CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

After the analysis of Malamud’s short stories in the light of his concern with the social realism and the ethnic identity we can draw certain conclusions about his fiction in particular and generalize certain facts about the ethnic literature in general. Malamud’s contribution to the Jewish American Literature and his exploration of the ethnic issues make him a representative author of ethnic literature. The hypothesis of the present study is that Malamud explores the social realism and ethnic identity in his short stories. The close reading of the primary data including his interviews and the survey of the secondary resources, it becomes clear that Malamud is more concern with social issues of Ethnic groups and their experience of identity crises.

In the introduction of the thesis, in order to formulate a frame of perception, a brief survey of the life and works of Malamud is undertaken. The literary influences, the contemporary social conditions and the significant biographical details which play an important role in the creative enterprise of the author is reviewed and correlated with his literary motifs. In this initial part of the thesis the aims, objectives and the hypothesis of the study is clearly stated and accordance to it the chapter scheme is arranged. The introduction is followed by the first chapter which constitutes a theoretical frame of the key terms – Social Realism and Ethnic Identity – which is further used to analyze the short stories of Malamud. The cross references of the discourses from the disciplines like Sociology, Political science, History, Literary criticism and Cultural Studies make this
Theoretical frame valid and useful. The issues of Ethnic identity and the social realism are much discussed topics but the combination of the social realism as a movement of literature and the Ethnic identity as a significant issue of sociology adds new dimensions to the existing body of criticism on Malamud’s fiction and the Jewish American Literature.

The theoretical frame prepared in the present thesis is useful not only to understand the Malamud’s fiction but it is very useful to perceive the phenomena of ethnic literature. In the following chapter that is chapter second Malamud’s select short stories are discussed in the light of the exploration of social realism. Malamud’s concern with the social issues cannot be just limited with his Jewish origin as it appeals universally. His humanitarian attitude is reflected in his short stories. The objective observation and its rendering in the literary art are the merit points of the author. His ability to explore the social problems in combination with his capacity to understand the human psyche makes his writing more realistic. In the second chapter a review of the definitions of the term Social Realism is undertaken; according to it social realism in literature is an attitude of mind or a strong desire to adhere strictly to the truth. In the notion of social realism it is believed that man is essentially a social animal and his existence cannot be separated from the socio-cultural frame. Therefore depicting a realism of an individual’s life always requires the exploration of the social, political, economical and cultural circumstances.

In the following chapter the select short stories of Malamud is discussed in the light of his concern with the ethnic identity. It can be argued that ethnic identity is part and parcel of the society and
therefore it should be explored under the title of social realism. But as the select author belongs to the Jewish origin and writes from the perspective of minority community, the issue of ethnicity becomes important as it occupies a significant role in the perception of his writing and therefore requires a special critical attention. His social ideology was formulated by his social identity as a member of minority and his cultural frame of mind was constituted in the context of his ethnic origin. The selection of the social scene, the thematic aspects and its rendering into the literary art is essentially related with the ethnic group to which he belongs to.

The analysis carried out in the preceding chapters enables researcher to make a valid arguments on the topic. The present chapter is conclusion. The basic feature of the social realism is the close connection between literature and life, artistic creation and social ideology. Malamud as a social realist of the new tradition of realism in American literature presented the realistic portrayal of Jewish Americans in his short stories. The social realism depicted in his fictions can be observed in his selection of social situation, characterization and the thematic concerns. His literary works reveals that he is an advocate of social truth and a protester against the social injustice. In his writing an individual’s problems emerge as a representative problem of the contemporary society. He avoids the idealization, escapism and other extravagant qualities and attempts to record the previously ignored aspects of contemporary life and society.

