CHAPTER SIX

SUMMATION
A probing study on Bernard Malamud’s novels would reveal that he has manipulated different allegorical modes of characterization to emphasize the need of love, compassion and mutual understanding in the prevailing violent atmosphere of greed, lust and selfishness. His novels cater to the need of the times, and according to Abramson, “his voice is distinctive, his characters memorable, and his compassion great” (145). Notwithstanding the fact that his novels penetrate deeply into Man’s depraved nature, with all his imperfections, they always and with an optimistic note that an individual can still triumph over evil in spite of his inherent weaknesses. Malamud has never failed to point out the sharp contrast between what Man is, and what he ought to be, through the subtle use of irony and symbols in the characters and situations. As irony and symbols always form the integral components of Allegory, Malamud’s characterization often tends to be allegorical, and his moralising effect has been marvellous. It has been discussed in this thesis, how Malamud as a skillful writer, has made use of different allegorical modes of characterization, not only to present the disabilities and imperfections of an ordinary individual, who has fallen far below the average human standards in the recent times, but also to offer a way out of this miserable condition through accepting the inevitability of suffering and responding to it with sympathy and a sense of responsibility.
In fact, Malamud’s different allegorical modes of characterization are a means of exploring the present state of uncertainty and perplexity and projecting the need for humanistic virtues in “a brutal, uncivilized, and dehumanizing” (Hershinow 14) existence. His emphasis on humanistic values is evident in the protagonist’s effort to escape his worthless, miserable past in search of a meaningful existence with love, and self-realization. It is also clear that Malamud’s optimistic concept of life is echoed in his novels, as he has shown that human beings are capable of enduring great sufferings and taking up responsibilities in spite of the various oppressions in life. All his novels reflect his unwavering hope in the power of human endurance, and in the human capacity to learn from suffering. Thus, though dead, Malamud continues to be a humanistic spokesman for responsibility, mercy, goodness, and love “in a world spinning out of control with frightening speed” (Alter 1), in a singular voice, awakening every individual to the pressing need of the times.

As analyzed in this thesis, Malamud has patterned his novels on some allegorical modes of characterization to bring out his theme of human redemption through suffering, compassion and mutual understanding. He manipulates these allegorical modes in such a way that he is able to present “the symbolic ideals of goodness and badness between which the protagonist must conduct his life, and against which he must measure himself” (Alter 12). First, the protagonists are Jewish schlemiels, caught in a world of conflict
between good and evil, stumbling often in the same error, and making themselves targets of ridicule. Yet they manage to attain a state of moral elevation through meaningful suffering. Ben Siegel is of the view that Malamud’s novels are “parables of possibility and regeneration” (The Fiction of Bernard Malamud 118), in which the protagonists achieve redemption and moral regeneration through suffering. It has been shown in this thesis how Malamud’s protagonists undergo suffering as Jewish schlemiels, indulge in deep self-scrutiny, and ultimately learn to take up responsibility with love. It is also observed that all of them except two, utilise their suffering to the betterment of themselves and the others around them. The main protagonist, Harry Lesser in The Tenants and Arthur Fidelman, the protagonist of Malamud’s novel, The Pictures of Fidelman: An Exhibition seem to get only the partial benefit through their suffering, as they often exhibit their selfishness and pride. The other protagonists in spite of their “ill-luck, moral flaw or sheer stupidity” (The Fiction of Bernard Malamud 119), as the typical schlemiels of the Jewish folklore, learn the power of meaningful suffering and face it with stoic endurance, which make them morally strong and superior to others. It is true that they are losers from the materialistic point of view, but they achieve moral success in acquiring precious humanitarian virtues like love and sympathy, which are desperately needed in the present perilous times. Sometimes the power of endurance they acquire through long and patient suffering is rather surprising and stimulating to the reader. This allegorical mode of characterization in presenting the protagonists as Jewish schlemiels is very convincing because the protagonists continue to amaze the readers
through their inner transformation when they gradually emerge into emblems of conscience and compassion.

It is also apparent that the characterization of the protagonists in Malamud's novels is intertwined with an allegorical Journey, each protagonist taking up a search for a meaningful existence. Like the heroes of the classical allegories, Malamud's protagonists undertake a Journey or quest towards a better existence. This Journey invariably leads them towards self-realisation, understanding about the needs of their fellowmen, and the sharing of responsibilities with others patiently. In Malamud's first four novels, the Journey is mainly physical, symbolising every man's quest for a fuller and meaningful life. In the latter four novels, the protagonists undertake an inner Journey, in their thoughts and reveries to acquire self-knowledge and mature understanding. Whether physical or mental, the Journey motif brings the protagonist to "the starting point for the possibility of a new existence" (The Fiction of Bernard Malamud 69). The protagonists undertake a Journey because they are dissatisfied with their past useless life, and they want to change their life for the better.

