It has been marked that although America was not directly affected by the two World Wars, these historical events had made an impression on American writers. The meaning of survival, the meaning of pity, the meaning of justice and of the importance of being oneself, and the individual's consciousness of his own existence, were some of the questions that arose in their minds. The immediate years of the Second World War were marked by experimentation and exploration, at the heart of which was unsurity; uncertainty as to what lay ahead of the Americans. Modern novelists used the novel to criticise and protest against the contemporary life, and acting as reformists they tended to concentrate on the spiritual and material evils that demanded reform. Two distinct types of novels emerged during the post-war period – the naturalist and the realist novels.

Saul Bellow is undeniably the most outstanding fiction writer of our times. The Nobel Prize winner for the year 1976, has established himself as a writer with humanistic concerns and positive values, while literary modernism and the "waste land outlook" dominated the scene; critics have been aware since the sixties of a sense of liberation and movement away from this aspect of modernism and its hallmark of despair, rebellion, alienation and other
antisocial though not anti-human categories. Though in full sympathy with this sense of alienation, Saul Bellow was, among the significant post-war writers, to feel great dissatisfaction with the modernist movement in literature. He has attempted in his novels to provide alternatives to the ivory tower attitude while being fully aware of the modernist view of man trapped and adrift in a valueless universe. My present thesis is devoted to the study of the novels of Saul Bellow with regard to the themes and the techniques employed and also to assess the value of his work in terms of content and style.

The first chapter is an attempt to give a brief account of Bellow's biography; it also describes the literary climate and the modern trends affecting Bellow's writing.

American novels are filled with complaints over the misfortunes of the sovereign self. Writers have inherited a tone of bitterness, many of whom lament the passing of a more stable and beautiful age demolished by the barbarous intrusion of an industrial and metropolitan society. The sense of alienation, despair and emptiness of the modern life are emphasised in most of the modern novels. However, Saul Bellow has emerged as the most important of the realist novelists, mainly because of his humanistic concern, his feeling of brotherhood inspite of the despair and alienation felt by his contemporaries. Today, Bellow is America's most
acclaimed fiction writer and is ranked among the pioneers of the modern realist novel along with his contemporaries Malamud, Norman Mailer, Updike, Styron, and J.D. Salinger. These writers share a vision of loneliness of man in the modern environment, strikingly similar to the absurd universe that Albert Camus and Sartre had described earlier. Most of the novelists who emerged after the Second World War were not so much interested in rebelling against society as they were in understanding themselves. Bellow was the first Jewish writer to appear and who was determined to bring something new into American fiction.

The second chapter gives a detailed account of the themes of Bellow's novels. Bellow's fiction is a moral fiction. It is not concerned with style for its own sake nor even with psychological revelation for its sake, it is concerned with such moral metaphysical problems as the demarcation of human responsibility as in The Victim, and the relationship of the individual to the world of power as in Herzog. Always it seeks to know 'why.' Always it is concerned with goodness - the failures or success of the sympathetic heart. It believes in man and the potentiality of holiness and joy within the common life, the possibility of meaningful existence in this crude material world. Certainly this is the function that Bellow has taken on in his fiction. In this role he affirms the possibilities of meaningful individual life, inspite of the difficulties and failures.
In most of Bellow's fiction there is an alienated hero struggling to redeem his own life - often the burden weighing down the hero is actually his own ego, which is the accumulation of the past. It is the struggle which proves that life is not a 'dusty irrelevancy' but that dignity can be salvaged from the wreckage. Thus at the core of all Bellow's novels there is a concern for other human beings, a concern that is evident especially in the transformation of the hero. The obstacles to learning to go beyond the self and be concerned for others make up much of the substance of Bellow's novels.

Modern Fiction is primarily concerned with the exploration of the self, with its examination of the private and inner life of the central character. The single self in the midst of mass, his moods of bitterness, nihilism, and futility, his responses to new physical, psychological and philosophical theories are the subject matter of many of Bellow's novels, but as he himself says, "after having completely rejected the romantic idea of the individual, writers who do not try to provide an answer to the question as to what a human being is, somehow fail as writers."