The characters of Malamud generally represent the common man of the society. After the analysis of the characters of his stories like ‘The Last Seven Years’, ‘The Cost of Living’, ‘Take Pity’, ‘The
Bill’, ‘The Mournerr’ and ‘Black is My Favorite Color’, it becomes apparent that he is more interested in the tragic figures and real social pathos instead of representing an ideal life in an utopian space. He focuses the struggle of these characters against the hostile social and economic situations. The suffering, cultural estrangement, social conflict, identity crises and insufficiency to integrate in the host society are the commonest themes of his writing. Another common tendency of his characterization is that he always prefers his characters as old men, lonely bachelors and widowers. This loneliness leads them to make an attempt to establish a meaningful interaction with the society but eventually they fell in it. This tragic, pathetic situation of his characters represents the universal human conditions in the contemporary period. Another interesting fact can be drawn in the light of the analysis is that his characters are mature enough to tolerate the hostility of the world. In the selection of these mature characters, Malamud has a literary motif to use their experiences to make them real and explore the social condition from the experienced eyes. These experiences of the world also help him to draw a realistic sketch of the world in a minimalistic narrative style. The sufferings of these characters are due to the social, cultural and personal reasons. Nathan Lime’s problem in the story ‘Black is My Favorite Color’ is due to the prejudices and misunderstandings in the interracial relationships and therefore should be considered as a social problem, whereas the problem of Rosen, the protagonist of the short story ‘Take Pity’ is a personal problem as he cannot adjust himself with the chaotic, merciless and incomprehensible world. It can be observed that the characters of Malamud not only react to the social and cultural issues but they also give their reaction to the religious dogmas. In many of his short stories he maintains the line of the
action according to the religious revelation – sin, suffering, and redemption. As they are culturally estranged, they become isolated which leads them towards the contemplation of their condition and motivate them for survival and salvation.

Malamud can be analyzed on the ground of Diasporic Literary features as most of his characters are the refugees and immigrants. For example Feld is immigrant from Poland and his servant Soble is a Poland refugee who escaped from the tyranny of the Nazi Government, Shimon Susskind is a refuge in ‘The Last Mohican’ and many other characters. Malamud very successfully registers the social and psychological realities of these characters. His grasping of the psychological essence and their personal ideology give them a unique identity to them. This particular technique of characterization is very essential to make the writing realistic.

Another important fact in the concern with the social realism is that his stories reveal the problems of Jewish ethnic group. The Jewish experiences explored in his short stories are authentic as he himself has experienced the oppression of Majority and has faced the problem in the integrating with the host society. His experience as Jew has provided him a tragic vision of life. The injustice, oppression and discrimination of the majority due to the different ethnic origin and immigrant status in the society lead him to reveal a profound reverence for human dignity. The Jewish personas reflected in his short stories realistically reveal not only the sufferings of Jewish community but it also stands for the human suffering in general.

The analysis of his short stories and the biographical details reveal that the two great World Wars left a profound impact over his creative mind. The deceased social situation and the hybrid cultural
scene motivate him to become a significant spokesman of the moralistic tradition of American literature. The fading social values, inharmonious cultural principles and the suspicion about the religious faiths, make an utter chaos in the every sector of human life. As the religion is shattered in the light of harsh reason, Malamud feels that society requires someone to show them the rays of hope. Therefore the analysis of the select short stories on many occasions demands the synthesis of the religious impulses which are in the real sense the sting point of his literary creations. While dealing with the modern man and his problem in the world, Malamud suggests that the traditional ethical codes can be used to survive the safe and harmonious cultural situation. His moral vision wants to establish a society in which an individual’s spirits will be liberal from the prejudices, misunderstandings and the faulty attitudes and will promote harmonious and integrated relations in the society. He focuses the need for love, respect for discipline and the value of human relationships. The period in which Malamud was writing is a period of great wave of pessimism and frustration due to the war effects. The writers like Ernest Hemingway was tuning with the pessimistic philosophy and exploring the frustrated world view. Malamud’s influences suggest that he wrote under the influence of his writing but one can very precisely prove that his influence was only limited to his narrative style, especially with the naturalism and symbolism. With the help of these influences he has mastered his craft but his thematic concerns are original. Thus, Malamud himself has described the literature of his period as it is loaded with sickness, homosexuality and fragmented masculinities, disappearing social codes and blurring cultural values. His opinion clearly suggests his literary motif that he wants to fill it with love, beauty and hope. As
his short stories are his reactions to the contemporary social scene, they realistic in nature.