The Journey motif has enabled Malamud to present clearly and emphatically, the protagonist's striving towards a meaningful existence. Generally each novel follows a clear pattern of the protagonist succeeding in his attempt towards a better life, though the success may not be "in terms in which he had envisioned his quest" (The Fiction of Bernard Malamud 86). For
example, When Yakov Bok, the protagonist of *The Fixer* undertakes a journey from his Jewish shtetl towards Kiev, he has glorious expectations of a bright future. Yet the journey does not lead him towards material prosperity according to his expectations. On the contrary, it involves him in a series of troubles, and ultimately takes him to prison where he has to face terrible sufferings as a punishment for a crime, which he did not commit. In Malamud’s moral vision, material prosperity is nothing compared to moral success. His protagonist, Yakov Bok does achieve moral success in learning compassion and endurance through intense suffering, and he is really a changed man as the novel closes. His miraculous inner transformation is evident in his readiness to accept the moral obligations towards his unfaithful wife Raisl and his other fellow Jews.

Tony Tanner is of the view that in the protagonist’s quest, the “invulnerability of the individual self fade away before the experienced fact of involuntary involvement in the lives of other people” (Qtd. in CLC 2, 268). It is the unexpected involuntary involvement in the lives of other people which finally leads the protagonists, Frank Alpine, and Seymour Levin to the willing acceptance of responsibilities in the novels *The Assistant*, and *A New Life* respectively.

It has also been noted in this thesis how Malamud sustains the Journey motif in the latter four novels by letting his protagonists go through an inner Journey in their thought process through fantasies and reveries. Though
encountered with repeated failures, the protagonists exhibit some change in their attitudes as a result of their progressive thinking. For example, the protagonist William Dubin in Dubin's Lives leaves his mistress Fanny, at the close of the novel, in search of his wife, Kitty with love, and it is the result of his constant scrutinising thoughts, blaming himself for the neglect of his wife and children. He feels sad that he is responsible for the indiscrete actions of his children which lead them to endless misery. His daughter, Maud has an affair with an elderly black teacher, old enough to be her father, and even gets pregnant through him. She refuses to go for an abortion and Dubin feels very sad for her miserable condition. His step-son Gerald is caught up in Russia and he is not able to get back from there. Owing to his unwise request to his chief, Colonel Kovacol to send him back to Sweden, he is dismissed from the army without food and payment. Dubin plans to go to Russia with his wife, Kitty, to help him out, but he himself is in a confused condition. He broods sadly over all the unfortunate happenings in the lives of his children, and blames himself for their sufferings. He feels as though he travels in a wrong train on a wrong track. In fact, his continuous thought process of self-scrutiny is like a fast moving train which leads him gradually towards a remarkable inner change, finally leading him to the willing acceptance of his obligations towards his wife and children.

This thesis has attempted to trace the Journey motif in each novel of Bernard Malamud, which is closely associated with the allegorical characterization of the protagonists. It is obvious from a close analysis of
Malamud's novels that the allegorical Journey of the protagonists in general indicates the purifying process, leading them towards moral regeneration and redemption. Enthusiastic readers of Malamud may easily identify the protagonist's Journey with his search for a better, meaningful existence. They may also note that the Journey leads the protagonist from immaturity to maturity. The protagonist who has attained the state of maturity is seen looking at the other characters and situations with a moral perspective like his creator, Malamud. Thus the Journey motif, as an allegorical mode of characterization is successfully employed in Malamud's novels, creating a remarkable effect on the readers.