The third chapter consists of the plots and the various plot situations that Bellow has adopted in order to bring out his themes. Bellow, in so far as he sought to seek a condition in which the self could have a 'general relation
to its world,' provides a set up in his novels whereby his characters undergo a change of thought, moving from alienation to accommodation through a series of confrontation of the self with other human beings, through events in the external world where the attitudes result in actions. Bellow's plots thus can be described as plots with a broader range, a synthesis of 'particular materials of character, thought and action,' capable of affecting the readers' opinions and emotions. The situations, events and even the setting of each novel is different, yet Bellow brings out the same theme of alienation in almost all his novels. The Adventures of Augie March being a picaresque novel consists of a number of incidents. Henderson The Rain King is set in Africa with its primitive life, Herzog deals with the problems of an urban intellectual, Sieze The Day consists of the events of a single day, Dean's December consists of events in Rumania, Dangling Man and The Victim have a typical urban setting. Thus we come across a vast panorama of events in Bellow's novels, all leading to the transformation of the hero from alienation to accommodation.

The fourth chapter deals with the main characters of Bellow's novels, the central characters around whom the entire novel revolves. As many critics of Bellow have pointed out, Bellow's characters have an 'existential sensibility,' aware of despair, alienation and emptiness of
modern life, yet all of them take a stand against the 'wasteland' attitude and favour 'brotherhood and community.' This change in thought in the character whereby individual preoccupation is replaced by concern for others, accomodation and compliance is perhaps, Bellow's contribution to human understanding and the situations in which his characters are placed help them to move towards this ideology.

In the beginning of almost all his novels, we see the heroes who are alienated, burdened with guilt and unable to live normally in society. In Dangling Man we see the hero Joseph facing a vacant emptiness without any positive value. In Sieze The Day Tommy is facing a financial collapse along with an estranged relationship with his father. Asa Leventhal in The Victim is a solitary depressive, burdened with a constant struggle against the world. Augie March moves from situation to situation in search of truth. Bellow takes up these problems and leads his heroes to a path of transformation. Through the course of the novels we see that, unable to employ the old tactics of avoiding and hiding, the hero must change. His present self is worthy of death, and he can be free of death only by discarding his self. But fearful of death, he holds on to his self; yet only by discarding his self can he conquer death. According to Bellow, discarding selfhood means getting rid of the sense of being set apart from other people. When the hero sees
himself as not special but only another creature, he can 
breathe freely without the fear of death. The hero is 
changed into a loving member of the community.

Thus Bellow's version of partial salvation proposes 
a new kind of greatness possible for man. Since the hero's 
personal life is justified, so is the life of each man and of 
society. According to Bellow, man's life is a thing of 
dignity, of value of greatness— not the greatness of 
Nepolean, but that of a simple loving man.

The fifth chapter is devoted to the study of 
Bellow's style and his narrative technique. It is marked 
that in his first two novels - Dangling Man and The Victim, 
Bellow has used prose which is flat, perceptual and seems 
detached and rigid. Then, a great change came over Bellow's 
style in Augie March in which he used the metaphor-saturated 
style, mixing grandiose, philosophy and slang. Augie March 
is lyrical, Henderson is symbolical, Sieze The Day is rich in 
bitter comedy. The chief thing to be noted is that inspite 
of the seriousness of the problems taken up by Bellow, he 
uses the comic element in such a fine way, as if to laugh 
away the problems and look to the brighter side of life. 
However, Bellow's heroes are not perfectly transformed. But 
they are capable of salvation, they are touched with truth, 
and they do learn to confront the darkness in life.
In the final analysis, the last chapter or conclusion, I have briefly described Bellow's development as a writer. In all his novels, this central theme, the defence of man, and the psychic core from which this theme is derived, remains constant. Bellow's life has thus far been a very representative American life, 'a life deeply immersed in the vast complexities of modern America.' Yet Bellow is a part of the Jewish affirmative culture. Moreover, the elimination of the self, we may note, is more oriental than Jewish, and it reminds us of our Hindu Philosophy. Bellow does provide an answer to the difficult problems of life. These various combinations make him an outstanding novelist of our time. Thus, the final chapter sums up the findings of the previous chapters. While the conclusions drawn here are by no means final or exhaustive, an attempt has been made in this thesis to discover Saul Bellow's novels, and to provide a valid and useful perspective that might enable one to see his work as a whole.