CHAPTER THREE

THE EXISTENTIAL AFFIRMER

It is the privilege of every age to consider its predicament unique, and it is its hope that the predicament may prove the most gravid history has known. Such illusions are not always idle; for they are the stuff of which men make the record of their speeding days, heightening their moment with some articulate show of pride, wonder or despair. In the end, such illusions are but the human way of stating: "We are here!"

(Hassan, Radical Innocence: Studies in the Contemporary American Novel 3)

Isaiah Berlin classifies philosophers and writers into two categories, "hedgehogs" and "foxes," referring to Archilochus' famous line "the fox knows many things, but the hedgehog knows one big thing." According to Berlin, on one side there are writers who "relate everything to a single central vision, one system less or more coherent or articulate, in terms of which they understand, think and feel... and, on the other side... those who pursue many ends, often unrelated and even contradictory... in this sense Dante belongs to the first category, Shakespeare to the second; Plato, Lucretius, Pascal, Hegel, Dostoevsky, Nietzsche, Ibsen, Proust are, in varying degrees, hedgehogs; Herodotus, Aristotle, Montaigne, Erasmus, Moliere, Goethe, Pushkin, Balzac, Joyce are foxes" (1-2). A close study of the novels of Bellow and Parthasarathy reveals that these two writers are "hedgehogs" and that they present a single central vision of the world. The
novels of both Bellow and Parthasarathy express the idea that man, who
is caught in the dilemma of choice and responsibility, discovers
authenticity as the price promised to him if he overcomes alienation. Both
the writers share the view that the essence of human existence lies in the
transformation from isolation to accommodation, from bitterness to love.
In the novels of both Bellow and Parthasarathy, the emphasis is on the
transformation of the alienated wanderer into an existential affirmer.

An authentic man is a person who discovers his real self and makes
the right choice freely and consciously. He is responsible for what he is.
Authenticity, however, depends on the realization of the human self, and
this understanding differs from philosopher to philosopher. For
Kierkegaard, the most authentic man is the man in the religious state—
one who surrenders himself to God in blind faith. Marcel believes that
authenticity is found in inter-subjectivity, that is, where two persons
relate as equal subjects, as persons complementing each other. Heidegger
describes an authentic man as one who relates himself to the existence of
the entity, that is, one who discovers the real meaning of being in inter-
relationships. For Sartre, an authentic man is the free man of auto-
determination, but he believes that this freedom is unrealizable. Sartre
differentiates between "being-in-itself" and "being-for-itself" and considers
man "being-for-itself," that is, consciousness struggling to realize itself...
For Sartre, the authentic man is one who struggles to realize himself.
Bellow and Parthasarathy maintain that man is alienated from his
authentic form of existence in the post-war world and is in constant search, making efforts to rediscover his authenticity.

Jonathan Wilson considers Bellow a "hedgehog" because Bellow's novels articulate a system. Wilson argues that Bellow, as Freud presents a vision of human predicament in *Civilization and Its Discontents*, expresses in his novels the idea that the civilized world is a place where man is painfully and inevitably caught between his values on the one hand and his desires on the other. "In Bellow's fictional world," says Wilson, "as in Freud's real one, the rewards of civilization—law, order, cleanliness, 'civilized' behaviour—are won at the expense of great individual frustration" (13-14). Wilson feels that Bellow's vision is bleak and that "it is neither tragic nor terrifying" (15). In *On Bellow's Planet: Readings from the Dark Side*, Wilson deviates from the usual criticism and asks how a writer whose message is essentially bleak and whose characters are generally described in terms of their disembodied consciousness has come to be seen as a champion of open-ended human possibility. Wilson's argument is correct as far as the treatment of the theme of alienation is concerned. But it should be noted that Bellow's novels present a more important vision that lays emphasis on the transformation from alienation to affirmation.

In *Saul Bellow: In Defense of Man*, Clayton states that Bellow's "humanity and compassion radiate from every novel... his ability to describe experience in a human voice so that the texture of the experience comes through, and his ability to convey the philosophical-moral
complexities of human life without losing that life itself... He can define the Darkness but never enter it; he can examine cultural nihilism but never share it" (3). Clayton points out three interrelated contradictions in Bellow's fiction (3-4). First, Bellow rejects the cultural nihilism of the twentieth century, but his imagination is as horrified by the emptiness of modern life as is Ionesco's. Second, Bellow's fiction emphasizes the value of brotherhood and community, yet his main characters are all masochists and alienatees. Third, Bellow values individuality highly, yet in his fiction he presents individuality as a burden which keeps the human being from love, stressing on the possibility of the individual's union with others.

All the three contradictions exist in Parthasarathy's fiction also. Like Bellow, Parthasarathy rejects nihilistic attitude and refuses to plunge into despair, yet most of his novels portray the emptiness of modern life. He advocates tolerance, compassion and understanding of human nature, but there are many characters in his novels experiencing deep conflicts arising out of the hard realities of life. Like Bellow, Parthasarathy lays great emphasis on individual freedom but his fiction portrays the conflict between individual freedom and social norms.

