HRK 47) says Henderson. But when he is confronted with a young tribal girl, who starts crying as she sees him, he is extraordinarily hurt, to his own surprise and immediately the guilt inside him comes to the fore. “Oh, the bad! Oh, the wrong, the wrong! What can I do about it? What can I do about all the damage? My character! God help me, I’ve made a mess of everything, and there’s no getting away from the results. One look at me must tell the whole story.” (HRK 49)

The wrong, the bad, the guilt that he was trying to escape are still chasing him. It is all there, even in the desert, far, far away from home, he feels the pangs. The Arnewi have no idea of his history of course, they are crying for themselves, at their own misfortunes, but Henderson’s guilt is its own punishment. In spite of being an extraordinarily rich man, Henderson feels out of place in America. He is unhappy with himself as the world is unhappy with him. He has a
deep desire to be admired, for being useful to others. He is quite disappointed at being of very little use to the African tribals. He wishes he could operate upon the queen’s eye to remove her cataract but he is no doctor who knew it. He is dissatisfied with the gifts he brings them and the only way to show his gratitude and being useful to these people seems to be the cleansing of the water, his attempts at which, unfortunately, backfire and he has to stealthily leave the place.

But after this, Henderson meets Dahfu, king of the Wariri tribe, and is caught up in a ritual to bring rain to the land, and in the process, he realizes, “I’m not what I thought I was.” He becomes Dahfu’s disciple, who teaches Him to “call upon the reserves of courage and love that already are in his heart.” Now as he meets Dahfu, he has a new guilt to bother him and a fear of his Arnewi misadventure becoming known to the Wariri and his dear friend, king Dahfu. But Dahfu teaches him to release and let go, to roar and to smile without guilt. “Still, as the novel demonstrates, his habits of mind are deeply ingrained, and ‘pedantry’ offers plenty of resistance to illumination.” (Pifer 103) His helmet “becomes a recurrent motif emblemizing Henderson’s militant resistance to reality.” (Pifer 103) He is an idealist who feels stifled in an artificial world, who cannot adjust to its
materialistic, manipulative ways. When King Dahfu asks him, “Good impresses you, eh, Mr. Henderson?” In the flash of the sun, tiny gold platelets within his eyes blinding him, Henderson nods and says, “Yes, Your Highness. No bunk. The true good. The honest-to-God good.” (HRK 168)

He finds this good in the tribals, especially Romilayu, who guides him and supports him through thick and thin, and king Dahfu, who becomes a very close friend, philosopher and guide to him, and Henderson realizes, “you bump into people casually by a tropical lake with crocodiles as part of a film-making expedition and you discover the good in them to be almost unlimited.” (HRK 131) Queen Willatale was going to teach him about grun-tu-molani, if his experiment with the frogs had not ended in a disaster. “I hoped to learn the wisdom of life from her but I guess I am just too rash.” (HRK 112) Itelo had started to respect and love him a lot, and he is the one to suggest a quiet escape to him to save him from the anger of the Arnewi. “This was how I left in disgrace and humiliation, having demolished both their water and my hopes. For I’d never learn more about the grun-tu-molani,” (HRK 112) regrets Henderson. “I may be nothing but an old failure, having muffed just about everything I ever put my hand to; I
seem to have the Midas touch in reverse,” (HRK 113) says a hurt Henderson before leaving the Arnewi village for good. He knows his intentions were good and the Arnewi might now start a trek for water, having lost all the dirty water they were storing for long, but he is embarrassed and hurt. He sits, “thinking of my shame and ruin, but a man goes on living and living, things are either better or worse to a fellow. This will never stop, and all survivors know it. And when you don’t die of a trouble somehow you begin to convert it-make use of it, I mean.” (HRK 114) When Henderson tells the king that he could “return good for evil,” the king appreciates it and gladly expresses his agreement saying, “Every brave man will think so.” He further adds:

“He will not want to live by passing on the wrath. A hit B? B hit C? - we have not enough alphabet to cover the condition. A brave man will try to make the evil stop with him. He shall keep the blow. No man shall get it from him, and that is a sublime ambition. So, a fellow throws himself in the sea of blows saying he do not believe it is infinite. In this way many courageous people have died. But an even larger number who had more of impatience than bravery. Who have said, ‘Enough of the burden of wrath. I cannot bear my neck should be unfree. I cannot eat
more of this mess of fear-pottage.” (HRK 214)

The natural surroundings divert his mind a little, and “the strange
background, the desert, the ostriches and ants, the night birds, and the
roaring of lions occasionally, would take off the curse.” (HRK 114)

They saw giant spiders and “nets set up like radar stations among the
cactuses. There were ants in these parts whose bodies were shaped like
diabolos and their nests made large gray humps on the landscape. How
ostriches could bear to run so hard in this heat I never succeeded in
understanding. I got close enough to one to see how round his eyes
were and then he beat the earth with his feet and took off with a hot
wind in his feathers, a rusty white foam behind.” (HRK 114)

Even Ravelstein, a very worldly person in general, for whom
nature was not something he would intentionally indulge, who “didn’t
care about the fields, trees, pools, flowers, birds,” that “wasted the
time of a superior man,” (R 108) gets mesmerized by the sounds made
by parrots, surprising Chick; “I recall that flocks of parrots had
descended on a clump of trees that grew edible red berries. These
parrots, thought to be the descendants of a pair of caged birds that had
escaped, built their long, sac-like nests in the lake-front park and later
colonized the alleys. In these bird tenements that hung from utility
poles, hundreds of green parrots lived,” (R 141) Ravelstein watches them and remarks, “I never thought I’d see the likes of this. What a noise they make.” (R 141) At this Chick informs him that “there used to be only rats, mice, and gray squirrels—now there are raccoons in the alleys and even possums—a new garbage-based ecology in the big cities...” (R 141) This interests Ravelstein, who immediately brings his pedantry in, “You mean the urban jungle is no longer a metaphor... It really jangles me to listen to these noisy green birds from the tropics. Doesn’t the snow get them down?” (R 141) The birds are so full of life and enthusiasm that “nothing got them down.”

The noisy green birds threshing and bickering in the leaves, scattering snow, gorging on berries held Ravelstein’s attention longer than I had expected. He had little interest in natural life. Human beings absorbed him entirely. To lose yourself in grasses, leaves, winds, birds, or beasts was an evasion of higher duties. And I think the birds held his attention unusually long because they were not merely feeding, but gorging, and he was a voracious eater himself. Or had been one. His meals were now mainly social. Conversational occasions. He was dining out nightly. Nikki couldn’t cook for all the people who were flying
in to see Ravelstein. (R 142)

The fact that these noisy birds are the progeny of a caged couple that escaped is very significant. The company of nature and in the parrots’ case, their natural habitat and abode, brings ecstatic joy and a sense of freedom that liberates the mind, is a source of creativity and inspiration. “I feel that art has something to do with the achievement of stillness in the midst of chaos. A stillness which characterizes prayer, too, and the eye of the storm. I think that art has something to do with an arrest of attention in the midst of distraction,” Bellow told Harper, in an interview. Nature arrests the attention in the midst of worldly chaos and distraction, inspiring creation and order, allowing a free flow of imagination. “All human accomplishment has this same origin, identically. Imagination is a force of nature. Is this not enough to make a person full of ecstasy? Imagination, imagination, imagination! It converts to actual. It sustains, it alters, it redeems!” (HRK 271) Bellow holds art and imagination in very high esteem, “Chaos doesn't run the whole show. That this is not a sick and hasty ride, helpless, through a dream into oblivion. No, sir! It can be arrested by a thing or two. By art, for instance. The speed is checked, the time is redivided.” (HRK 175-176)
Henderson’s journey to Africa is a “symbolic one which takes him not only into the depths of the African continent but also into the recesses of his own psyche to discover the validity of the inner man.” (Cronin and Goldman 87-88) Even Herzog, when he finally “returns to his rural retreat, is not attempting to find solace in nature itself but rather to transcend the natural world and commune with the spiritual world which he believes it to represent.” (Cronin and Goldman 89) Citrine “wants the soul to transcend the physical and communicate with the spiritual” and proclaims, “each thing in nature was an emblem for something in my soul.”