The third allegorical mode of characterization traced out in Malamud's novels, in this research study is Malamud's objectification of characters by conscience. This allegorical mode of characterization is very persuasive in Malamud's novels, amplifying his idea that moral regeneration is possible in each and every individual, through the awakening of his own voice of conscience. Malamud deliberately uses some characters to embody the protagonist's voice of conscience to bring him to self-realisation and guide him towards the path of good-will and responsibility. The characters who represent the protagonist's conscience are undoubtedly the symbolic projections of his own inner self, directing him towards the right path of goodness and sacrifice. In Malamud's moral vision, love, compassion and mutual understanding are highly valued, and this allegorical mode of objectification by conscience enables him to voice forth "his compassion for humanity and moral purpose to
produce a complex vision of muted belief in the potential of the human spirit” (Hershinow 135). He endows these characters who represent conscience with tremendous vitality and uses them to bring out the hidden humanitarian virtues from deep inside the protagonist. As emblems of conscience, their characterization is allegorical like the characterization of the protagonist, and they play a major role in shaping the lives of the protagonists towards a meaningful life. The awakened protagonists in turn emerge into emblems of conscience for the readers. Thus Malamud effectively executes his didactic purpose through his allegorical modes of characterization. His protagonists and the other characters as emblems of conscience never fail to influence the readers by moving their spirit, touching their imagination, and haunting them endlessly with their thought-provoking questions and reflections.

Malamud’s moral sensibility is evident both in the characterization of the emblems of conscience, and in the characterization of the emblems of evil. These characters that represent hatred and malice try to hinder the progress of the protagonists towards moral maturity. Especially when Malamud builds up characters with evil designs, he strongly uses their very names as symbolic of their nature. Sometimes, the names are suited to their nature, and sometimes they have ironical significance. For example, Judge Goodwill Banner and Max Mercy, the sports writer in *The Natural* behave in a way, contrary to their names. Judge Goodwill Banner has no good-will towards others, and Max Mercy has no mercy at all for the poor and needy. On the other hand, Mr. Labhart, the President of Cascadia College in *A New Life* behaves exactly
as his name implies. He has a heart attached to technology and does not favour liberal arts at all. The protagonist, Levin is disappointed with the prevailing situation at Cascadia College and tries to reform the existing educational system there. Yet Mr. Labhart and his followers, Mr. Fairchild, the Chairman of Department of English and Gerald Gilley, the English Composition Director strictly oppose to any reform in the institution. Another character whose name is directly suited to the inner nature is Buz, a chimpanzee in God’s Grace. The very name ‘Buz’ indicates noise and haste and Buz behaves exactly in a hasty way creating much noise and disturbance. He does not understand or appreciate the love and care of Calvin Cohn, the protagonist, for him. Though Cohn treats Buz as his son, Buz is not grateful, but he takes sides with chimps who cruelly murder Cohn’s precious child. Thus he prevents the arrival of a new generation on earth after the Second Flood. All these evil characters hamper the protagonist’s moral growth in the respective novels.

It has been discussed in the proceeding chapter on Malamud’s use of symbols that Malamud uses symbols in the characters and the physical environment surrounding the characters to denote the nature and mood of the characters. It is shown here that the names, and some times the occupations, and physical characteristics are symbolic of the innermost tendencies of the characters. Malamud’s use of symbols forms an integral component of his allegorical mode of characterization. His symbols do not stand in isolation, but they become a part of Malamud’s world which “blends hope with despair, pain with possibility, and suffering with moral growth” (Hershinow 146). His
characters who emerge into emblems of conscience and endurance from their weaknesses are sometimes depressed and dejected when they have to undergo sufferings and painful experiences, but they do not become victims to their tragic circumstances. They are hopeful in despair, get courage under trying situations, and rise up to great moral heights.

Symbols of cracked and crumpled objects in Malamud’s novels may indicate the depravity and imperfection of human beings. For example when Gerald Gilley assigns the radical Leo Duffy’s room to Levin for his work at Cascadia College in *A New Life*, Levin sees a window with a cracked glass there, which may symbolise his own imperfections and Leo Duffy’s. Also, one of the protagonists of *The Tenants*, Willie Spearmint, a black writer always has crumpled paper at his desk which may denote the lack of form and creativity in his work. What Malamud seems to say is that in spite of the imperfections and depravity in human nature, there is still a possibility of redemption.

Seasonal cycles, depicting the mood of the characters are a recurrent motif in Bernard Malamud’s novels. It has been pointed out that the cheerful, excited mood of the characters is reflected in the spring season while their depressed, gloomy feelings are focussed through winter. Similarly the contented nature of the characters with no worries, is shown through summer while their anxious feelings of uncertainty are conveyed through autumn. It has been repeatedly affirmed through Malamud’s novels that flowers and fruit are positive symbols for Malamud, denoting love and fertility. Birds usually
symbolise redemption as the white owl in Dubin's Lives leads the protagonist William Dubin out of the dangerous blizzard. Birds in The Assistant offer the protagonist, Frank Alpine real freedom from the entanglement of self and worldly appetites. He finds pleasure in feeding the birds in the park when he faces a painful and depressing situation due to Helen’s rejection of his gifts.