It cannot be denied that the novels of both Bellow and Parthasarathy have these contradictions. Nevertheless, there is a strong note of affirmation in the human possibilities at the deeper level. Both the writers believe that man has the power to develop his innate capacities so as to achieve dignity in spite of the hurdles in the world. The works of these writers finally defend man against nihilism and pessimistic despair.
successes on other levels of culture and subculture. What Saul Bellow is for highbrow literature, Salinger is for upper middlebrow, Irwin Shaw for middle middlebrow and Herman Wouk for lower middlebrow" (3). Fielder points out that the themes of Bellow are not very different from those of the middlebrow Jewish novelists but in treatment they become transformed: "Like Wouk or Shaw, he, too, has written a War novel: a book about the uncertainty of intellectual and Jew face to face with a commitment to regimentation and violence. But unlike Wouk and Shaw, Bellow has not merely taken the World War I novel of protest and adulterated it with popular front pieties" (4). The important point to be noted here is that in Bellow's DM, the theme of protest is not a stereotyped one fused with anecdotes but it is presented as a subject, "a temptation to be confronted, not a value to be celebrated" (Fielder 4).

Bellow's Jewish experience has enabled him to introduce a moral seriousness in his fiction. As Clayton observes: "Bellow is not only a part of the affirmative Jewish tradition; he is self-consciously a part of it. He knows that Jewish writers have said Yes in the face of suffering, and he longs also to say Yes..." (34). Bellow is aware that the modern society has banished intuition and that it has been divided by artificial walls created by man. The traditional beliefs have been demolished and human existence appears to be meaningless. Yet Bellow does not want to plunge into despair. He rejects nihilistic point of view.

Though Bellow says that he is not much interested in being called a Jewish writer, his cultural background and ethnic perceptions form an
fiction shows the influence of Indian culture and Western philosophical thought. Both the Jewish and Indian cultures are essentially affirmative.

India has been a land of rich cultural diversity and has remained the seat of many ancient civilizations. Culture differs from civilization. As K.M. Munshi says: "... essentially culture has little to do with material equipment of life. It is the characteristic way of life inspired by fundamental values, in which people live. It is the sum total of the values expressed through art, religion, literature, social institutions and behaviour, the overt acts of individuals and mass action inspired by collective urges" (71). The important aspect of culture is its continuity. It comes from the past, modifies itself according to the present demands and goes forward to mould the future. It is a natural growth from the soil and is influenced by geographical factors. As Jawaharlal Nehru says: "Obviously, the culture of India in the old days was affected greatly, as we see in our own literature, by the Himalayas, the forests and the great rivers of India among other things" ("What Is Culture?" 81). Even in the midst of so many disturbances, a rich sense of the past and a strong belief in the future enable an average Indian to lead an essentially peaceful and contented life in the present.

The theme of the continuity of life runs like a thread in the novels of Parthasarathy. In the interview to the Researcher, Parthasarathy expresses his belief in the continuity of life.

SS: Laa. Sa.Raa. says that everyone comes into this world, exists and departs when the work is over. Everyone is like a bubble that lasts
only for a short period. Some people are like sparks of fire lasting for some more time. This is what we call human life. This idea is similar to Shakespeare’s “All the world’s a stage, / And all the men and women merely players.” What is your view of human life?

IP: I like to focus on the continuity of human life. When Thiruvalluvar says that the world is great, he means that the world goes on and that human life continues. The continuity of life is important. Man strives to achieve many things because of his awareness of death. He wants to leave many things to posterity only because of his knowledge of death. But death is not the endpoint. (Appendix I)

The spirit of tolerance and a whole-hearted acceptance of different schools of thought have strengthened and invigorated Indian culture. Several races and communities driven out of their homelands have found India to be a safe haven. It is obvious that this broadmindedness has had its impact on the citizens. Influenced by the spirit of tolerance and affirmation inherent in the lifestyle, Indians have always maintained a healthy and optimistic outlook, hoping for the best always. Such a spirit has taught them not to plunge into despair but to surge ahead, affirming the incredible possibilities offered to man in the universe. Tolerance which leads a person to affirmation has been the hallmark of Indian thought and culture. This quality makes Parthasarathy’s fiction, in spite of its depiction of the predicament and anguish of man in the post-war era, essentially affirmative.
In the interview to the Researcher, Parthasarathy acknowledges the powerful influence of the Indian culture in moulding his personality:

SS: Saul Bellow's fiction shows the confluence of Jewish culture and American cultural background. Your novels display the confluence of Indian cultural background and Western philosophical thought. I think both Jewish culture and Indian culture are essentially affirmative. What is your opinion?

IP: As you have said, both are basically affirmative. The Jewish tolerance is found in Indian tradition also. Indian culture has an optimistic outlook as its base. (Appendix I)

Regarding the influence of Western philosophy on Parthasarathy, it can be said that his thematic structures are based on the tenets of existentialism, Freudianism and other psycho-analytic theories of the West. According to Encyclopaedia of Tamil Literature, Parthasarathy has made “attempts at informing one aspect or the other of the psycho-analytic theories of the West” (Murugan 512). S.Ravindranathan says about the influence of Western philosophy and literature on Indira Parthasarathy: “His intelligence is a refined one. He has made an in-depth study of Western literature and philosophy and assimilated them. No doubt his writings will serve as a bridge connecting Western philosophical thought and Tamil literary tradition” (Oppilikkiya Pärvai 73-74). In general, fictional writing in Tamil has been the product of the receptivity to the West. As far as Parthasarathy's works are concerned, the
description of the workings of human psyche is definitely the result of the influence of Western psycho-analytic theories.