Most of Saul Bellow’s novels present a “Jewish-urban milieu” – usually that of New York or Chicago, portraying city life through the eyes of various Jews in different novels. Bellow heroes are dissatisfied, careworn men, struggling within themselves, fighting against imposed duties and societal attitudes and searching for an escape, which they find generally in the company of nature. That is why we find in Bellow “a corresponding pastoral element, an excursion, either physical or mental, to an environment that is free from the clutter and chaos of the protagonist’s urban environment,” pronounces Molly Stark Weiting. Weiting considers the cities to be
“among Bellow’s most brilliant creations,” with which he not just reflects a “vivid social and ethnic milieu,” but also at the same time “uses the urban world as a projection of the protagonists’ fragmented lives.” Weiting further notes that if the “chaos of city life mirrors the personal fragmentation of Bellow’s characters;” the pastoral element symbolizes “wholeness of spirit, order and peace.”

All Bellow heroes, except for Mr. Sammler indulge in idyllic imaginings, expecting a simpler and calmer mode of existence away from city life. Interestingly, Sammler too ultimately succumbs to the possibilities of an escape from the complexities of the earth thinking that “colonies on the moon would reduce the fever and swelling” on earth. Many of us agree with Sammler that “liberal beliefs” are generally incapable of self-defense but the soul has “its own natural knowledge” and “a desire for virtue was no accident.” So we must try to be as human as possible and meet the terms of the contract life sets us. “The terms which, in his inmost heart, each man knows. . . . As all know. For that is the truth of it—that we all know, God, that we know, that we know, we know, we know.” (MSP 260) Bellow’s shift towards transcendentalism is quite evident in his later works.

The American intelligentsia largely consists of Jews, who are
bright, scholarly people, as Chick remarks, “for Millennia, Jews have taught and been taught. Without teaching, Jewry was an impossibility.” (R 101) Bellow heroes are generally intellectuals: professors, doctors, scientists, lawyers, and philosophers residing in the city and cursing city life, craving for the natural and sometimes for the transcendental. All his protagonists complain about the difficulties and problems of city life and yet they all love the city, because “the tree so beautiful to look at, never spoke a word and that conversation was possible only in the city, between men.” (R 100) Human company and humanity are the most comforting assets of a man, as humans crave most for love and when they do not get it, they set out to take revenge. That is why after being betrayed by Madeleine, in his desperation and rage, he decides to kill Gersbach.

At the nadir of his despair, Herzog determines to murder his wife's lover, Gersbach. He goes to his wife’s house and peers through the bathroom window as Gersbach tenderly bathes his daughter, June. He suddenly realizes this is an act of love and later, as he talks with June, he knows that there is no conspiracy to turn June away from him. Herzog tells his brother, “There’s no reason to be upset about me. By God, Will, I’m about to cry!
How did that happen? I won’t do it. It’s only love. Or something that bears down like love.” Herzog can now accept life as it comes to him without playing analytical games. To the question of what he wants, Herzog replies, “I am pretty well satisfied to be, to be just as it is willed, and for as long as I may remain in occupancy.” Henderson echoes this discovery when he says, “I’ve gotten to that age where I need human voices and intelligence. That’s all that’s left. Kindness and love.”