Besides the characterization another significant feature which makes his writing the realistic is his thematic concerns. The analysis of his short stories clearly depict that his thematic concerns are in fact the burning problems of the contemporary society. The alienation, displacement, cultural estrangement, identity crises, struggle of minority, oppression, discrimination and the predicament of man in the contemporary society are the major thematic concerns of his writing which can be seen as major themes of the literary tradition of the American social realism. For instance in the short story ‘The Mourner’, Malamud shows that how an old man has to live the life of alienation and depends on the social security. The social problem reflected in the story is the problem of old age which can be observed in the every period of literary history and therefore the story appeals universally. The problem reflected in the story ‘Take Pity’ is the problem of widower. The story focuses of the interpersonal relations in general and the man-woman relation in particular. Author in this story, by using the narrative techniques of Naturalism and interweaving the threats of the knowledge of human psyche, makes it a valid picture of a contemporary society. The stories like ‘The Bill’ and ‘The Loan’ reflect the theme of economic victimization and oppression. These stories reveal that how the economic relations of the society was influenced by the ethnic origin and the social status. The sensible artist like Malamud is quite sensible to the social surroundings the multi-cultural, multiethnic society, their different religious faiths and different cultural conducts, their different philosophical backgrounds and different ideological understandings.
Malamud very sincerely portrays man in relation to the real life of society and ethnicity.

The reflection of social realism is not just explored through the realistic characterization but it is revealed through the realistic geographical setting. Malamud’s short stories are set in the different geographical area of different country. He very skilfully used the real geographical and historical background to his short stories. In most of his stories the World Wars appears as a historical setting. These historical backgrounds and different geographical and cultural landscapes allow him to evaluate the religious ideology of Judaism. Besides this he chooses the social setting which is helpful to depict the poverty and conditions of the immigrant social groups. In the picturization of the tenements and the houses of the characters he becomes more minute in details. Nathan Lime in ‘Black is my Favorite Color’ visits the ‘Negro houses’ that are located in the middle of a ‘not-so-hot white neighbourhood’. The description of this colony reflects the worst condition of Negros in the contemporary period. Besides the characterization, setting, and themes, the language of his short stories is realistic and precise which provide them a realistic approach to his novels and short stories.

Thus, in the light of this discussion one can argue that Bernard Malamud is a significant author of the tradition of American Social Realism. The real like characters, naturalistic picturization of the geographical setting and the themes as the burning issues of the society are the major features of his writing which are sufficient to prove him the author of the tradition of realism. His affiliation to the social truth, genuine feelings for the social problems, his critical and intellectual observation of the dynamic cultural scenes, his
understanding of the human psyche, and the vast experience of the world make his writing realistic in nature and didactic in mood.

After having a broad frame of understanding of his social concern in the fourth chapter the issue of ethnic identity was discussed. In the theoretical frame the concept of identity in general and the notion of ethnic identity in particular, was reviewed in order to make a critical statement on the theme of ethnic identity in Malamud’s short stories. After the analysis of his short stories, it can be argued that the ethnicity plays a significant role in his short stories as it influences his selection of characters and his choice of social themes. It depicts that in American society, commonalities among groups of people set an opportunity to construct a difference. These commonalities are decided on the culture, language, race and ethnicity. Due to this social categorization, few groups become majority and few remains in minority. Further this categorization influences the power relations in the society. In Malamud’s writings all these issues get prime importance. As Malamud represents the Jewish American literature, his works are essentially depicting the Jewish problems in particular. Most of his characters are Jew and living the immigrant life in the foreign land and facing the problem of cultural and religious estrangement. The characters like Feld, Sobel and Miriam in ‘The First Seven Years’, Rosan in ‘Take Pity’, Nat Line in Black is my Favorite Color, Harry Cohen in ‘The Jew Bird’, Oskar Gassner in ‘The German Refuge’, Marcus in ‘The Death of Me’ and Teddy in ‘The Letter’ represent the Jewish ideology and realistically demonstrate the life of an immigrant. As Malamud was the author of depression period his short stories marked by the social unrest, mass scale unemployment and the sharp class conflict. It
reveals that though he is dealing with the panoramic world view and highly philosophical in tone, his short stories always have the basic undercurrents of his Jewish origin.

In the tradition of American literature the theme protest has been in the centre of it and always remains the most focused issue in the literary criticism. The history of American literature reveals that it has been exploring the slavery, the forced migration of American Indians, the Great Depression, Civil Rights, women’s suffrage, labour unrest, the movement of feminism, and gay and lesbian rights as major themes. In the short stories of Malamud he has registered his protest against the injustice in the society, but his protest always underscores the impulses of his ethnic origin. These characters struggle to survive in the displaced locations where the social situation is hostile and brutal.