Parthasarathy's Western leanings can be identified in his grasp of the Western philosophical thought and the early influence of the Western writers on him. In most of his novels, there is an in-depth analysis of the purpose of life. They revolve around the problems of alienation and existential estrangement. His characters search for identity and individuality in the rat race of the world today. He firmly believes that man is responsible for his actions, which is a tenet of existentialism. The absurdity of human existence is highlighted in his works.

Parthasarathy is of the view that literature transcends language. He has been greatly influenced by Shakespeare, Milton, Shelley, Emily Zola, Balzac and Aldous Huxley. Parthasarathy owes his evolution as a dramatist to Shakespeare. The works of Shelley had turned Parthasarathy into a rebel, an angry young man, who was highly critical of the hypocrisy prevalent in the society. Balzac was a source of inspiration right from his college days. In the interview published in *Cupamāṅkāla*, he recollects how he had read all the books written by Balzac, that were available in the Gopal Rao Library at Kumbakonam: "When I was doing my Intermediate, I studied Shelley's poems. I read Shelley's works with great enthusiasm... Because of my sudden interest in Balzac, I began to read all the books by Balzac, and I was particularly influenced by his *The Quest of the Absolute*" (9). Aldous Huxley's amazing range of knowledge
and lucid style had a great impact on Parthasarathy's creative process. Influenced by Huxley, who writes with ease on a variety of subjects, philosophy, art, music, sociology, biology and economics, Parthasarathy describes how he read Huxley's *Ape and Essence* with great admiration (Albert 237). Huxley's criticism of the dehumanized world has motivated Parthasarathy to condemn the modern craving for materialistic pleasures.

The cultural backgrounds of Bellow and Parthasarathy have enabled them to realize the existence of a higher consciousness. Both the writers are of the view that to affirm oneself and search for meaning in life one must affirm the transcendent as well. One cannot exclude the presence of the transcendent when one is in the process of self-affirmation. Both Bellow and Parthasarathy emphasize on the unfathomable vastness that lies beyond the reach of positivistic science and human psyche. This emphasis makes them prefer the theistic side of existentialism to the atheistic side. What these writers have derived from Sartrean existentialism is its humanistic perspective.

In the interview to the Researcher, Parthasarathy clearly states his position:

**SS:** Your vision, that is, humanistic existentialism, has a lot in common with Sartre's existentialism. Does it show his influence on you?
I admit that I have been influenced by Sartre, Husserl and Heidegger. I prefer the theistic side of existentialism to the atheistic side (Appendix I).

Regarding the belief in the existence of God, Parthasarathy clarifies his point in the interview to the Researcher:

Whether one believes in the existence of God or not, one needs a God. There is a psychological need of a God. Once man believed that he could completely depend on science because it gave him evidences. But now science is becoming more and more abstract like philosophy. There are many things in the universe which defy a satisfactory scientific explanation. There are many absurd things which we are not able to understand. A proper explanation for the happening of these things is eluding. In Balzac’s novel, The Quest of the Absolute, there is a character who tries to prove the existence of God. He gets only frustration. I don’t think we are endowed with such knowledge as to probe into these mysteries. The more we try to know the more we find the extent of our ignorance. Man always tries to understand reality... My search for truth, my knowledge of the universe and my experience in life make me humble. (Appendix I)

Bellow writes about the need for affirmation of the transcendent in his foreword to Allan Bloom’s The Closing of the American Mind: “But the channel to the soul is always there, and it is our business to keep it
open, to have access to the deepest parts 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 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" (16-17). Bellow's point is that keeping the channel to the soul open is absolutely necessary for a person to attain a higher consciousness.

Both Bellow and Parthasarathy condemn the narrow empiricism of modern psychology and the dehumanizing aspects of scientific materialism. They reject objective knowledge because their focus is on the existential nature of the transcendental man. In this respect, their views are similar to Berdyaev's existentialism which is founded on the distinction between person and individual, that is, the soul possessing a higher consciousness as distinguished from the naturalistic biological unit. Berdyaev also differentiates between existential knowledge and objective knowledge, that is, knowledge growing out of actual experience, including soul experience, as distinguished from abstract or rationalistic knowledge. In Truth and Revelation, Berdyaev states: "... transcendental man is the inner man whose existence lies outside the bounds of objectification" (qtd. in Tanner 286). Tanner explains how Bellow's fascination for writers who deal with the subject of a higher consciousness is revealed in his fiction: "And it must be remembered that Bellow is fascinated by writers who treat the subject of a higher consciousness,
regardless of their eccentricity (e.g. Swedenborg, Blake, Emerson, Whitman, Rudolph Steiner, and Jewish mystics" (285). Tanner points out that Berdyaev's mind is "the meeting place for many minds and he embodies a tradition of religious-philosophical thinking that includes voices Bellow knew at first hand" (285). Thus the theistic and humanistic aspects of existentialism form the basis of the novels of both Bellow and Parthasarathy.

The essential similarity between Saul Bellow and Indira Parthasarathy is that the cultural backgrounds of both the writers have helped them strive sincerely to transform the alienated wanderer into an existential affirmer. In DM, Joseph's final decision to enlist in the army is a conscious choice born out of his realization that goodness is achieved not in a vacuum, but in the company of other men. This decision indicates his desire to establish a link with mankind. The idea of common humanity is fixed in the mind of Joseph who has always striven to avoid blaming people. In their "businesses and politics, their taverns, movies, assaults, divorces, murders" (DM 20) Joseph tries continually to find clear signs of their common humanity. He believes that he is fixed with other people in the same plot and so they are his generation, his society and his world. Joseph feels that it is a mistake to consider the present world a condemned age because in "all principal ways the human spirit must have been the same" (DM 21).