Bellow’s vision is not that discovering the bond of affection solves all problems. This may occur only fleetingly. In the American experience where image supercedes substance, where fatalism excuses evil, where anxiety is the norm, Bellow calls upon his reader to reexamine that view. (Bancroft)

He “calls for joyful living in the whirl of modern life. As Citrine observes, ‘Now I begin to understand what Tolstoi was getting at when he called on mankind to cease the false and unnecessary comedy of history and begin simply to live.’ Part of that living is the fiction of Saul Bellow.” (Bancroft) Bellow raises a voice against pedantry and excessive reading too. He warns all pedants that they could lose their lives in libraries.
Bellow suggests that experience, books, and intellect may instruct us, but an act of will is necessary for worthwhile action.

What is it that brings knowledge of self? The central theme of Bellow’s work is that amid the alienation caused by social and personal upheaval in life, we must cling to the belief that there is more to life and this something more is bred of love. In an age that accepts the premises of determinism, Bellow affirms that there is another reality. (Bancroft)

He told Keith Botsford in an interview that he considered it the younger generation’s privilege that they had music, sex and drugs instead of books. A mind filled with books creates a “terrible disorder, and you’d better make sense of it because the premise of the whole thing is your autonomy.” From books, we gain confidence and learn to govern ourselves. “And you don’t realize what the cost of it will be,” Bellow goes on. “At first it fills you with pride and a sense of purpose and power, and then you begin to see that you are incapable of making the finer adjustments by yourself and life is going to be a mass of errors, that clarity is to be found only in spotting the mistakes. You are being educated by your mistakes,” while “the objectives are simpler today. You want pleasure, you want money, you want to get ahead in
the world. You want to lead a full American life.” Yet it definitely cuts down on desires if one remains preoccupied with books and ideas. In Herzog, Bellow says he has attempted to “show that ‘higher education’ had nothing to offer to a troubled man.” He, then, goes on to say:

Herzog ultimately realizes that he has had no education in the conduct of life (at the university, who was there to teach him how to deal with his erotic needs, with women, with family matters?) and he returns, in game language, to square one - or as I put it to myself while writing the book, to some primal point of balance. Herzog’s confusion is barbarous. Well, what else can it be? But there is one point at which, assisted by his comic sense, he is able to hold fast. In the greatest confusion there is still an open channel to the soul. It may be difficult to find because by midlife it is overgrown, and some of the wildest thickets that surround it grow out of what we describe as our education. But the channel is always there, and it is our business to keep it open, to have access to the deepest part of ourselves - to that part of us which is conscious of a higher consciousness, by means of which we make final judgments, and put
everything together. The independence of this stricter consciousness, which has the strength to be immune to the noise of history and the distractions of our immediate surroundings, is what the life struggle is all about. The soul has to find and hold its ground against hostile forces, sometimes embodied in ideas which frequently deny its very existence, and which indeed often seem to be trying to annul it altogether.

In an attempt at rejuvenating his soul and comforting himself, Herzog expresses a desire to donate his house and property to the Bhave movement. “Dear Dr. Bhave,” he writes a mental letter:

*I read of your work in the Observer and at the time thought I’d like to join your movement. I’ve always wanted very much to lead a moral, useful, and active life. I never knew where to begin. One can’t become Utopian. It only makes it harder to discover where your duty really lies. Persuading the owners of large estates to give up some land to impoverished peasants, however… These dark men going on foot through India. In his vision Herzog saw their shining eyes, and the light of spirit within them.* (H 48)
He too, like T. S. Eliot, looks at India as a spiritual nation, where the soul can be cured of its worldly ailments. Eliot studied Sanskrit and Patanjali’s metaphysics which enlightened and mystified him and Bellow was influenced by Bhagwad Gita’s Karma yoga. Bellow referred to the Karmic philosophy in an interview to Keith Botsford and Mr. Sammler has the qualities of a yogi. According to Sukhbir Singh, the “subject of Mr. Sammler’s Planet is an antidote or alchemy for the sixties in America, which conveys the message of karma yoga as a cure for contemporary moral decay.” Sammler, after having fallen into the hands of the Germans and having been punished for being a Jew, was in a way, reborn, his materialistic illusions all gone. “He came out of the grave---symbolically reborn, stripped naked of his old sophistication, ignorance, selfishness, and egotism---and he left behind his worldly life of desires in the corpse of his wife.” He came out altered and modified just as Bellow had changed after realizing the actual impact of anti-Semitism. “Bellow’s portrayal of Sammler aims at an open derision of the intellectual and behavioral extremes of the New Left or the counterculture followers in America. He does this mainly through Sammler’s humanistic ideas, harmonious views, controlled actions, and universal outlook,” which has been Bellow’s message to the world through his writing throughout, especially in his
later works. Bellow’s novels invariably end on a positive note, where we see the ailing protagonist moving towards a cure, towards optimism and peace after struggling long and hard against worldly and materialistic pursuits.