Theme of social injustice and the suppression is another important characteristic feature of the ethnic or minority literature. These authors attempt to focus the social injustice they face as a member of a minority. The power politics plays an important role in their lives as they have to live life under the burden of majority and have to face injustice without any protest. Therefore, the literature appears them a potential medium to show the injustice to the world. In the story ‘The Mourners’ he demonstrate that how the emotions were substituted for the highly professional attitudes. An old man, without any companion to help lives a lonely life in a tenement for ten years, and one day suddenly the landlord asks him to leave the room. This injustice and the old man’s reaction to it make us feel the pity for old man and anger for the Landlord.
In few of his short stories the ethnic concerns seem secondary to other social themes, but in many of his short stories we find that he is addressing the ethnic or racial issues directly. For instance, in the story ‘Black is my Favorite Color’ he points out that the interpersonal relations in two different races are impossible. His characters directly address the problem of discrimination on the ground of their ethnic origin, for example in the same story Nat’s mother says that if she ever forgets she is a Jew, a non-Jewish person will remind her that she is one. Similar to ‘Black is my Favorite Color’ another story of Malamud ‘The German Refugee’ explores the failure of relationship between two races. It is the prejudices which become the major obstacle between harmonious relations in the society. In the story ‘The Jew Bird’ he deals with the themes like personal identity and assimilation among American Jews. The theme of ‘Anti-Semitism’ is also one of the important themes reflected in this story. Though, his writing shows the ethnic relevance by writing short stories about Jew community and by using the Jew personalities as a protagonist, he does not want to be labelled as the writer of ethnicity. But in the analysis of his fictional writing, one cannot separate his ethnic concerns. The themes, settings and the Yiddish-accented English and his portrayal of star-crossed Jewish character make him essentially an ethnic writer.

The study of Malamud’s short stories in the light of ethnicity is not only related with the traditional notion of ‘ethnicity’ but on the contrary it should be conserved in the altered conceptualizations of ‘nation’, ‘society’, and ‘culture’. The period of Malamud is marked by the rapid changes in the industrialization, the development in the international trade and the multiculturalism in the society. As an
immigrant he has accepted America as his homeland and attempted to integrate in the American Culture. In his short story collection *The Magic Barrel*, his major concern is the social realism as he deliberately keeps distance with the ethnic issues and attempt to make his stories universally acceptable, because he want to be the part of mainstream American Literature instead of categorized as Jewish writer.

Thus, after the analysis of his short stories, it can be argued that his literary motif is to focus the immoralities of the contemporary society and demonstrate them the ‘moral and ethical codes’ to sustain the peaceful social environment and integrated space of the culture, his writing method is ‘realistic’ as his ideology was affiliated to the truth and his central artistic concern is with man in society as he belongs to the humanistic tradition of philosophy.

In the case of emigrant writers, their narratives always have two spaces, one is the space of their homeland and another is the space of the host culture in which they now exist. But in the case of Malamud, the exception should be noted, his characters are not showing the affinity towards a particular nation or do not claiming the membership of any particular political group but on the other hand his characters came from different cities of the world and represent the humanity in general. Therefore the predicament of his characters symbolizes the predicament of entire humanity.

A brief review of the American Literature and the analysis of Malamud’s short stories it become apparent that his fiction world shifts the literary focus from activist- hero’s or the brave soldiers of the World Wars to the victim hero, who represents the minority
community in the condition of suppression. The social history of American society in general and the history immigrated Jews in particular reveals that the Jews migrate to America for the social and religious freedom. The first generation of Malamud’s family is also emigrated from Soviet Union to the United States of America; they are deeply committed to their religious doctrines, political ideologies, and cultural codes. In this family environment Malamud was deeply influenced by the Jewish heritage of his family. This influence can be illustrated with the classic examples from his fictional world. The realism and humanism reflected in his writing can be traced out in his biography. The issues of ethnicity, race, class, and nationhood emerge very realistically in his writings as he has the first hand experience of it. Thus, Malamud successfully develops the social truth of America by interviewing the realistic historical, political and cultural background with the creativity and portrays the American landscape with all its prospects and follies. Despite of any ideological slant, his social realism is born out of his innate understanding of human society. His complex vision of ethnicity cannot be understood in the isolated analysis of his short stories, but on the broader perspective it demands the background of sociology, history, anthropology and international politics. Thus, Malamud is not just a creative artist but he is a social scientist who wants to resolve various problematic issues of his society by eradicating the unjust laws and establishing the law of morality which springs from the human heart.