Joseph rejects the theories of a wholly good world and a wholly evil world. In his opinion those who believe in a wholly good world do not
understand depravity and those who always hold a pessimistic view fail to get the correct picture of human life. For him, "the world is both, and therefore it is neither. In a sense everything is good because it exists. Or good or not good, it exists, it is ineffable, and, for that reason marvellous" (DM 24). In his journal entry on 6 January 1943, Joseph points out the essential difference between the life of man six hundred years ago and that of man in the twentieth century: "Six hundred years ago, a man was what he was born to be. Satan and the Church, representing God, did battle over him. He, by reason of his choice, partially decided the outcome. But whether, after life, he went to hell or to heaven, his place among other men was given. It could not be contested. But, since, the stage has been reset and human beings only walk on it, and, under this revision, we have, instead, history to answer to... Now, each of us is responsible for his own salvation, which is in his greatness" (DM 73). Joseph believes that this sense of greatness plays a vital role in human life in the present context.

Like Joseph, Asa Leventhal in The Victim comes out of his self-imposed burden and learns to accept himself and others. Both Joseph and Leventhal, like the protagonists in the novels of Parthasarathy, realize finally that the true beauty and dignity can be attained only by accepting oneself rather than blaming oneself and others. This acceptance depends on the individual's effort to become "exactly human" (The Victim 119). This concept is revealed through the character of Schlossberg, the old Yiddish journalist who writes for the Jewish papers. Schlossberg becomes
the novel's spokesman and his argument helps Leventhal realize the importance of human dignity. Schlossberg's argument forms the central theme of Bellow's fiction. Schlossberg talks about three important points—being "exactly human," "less than human," and "more than human." In German, "Schlossberg" means "castle-mountain," denoting loftiness and dignity. According to Schlossberg each individual must act upon knowledge that emerges from the inmost self. Schlossberg points out that when a person cuts himself off from the source of his own deepest powers, he endangers his own humanity.

When Leventhal meets Schlossberg one Sunday afternoon in a cafeteria on Fourteenth Street, he feels himself strongly drawn towards him. Schlossberg helps Leventhal realize that his attempt to repress his own powers of insight is a serious flaw. Schlossberg insists on being open to life and other people. The central idea of his speech is that human life has dignity. Human life has greatness and beauty; but the condition is that it must be "human" life and not "less than human" or "more than human." Schlossberg points out how Leventhal, like Caesar, rejects his weakness and projects it onto others. In Schlossberg's view, both "less than human" and "more than human" indicate the separation from humanity. In this context, Clayton refers to Peretz' short story, "If Not Higher," in which Litvak, who is mistrustful of the integrity of the rabbi of Nemirov, becomes an ardent follower of the rabbi (146). The rabbi disappears every Friday morning at the time of the Penitential Prayers and so Litvak wants to find out what the rabbi does at the time of prayers. One
day Litvak hides under the rabbi's bed. Early he hears the rabbi's groans of suffering for all Israel. Then he watches the rabbi dress in peasant clothes and go anonymously to help a sick woman. The rabbi brings her firewood, kindles it, and as the fire burns recites the prayers. The rabbi does all these things without expecting anything from the sick woman. This act of the rabbi makes Litvak a true disciple who has attained real knowledge. When another disciple tells how the rabbi of Nemirov ascends to heaven at the time of the Penitential Prayers, Litvak does not laugh. He only adds quietly: "If not higher." The rabbi has achieved greatness not by leaving the world but by involving himself with it and by helping others. As Clayton says: "...he does not remove himself from humanity but enters it, listening to and heeding its groans" (147).

Schlossberg differentiates between intuitive knowledge which forms the basis of aesthetic, moral and spiritual values and mathematical knowledge which involves logic and analysis. He believes that contemporary culture has been influenced by mathematical knowledge to a great extent. He writes science articles himself. People look at these articles, put them under a microscope and say that "a man is nothing, his life is nothing" (The Victim 120). Schlossberg considers such nothingness a product of mathematical knowledge. When a person sees a thing through a microscope, he focuses on smaller and smaller units until the whole disappears from the view. But the intuitive knowledge enables a person to see the whole. Influenced by materialistic thinking, people say that they know black and white but do not know beauty and greatness.
Schlossberg asks the young men in the cafeteria: "What do you know? No, tell me, what do you know? You shut one eye and look at a thing, and it is one way to you. You shut the other one and it is different. I am as sure about greatness and beauty as you are about black and white. If a human life is a great thing to me, it is a great thing... And why be measly? Do you have to be? Is somebody holding you by the neck? Have dignity, you understand me? Choose dignity" (120). Schlossberg believes that if a man is not for dignity, there is a great mistake somewhere. Schlossberg's words have a great impact on Leventhal who tries to become "exactly human." This becomes evident at the end of the novel.