**Conclusion**

This piece of research is primarily a work of Cultural Studies but it involves an eclectic method including Postcolonialism, Psychoanalysis and Ecocriticism. Saul Bellow’s Jewish birth and American citizenship have produced in him an angst, characteristic of a “cultural hybrid” and a “marginal man.” The Jewish and American cultures combine in Bellow’s mind, giving birth to a special kind of writing. The study of conscious, subconscious and unconscious motives in his writing reveal a lot about the man and his work. His insistence on the importance of nature and the way his characters’ states of mind are reflected in the descriptions of their surroundings, inspired a ecocritical study of his work.

Saul Bellow’s characters are thinkers, having an inner life more than an external one. They are out there to explain and justify themselves, they wish to talk and to be heard. ‘We must interpret their reflections,
and intentions, rather than their actions. This is exactly what Bellow’s characters ask of us.’ Therefore, an attempt has been made at understanding the social, historical, cultural and psychological factors that give birth to Saul Bellow’s discourse.

After reading through Bellow texts and critical works, I have reached the conclusion that Saul Bellow’s writing is all about his emotional reactions; conscious, subconscious and unconscious, to whatever goes on in front of him and behind the scenes. His writing is an outpouring, a venting out of his frustration and dissatisfaction with the society he lives in. His American surroundings collide with his Jewish heritage resulting in a cultural clash typical of a marginal man. At the same time, the relations between men and women, old age and young, black and white cultures among other conflicting situations that he contacts in his day to day life, collude and collide, giving birth to a unique idiom, that is Bellow’s.

His Jewish birth and inheritance have affected and influenced his personality and writing much more strongly and deeply than he realizes. His Jewish subconscious is always at work, making him write about Jewish themes, that too, in a Jewish manner. He went on denying this influence till late until he confessed it to his son and then
to the world. But the hidden meanings in his work can easily be read and linked to his Jewish inheritance by an alert reader. His rhetoric is thinly veiled Jewish discourse to a large extent.

His American upbringing is something he wants to be proud of, but feels uncomfortable with everything American. He never felt entirely at home in America and could never get rid of the feeling that he did not exactly belong here. His anxiety and discomfort with America and objections to its ‘head culture’ are quite evident in his writing.

The Bellow hero’s uneasy relations with women are a result of his inability to understand the opposite sex. Expecting servility from indomitable women is the mistake he always makes. But he never realizes nor accepts his fault. His discourse relating to women is entirely one-sided and appears to be misogynist, while in reality it is only his reluctance to accept his shortcomings and failings, and an attempt at hiding them.

Saul Bellow’s language is his strongest point and derives from Yiddish and American languages, mildly interspersed with Russian and other influences. The literary idiom he has invented works perfectly to hide what it reveals and reveal what it hides.
Ultimately, after several attempts at denial and at running away and escaping the real world, the Bellow hero’s journey and Saul Bellow’s own quest end in acceptance and a return to humanity, love and peace. Just as there is calm after a storm and order after chaos, the Bellow protagonists’ anxiety and Bellow’s quest end in peace. All his novels end with their protagonists realizing the importance of love, humanity and brotherhood. Without others, man’s life has no meaning and man is powerless until he accepts the power of others over him. Nature plays a very important role in the Bellow hero’s healing process, helping him grow and learn the value of humanity and spirituality at the same time.