Malamud’s use of colour symbolism to underscore the racial conflict between the Whites and Blacks has also been analyzed in the previous chapter with reference to The Tenants. In his fantasy, Harry Lesser sees Black Willie’s eyes as “white stones” (43). Also, he imagines a black head staring at him fixedly from the snow and disappearing “like a moon entering a cloudy bank” (106). Though Lesser is a White man, he thinks that the black head is in himself because he longs after Willie’s girl. Again the comparison with the moon entering a cloudy bank suggests the contrast of the light and dark images. Thus the black and white images are deliberately juxtaposed to convey an effective Black-White dichotomy.

The present research study has thus attempted to explore the allegorical modes of characterization in Malamud’s novels at four levels – “Protagonists Jewish schlemiels”, Allegorical Journey”, “Objectification of characters by conscience”, and “The use of symbols in Malamud’s novels”. Individual chapters have been organised in accordance with these four levels, and it is clear that Malamud has adopted these allegorical devices to emphasize the need for kindness and considerate understanding in this chaotic existence. As
pointed out already, his allegorical modes of characterization form a proper channel through which he is able to convey his message of hope for every man, irrespective of his nation, race, and culture, that the individual can achieve moral redemption, and rejuvenate the lives of others too, if he earnestly seeks for a better existence with the humanitarian virtues of tenderness and sympathy. Also it is clear from the above discussion that Bernard Malamud is a conspicuous humanist who is dead against the devaluation of the individual in the recent times. His distinctive voice, mellowed through wisdom and experience, echoed in his novels through his allegorical modes of characterization makes a passionate appeal for the cultivation of humanitarian virtues, and his plea for love and mercy will never cease to persuade even the hardest individual to the acceptance of his moralistic views.

This study has attempted to concentrate on Malamud's eight complete novels, which were published before his death, in 1986, and ample evidence is provided to show that all these novels follow the same allegorical pattern. The protagonists are Jewish Schlemiels undertaking an allegorical journey towards a better existence. They are inspired and guided by some characters, who are representations of their own conscience. Most of them emerge into emblems of conscience for the reader. It is Malamud's optimistic concern to show in each protagonist, an inherent capacity to learn through suffering, and to become a better individual. Scholars in future may make an extensive use of these allegorical modes, applying them to Malamud's short stories which are like
parables of modern existence, conveying their message of hope and regeneration through despair and decay.

The present researcher has not taken into consideration Malamud’s last but unfinished novel, *The People* which was published after his death, in 1989, for the research study, because it is rather incomplete, and more than that, it does not adhere fully to the four allegorical modes of characterization relevant to the present thesis. This unfinished novel in sixteen chapters appears to end with a tragic note. Yozip, the Jewish peddler and occasional carpenter, involuntarily becomes the chief of a tribe of Indians in America’s North West in the post-civil war period. Under the new name of Jozip, he fights for the rights of the tribe which is named as “The People”, against the tyranny and oppression of the American Government. His efforts proved futile as the people are defeated, and many are killed by the Whites. Malamud sees the whites as the dominating, oppressing race in this novel, as they are merciless in expanding the land area of the United States through their heartless killing of the people. They don’t care for the wounded feelings of the oppressed race, and forcefully vacate them from the place of their original settlement. Malamud finishes the sixteenth chapter of this novel with a sad remark that the remaining Indians in the tribe are taken in freight cars to a miserable place, contrary to their wishes. It seems as though the weak have to bow before the strong. Malamud dies after the completion of this sixteenth chapter with the sad ending. Yet from the notes and outline that Malamud has left for the rest of
the novel, it is obvious that he wished to conclude the novel with a vision of hope.

According to the notes, Jozip decides to plead for the cause of the people after their defeat. For this reason, he enrolls himself in a night school at Chicago to study law and become a lawyer. So, even for this unfinished novel, Malamud has purposed to show the individual's capacity to hope in a hopeless atmosphere, his potential for moral success amidst the tension and violence of the day, and his inherent courage to overcome failure, thus achieving triumph in defeat. This theme of triumph in defeat may be traced from Malamud's first novel, The Natural itself to show Malamud's unending hope in the human heart and his moral vision to create a better civilization. Research proposals like "Triumph in Defeat in Malamud's novels" may be taken up for further study. Taking the novels chronologically from The Natural to The People one is sure to trace out Malamud's vision of hope through the increasing stress and turmoil of the times.