The end of the novel, The Victim, describes the meeting between Leventhal and Allbee several years later. Leventhal has now a better job. His wife Mary is pregnant. His health is better and there are changes in his appearance. "Something recalcitrant seemed to have left him; he was not exactly affable, but his obstinately unrevealing expression had softened... And as time went on, he lost the feeling that he had, as he used to say, 'got away with it,' his guilty relief, and the accompanying sense of infringement" (The Victim 256). While Leventhal is gazing into the street, he sees Allbee in the company of Yvonne Crane, a famous actress. Allbee and Crane sit in a box in the theatre, Leventhal and Mary are seated downstairs. Allbee looks more than moderately prosperous in the dinner jacket and the silk-seamed formal trousers. During the intermission, Leventhal meets Allbee. In spite of his elevated position and prosperity, Allbee shows "decay of something." Commenting on Mary's
pregnancy, Albee refers to the Hebrew God’s commandment to “increase and multiply.” Though the words of Albee provoke Leventhal, he quickly supplants by deeper powers of insight. He understands that Albee has said these words out of his habit and that he has no desire to be malicious. The generous understanding of Leventhal is an indication of his ability to see things with tolerance and calmness of mind. Finally Albee says to Leventhal: “... I want to say that I owe you something. I was trying to get around it when I talked about trying to kill myself only ... I don’t want to exaggerate, but I don’t want to play it down either. I know I owe you something” (264). To these words of gratitude, Leventhal remains silent, pulling his hands away, as though wordlessly rejecting the mention of a debt.

Albee realizes finally that he has been treated by Leventhal with decency and humanity. Leventhal’s sympathy, tolerance and affection indicate his attempt to affirm life by changing his hard-boiled resistance into a softened perspective. Ellen Pifer aptly says: “Only through relentless exposure to light and to other human beings, Bellow suggests, can the tender ego, the embryonic human spirit, flourish and grow... Albee inadvertently rescues Leventhal’s moribund inner life as surely as Leventhal saves the suicidal Albee from physical death... Recognition of their common origin and mutual ‘destination’ is what finally inspires Leventhal to affirm, and try to fulfill, the ‘promise’ of life—by being, in Schlossberg’s terms, ‘exactly human’” (56-57). Clayton feels that The Victim “is affirmative in spite of its dark tone, much more completely
affirmer who hears a voice that tells him "... she wants, he wants, they want" (286). The beginning of the novel shows how Henderson, who is placed in the familiar existential situation found in Bellow's fiction, experiences identity crisis. He longs for order but finds only distortion in his life. At the age of fifty-five, he imagines that not only life but also death are closing in on him. So he undertakes a journey to primitive Africa to find the wisdom of life.

With the help of Romilayu, a guide, Henderson goes deep into the prehuman past: "The mountains were naked, and often snakelike in their forms, without trees, and you could see the clouds being born on the slopes... And then there were the calm stars, turning around and singing, and the birds of the night with heavy bodies, fanning by" (HRK 46). Finally Henderson and Romilayu reach the bed of a good-sized river, the Arnewi, and they walk downstream in it, for it is dry. They see the Arnewi village and the circular roofs which rise to a point. The roofs are just thatch and brittle and seem like "feathers, and yet heavy—like heavy feathers" (47). Henderson feels that the place "must be older than the city of Ur" (47). The Arnewi are a gentle people who are very sensitive to the condition of their cattle. They regard their cattle as their "relatives, more or less, and not as domestic animals" (48). Now their cattle are dying because the Arnewi do not allow them to drink from a cistern polluted with frogs. Henderson now approaches the wall of the town and meets some of the children waiting up for him. Henderson tries to impress the children by setting a bush afire with his cigarette lighter. Then he meets
Prince Itelo. According to the mode of welcome, he gets involved in a wrestling match with Itelo and defeats him. The Queen's sister, Mtalba, betrothes herself to him. He tries to make the Arnewi understand that the frogs in the cistern will not harm their cattle but fails in his attempt. So he decides to cleanse the sacred cistern with a home-made bomb. Unfortunately things go wrong. His home-made bomb destroys the whole cistern and all the stored water along with the frogs. Henderson leaves the place to escape the consequences of his act.

Before his departure, Henderson learns from Queen Willatale an important lesson, that is, the concept of *grun-tu-molani* which means "man wants to live." It reinforces Henderson's determination to preserve life at any cost and transcend it through suffering, if possible. But *grun-tu-molani* is only a partial truth. Henderson realizes that *grun-tu-molani* is not enough when he meets Dahfu, the king of the Wariri.

Dahfu had been educated in the East and had been close to his M.D. degree when he was called back to the Wariri after his father's death. Henderson realizes that Dahfu is wiser than his people. Dahfu has a good command of the English language. He is a friend of Itelo and is familiar with the concept of *grun-tu-molani*. Though he has been educated in the world of civilization, he has chosen to be a doomed god-king in the primitive world. The Wariri believe that the strength of their nation depends on the strength of their king. The king will be allowed to rule as long as he satisfies the sexual demands of his wives. If the wives report to the priests that the king cannot satisfy their demands, he will be put to
death and the oldest son will become king. The new king must recapture within two years the spirit of the previous king that is supposed to get into the body of a wild lion marked by the priests. King Dahfu is yet to capture the spirit of his father.

During Henderson’s sojourn with the Wariri, he gets involved in their festival in which the rain goddess is invoked through a strange ritual. He is led to move the huge idol of Mummah and is made the Sungo, the rain king. After the feat of strength, the sky begins to fill with clouds and there is a heavy rain. Henderson knows about the consequences of becoming the rain king only after the death of Dahfu. If there is no son who is of age, the kingship will pass to the rain king. Henderson now realizes that he will be forced to become the king of the Wariri. To avoid becoming the next king, Henderson leaves the place with a captured lion cub. He returns to America to take up the study of medicine.

