CONCLUSION

Earl H. Rovit mentions in his article on “The Jewish Literary Tradition,” three possible choices that a Jewish American writer has before him. The first way is to capture the Jewish milieu in its broken accents and mores; the second is to ignore the Jewish background altogether; and the third is the attempt to utilize the Jewish-American background in a fictional framework and not to become a local colourist (4). The writer can amalgamate Yiddish folklore and the Jewish life in America. Malamud has fused these two aspects of the Jewish situation in his works. A study of Bernard Malamud’s work reveals that Jewishness and the Jewish milieu are central to it. We encounter Jews like Morris Bober, the grocer of The Assistant; Yakov Bok, the persecuted Jew of The Fixer; Arthur Fidelman, the Jewish art critic and would be artist of Pictures of Fidelman, and the long list of characters in the short stories. Each has his different preoccupations, but all the implications of being a Jew. But Malamud is a writer who recognizes a conflict between Jewish culture and the American heritage. Jewish tradition is morally admirable but it no longer appears appropriate in an open, liberal social system. The American heritage, vital and promising, values freedom and success whereas the Jewish culture prizes factors like discipline, law and meaningful suffering. In the conflict between the two, Malamud finds the fundamental tension between two sets of values. The choice of either set is apparently a question of being right in that perspective and wrong in the other. Thus it becomes essentially a moral issue. Malamud resolves this by bringing together both sets of values to a common
realm, the realm of personal relationships. Malamud recasts the values of both the American nation and the Jewish culture in terms of their implications to these relationships.

Malamud’s Jew is a type of metaphor both for the tragic proportions of anyone’s life and for a system of personal virtue. Malamud is interested much in his significance as a metaphor. The Jewishness of his characters serves as an ethical symbol. It is the symbolic use he makes of Jewishness that stands out to place him among the Jewish-American writers. For Malamud, the most striking feature of Jewish culture is its acceptance of suffering and its faith in the meaning of suffering. This assumes significance in his fictional strategy, suffering being one of the most fundamental facts of human life. It helps him make the Jew represent humanity, and suffering, the essential condition of human existence.

But this method has the danger of being reductionist. Malamud makes up for this reductionism by employing means of ensuring suggestive richness in his writings. The means he resorts to for this is the use of the rich Hebraic tradition. The Jewish understanding of suffering and a variety of related themes enhance the thematic complexity of the stories while the evocation of characters and situations from the Hebraic tradition adds further to the complexity of the fictional world. Suffering becomes an authentic means for moral resolution and self-realization in his fiction. It assumes the form of redemption, redeeming both the sufferer and those for whom he suffers. He follows the tradition of the ancient Jewish prophets Amos, Jeremiah, and Isaiah who had announced suffering to be the Jew’s special destiny. Malamud’s characters suffer deeply, but they hold on bravely in a world of chaos and nothingness.
Malamud's work retains a certain uniqueness in both subject matter and form. Avoiding the self-promotion of Norman Mailer, the black humor of Joseph Heller, the increasing self-absorption of Philip Roth, and the moral comedy of Saul Bellow, Malamud has continued to be a humanistic spokesman for a sense of responsibility, compassion and goodness in a world fast moving away from these. In presenting his concerns as a Jew, an artist and a moral man, Malamud has evolved a method that is uniquely his.

Malamud can be placed among the Jewish-American writers who have left the Shtetl and traditional Judaism to reach out into the world. Rejecting the confines of the past, he has accepted the universality of the Jew. He becomes a major spokesman of the moralistic tradition of American fiction. The value system of this tradition has usually been humanistic, rather than narrowly religious. It is a value system that emphasizes such concerns as the liberation of the individual human spirit, the need for love, respect for discipline and the value of human relationships.