At the deeper level, **HRK** is a novel that deals with the exploration of the self or “being.” Dahfu instructs Henderson that he must put an end to his “becoming” and that he must enter the realm of “being,” the only realm in which love is possible. Henderson realizes that Queen Willatale and King Dahfu are be-ers:

... some people found satisfaction in *being* (Walt Whitman: “Enough to merely be! Enough to breath! Joy! Joy! All over Joy!”). *Being*. Others were taken up with *becoming*. Being people have all the breaks. Becoming people are very unlucky, always in a tizzy. The Becoming people are always having to
make explanations or offer justifications to the Being people.

(HRK 160)

"Becoming" implies a future and a negation of the present.

Henderson learns the priceless lesson of tolerance and acceptance from Dahfu. In a lion's den, Dahfu teaches Henderson how to face death, how to "be" and how to "love." Dahfu tells Henderson that when fear subsides one is capable of admiring beauty. Under the supervision of Dahfu, Henderson settles on his knees and roars like a lion. Dahfu asks Henderson to feel the lion: "Now you are a lion. Mentally conceive of the environment. The sky, the sun, and creatures of the bush. 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... Be the beast! You will recover humanity later, but for the moment, be it utterly" (HRK 266-67). At this point, Henderson understands the prophecy of Daniel. Ihab Hassan comments on the significance of Henderson's experience in the lion's den: "It is not merely by journeying to Africa, with its strange kings and primitive rituals, nor it is merely by performing a serviceable act of extermination or rain-giving strength that Henderson begins to attain the wisdom. It is rather by learning how to absorb the pure moment which brings together the currents of life and death, ecstasy and numbness, absorb an animal presence, that he perceives the limits of human strife" (319-20). Hassan avers that HRK remains "the most affirmative of Bellow's works" (321) and describes how Bellow starts with the familiar
figure of the solitary American hero, fleeing civilization, and leads him "through reality's dark dream to a vision of light and a commitment that can only bind man back again to life" (321).

In the interview with Nina Steers, Bellow compares himself with Henderson:

**NS:** Which of your characters is most like you?

**SB:** Henderson—the absurd seeker of high qualities. (38)

Why Bellow compares himself with Henderson needs to be answered, and the answer lies in Henderson's words at the end of the novel: "But there is justice. I believe there is justice, and that much is promised" (HRK 328). These words strike the note of affirmation.

Marcus Klein states that what Henderson seeks is reality (54). But Clayton considers this view incorrect because reality is "what Henderson says he wants, and perhaps it is what he finds, but it is not what he really wants... Henderson wants to affirm, like Joseph, Augie, Herzog, and other Bellow characters, the meaningfulness of human life... It is Henderson's affirmation; it is Bellow's" (171). In Clayton's view, Henderson's quest is "not for reality but for release from mortality" (172). In his interview with Nina Steers, Bellow expresses a similar idea: "What Henderson is really seeking is a remedy to the anxiety over death. What he can't endure is this continuing anxiety—the indeterminate and indefinite anxiety, which most of us accept as the condition of life which he is foolhardy enough to resist. He tells the King that he is a 'Becomer' and that the King is a 'Beer.' I believe I meant him to say that human life is
intolerable if we must endure endless doubt. That is really what I feel is motivating Henderson" (38).

Clayton also refers to the Reichian therapy administered to Henderson by Dahfu. Reich, an Austrian psycho-analyst, developed modern therapy techniques and helped elucidate character structure. He introduced the concept of "character armour" as a type of defence mechanism. He emphasized the necessity of initially breaking down the "character armour" that a patient had constructed to defend himself from anxieties, but later he found that the "character armour" had its muscular components. Reich and Dahfu "both emphasize the interrelatedness of flesh and mind" (Clayton 180). Henderson's experience with Atti, the lioness, is based on the method recommended by Reich. Dahfu takes Henderson to the under castle, makes him look through the grating at Atti, and talks about the inevitability of death. Henderson watches the face of the lioness coming towards the king and how she allows him to fondle her. Inside the den, everything is black and amber. The stone walls themselves are yellowish. The dust is sulphur-coloured. The eyes of the lioness are ringed absolutely with black. Lying in the dust, Henderson roars while Dahfu sits with his arm about the lioness. Dahfu insists that Henderson must try to make more of a lion of himself. Clayton comments on the role played by Dahfu: "This Reichian king is physically and spiritually an ideal for Henderson... he is able to affirm the meaningfulness of human life, speaking of mankind's 'noble possibilities.' It is this affirmation which excites Henderson more than any other
doctrine of the king's" (181-82). In Clayton's opinion, "Henderson affirms. Bellow affirms" (185). Henderson's encounter with death makes him a wiser man.

Bellow's More Die of Heartbreak deals with the theme of higher consciousness. The novel focuses on religious preoccupation to keep the channel to the soul open so as to attain a higher consciousness. Stephen L. Tanner observes: "The preoccupation with the channel to the soul provides its active principle, and it is a religious preoccupation if a broad definition of religion is allowed" (284). Tanner refers to the religious sense: " 'A sense of religion' is a suitable phrase for describing the effect of this novel if emphasis on the transcendent in the human soul and on the importance of efficacious love are considered essential to the religious sense. In More Die of Heartbreak, Bellow has combined a rich diversity of images and motifs to convey a religious vision which, while playfully eclectic, is best identified as a version of religious existentialism" (284). Tanner explains how the philosophy of Nicholas Berdyaev, whom the narrator of MDH lists as one of his beloved Russian thinkers, provides "the most illuminating interpretive context for the ideas and attitudes expressed in the novel" (285). In Tanner's opinion, Berdyaev's writing remains a very important background source for understanding the religious and philosophical concerns of MDH and of Bellow's later fiction in general.

Kenneth Trachtenberg, the narrator of MDH, is a 35-year-old Assistant Professor of Russian literature. He leaves his native Paris to be
near his famous American uncle, Benn Crader, a world-class genius in botany. Ken accepts a teaching post at his uncle’s Midwestern university because he hopes to understand the meaning of the higher spheres of existence from his uncle. Ken’s father, Rudi Trachtenberg, stands for the just opposite view, belonging wholly to the sexual and social spheres of life. Rudi is an accomplished dancer and whenever he opens his arms to a woman she feels that she has come home. Ken comments on the character of his father: “The historical thing which millions of sex-intoxicated men were trying to do and botching he did with the ease of a natural winner” (MDH 39). Ken compares his father and himself: “Yet ladies were never the same after they had met Rudi Trachtenberg, whereas when they parted with me they were completely themselves, as before” (37). The higher consciousness which Ken tries to identify in his uncle Benn is just the other extreme of his father’s erotic adventures. Stephen L. Tanner aptly comments: “Thus, the book provides variations of two characteristic Bellow paradigms. The first is the paradoxical situation of a cerebral author creating a cerebral character who provides a cerebral critique of cerebral activity. The second is the situation of the intellectual male with a rational and decidedly misogynistic perception of female entanglements who nevertheless is an incorrigible sucker for them” (288).

The contradiction found in Ken’s philosophic thinking is due to two opposite influences on him during his stay in Paris. One is that of Alexandre Kojeve, who is the frequent guest of the Rudis. Ken’s knowledge of Hegelian philosophy shows the direct influence of Kojeve’s description of
Hegel “completing the Phenomenology at the appropriate historical moment, within earshot of the cannon at the Battle of Jena—an epoch culminating in the victory of Napoleon and completing an edifice of universal history from which absolute knowledge, only now possible, might view all Being” (37-38). Ken gives a list of topics discussed in the dining room: whether Man at the end of History remains alive simply as an animal; whether it is time for him to become ‘merely natural;’ the partition of Europe by Hitler and Stalin, and then by Stalin and the Western powers; the genocides, “the Gypsies of Europe roasted like coffee beans by the Nazis;” whether the end of Human Time, the creation of the free Historical Individual, is at hand (MDH 38). Ken has learnt about the Hegelian overview from Kojeve and talks about its importance: “The illuminated man is a microcosm incorporating universal Being in himself, with the proviso that he be on top of the edifice of universal knowledge... However, you’ll never be able in the slightest degree to judge these aberrant times if you don’t know that there is such a thing as the great Hegelian overview” (MDH 38). The second influence is that of Yermelov, a student of the mystical tradition. Yermelov is Ken’s first Russian language teacher who believes that every human being has an angel charged with preparing the human being for a higher evolution of the spirit. Yermelov has warned Ken against the glamour of thought, the calculating intellect and its constructions. These two influences represent a highly rationalistic view of existence on the one hand and mystical knowledge of the heart on the other. Deriving from cabalistic writing, Bellow gives a figurative
dimension to Benn's botany, using the terms, Tree of Knowledge and Tree of Life. These two terms correspond respectively with Berdyaev's objective and existential knowledge. The Tree of Knowledge is the truth of striving and the other the truth of receptivity (MDH 66). The Tree of Knowledge is related to the calculated power concerns in the areas of politics, technology, sex and money. The Tree of Life is associated with compassion for fellow human beings. Ken remembers how Yermelov warned him in “mind-boggling Russian against the glamour of thought, the calculating intellect and its constructions, its fabrications alien to the power of life” (MDH 66). In Yermelov's opinion, “knowledge divorced from life equals sickness” (MDH 66). What Yermelov wants to instruct Ken is the difference between intellect and soul. Intellect without soul, that is, objective knowledge separated from existential knowledge, reduces the transcendental man into a mere biological unit.

MDH portrays the condition of contemporary America effectively. On a bright day, Ken takes Uncle Benn Crader downtown and by a series of elevators they go to the hundred-and-second story observatory at the top of the Electronic Tower, once the site of the Crader Home for Individuals. Benn remembers that the book written by Haym Vital, a sixteenth-century mystic, on the Tree of Life has been buried at the site of Benn's family home now occupied by the Electronic Tower, a skyscraper constructed by another of Ken's uncles. That uncle of Ken was a man of corruption and greed. It shows how materialism affects humanism. Yet the novel, MDH, does not recommend escapism. This is indicated by the union of the Tree
of Knowledge and the Tree of Life, according to cabalistic tradition: "Eventually Science and Life would unite" (MDH 65). Ken believes that the right method to solve the problem one experiences in the materialistic society is not going away from the society but getting into the society, affirming the essence of life. Ken views that if a person does not come down into contemporary life he will never understand it. Stephen L. Tanner correctly states: "Behind Kenneth's recognition that you have to 'come down into contemporary life' is Bellow's understanding that the good that emerges from a conflict of values arises not from the total abandonment or destruction of one set of values but from the building of a new value, sustained, like an arch, by the tension of the original two" (290). Such a new value can be realized only when a person gets the turning point in his life. This is what Ken wants to emphasize in human life: "Inner communion with the great human reality was my true occupation... unless you made your life a turning point, there was no reason for existing" (MDH 243). Thus the novel, MDH presents the theme of the transformation of a naturalistic individual into a transcendental person.

Like Bellow, Parthasarathy presents the affirmative side of the absurd in his novels. His inquiry into the nature of human existence is made in the existentialist mode. Like Bellow, Parthasarathy believes in human dignity and is committed to the description of human condition with all its complexities. As in the novels of Bellow, the concept of death becomes an important theme in Parthasarathy's novels.
For both Bellow and Parthasarathy, death is a major theme, closely related to the theme of affirmation. Both Bellow and Parthasarathy present death as an important aspect in bringing affirmation to the protagonist. In TB, Kapoor's death forms an important stage in Kasturi's affirmation of the realities of human life. Hearing the news of Kapoor's accident, Kasturi and Meena go to Irving Hospital. Before they enter the ward, Kasturi thinks about the meaning of death. "Birth and death are the two truths that had invited man's attention right from the beginning of history. These two terms have remained the root cause of man's philosophical probings. What happens between birth and death is a puzzle. What is life? Is it death that occurs continuously or the new birth that happens daily? If it is death, then death does not need to transmit such shocking waves physically. If it is birth, we need not be afraid of death. There is death in life and life in death" (TB 102-103).

Meena plays a vital role in bringing affirmation to Kasturi. At the end of the novel, there is an analysis of Kasturi's life after he has come to Delhi: "Born in a middle-class family in a remote village in India, without the comforts of wealth but with a fire of imagination, Kasturi was obsessed with climbing the ladder of social status. He was divided between his two selves. While on one side he was fast moving towards success, on the other, he was unperturbed and remained an 'outsider.' When there was an easy and smooth flow of money and status, which he had considered challenges in his youth, he felt disappointed. Now life is no more a challenge and he feels more powerful than it! He is Doctor Gulliver... and
the others around him Lilliputians" (TB 231). When he tries to find solace in these thoughts, Meena says to him: "You are not an unavoidable person!" (231). These words have a great impact on Kasturi and create an important stage in his progress towards affirmation. In his "Foreword" to TB, Sujatha comments on the complexity in the relationship between Kasturi and Meena: "Meena plays a vital role in making Kasturi realize the futility of his primitive stubborn attitude. Both Kasturi and Meena conceal their mutual attraction for each other and thereby stall their love affair half way through. Parthasarathy has portrayed this aspect magnificently. Kasturi's fall reminds us of Julius Caesar's tragic fall" (TB 4).

An important side of Kasturi's character is revealed when he refuses to use his influence on Krishnaswamy, the Deputy Secretary in Home Ministry, to save the dishonest Mishra from dismissal. Magesh wants Kasturi to talk to Krishnaswamy, who deals with the case of Mishra. Magesh tells Kasturi that if he refuses to help Mishra, he will have to forego all the facilities enjoyed by him at present. Now Kasturi has to choose between a luxurious life or a situation which will force him to search for a new job. Kasturi says: "There is a critical time when everyone is forced to make a definite choice... like the choice before Siddartha... Now it's my turn" (TB 173). These words reflect Sartre's views on choice and responsibility. After much reflection, Kasturi decides to quit his job and remains firm in his decision.

Parthasarathy describes how the turbulent external world creates mental aberrations and psychic disorders in these characters. Yet he does
not advocate nihilism and despair. The whole novel focuses on Kasturi’s transformation from alienation to affirmation. The character of Kasturi is portrayed in such a way that the emphasis is on affirmation rather than on nihilism. The end of the novel shows how Kasturi has learnt to accept the facts of life. \textbf{TB} is an exploration of the self in the urban social context and Indira Parthasarathy presents successfully the growth and ripeness of the individual consciousness which moves towards the realization of the meaning of human existence.

The title of the novel \textbf{HKI} indicates the theme of affirmation. After flying high in the sky, the helicopters come down to the earth. Amirtham, who seeks his freedom from the family circle, finally realizes that “society is an unavoidable prison” (144) and that “individual freedom is possible only when a person becomes a saint or a mad man” (144). He understands that when a person learns to adjust his own values to the values of the society, life becomes meaningful and the “trap itself will become heaven” (144). Amirtham’s relationship with Banu is only a temporary escape from the shackles of the family circle. Amirtham attains the knowledge of the dimensions of reality at the end of the novel. After Tilagam has left him, he makes a self-analysis, thinking about the meaning of freedom: “Man exists at two levels—at one level, the entire world becomes his home; at another level he confines himself to a limited circle, rejecting the whole world. At the first level, man is tied up by social norms and responsibilities; at the second level, he realizes the limits of his
freedom" (HKI 143). Amirtham understands that if the freedom sought by man fails to give him solace, the freedom itself will become a burden.

The conversation between Amirtham and his friend, Banerjee, focuses on the predicament of man in the universe. Banerjee is a painter and he knows five European languages. When Amirtham goes to his apartment, Banerjee is reading a French novel. Realizing that Amirtham is in a disturbed mood, Banerjee says to him: "Man has no other problem except the one created by himself. In the struggle between man and Nature, man's problems are only at the physical level. Man's inner struggle is his own making. I don't give importance to psychological conflict because it satisfies only man's ego" (HKI 90). Amirtham asks Banerjee about the real meaning of the struggle between man and Nature. Banerjee says: "Life indicates the struggle between man and Nature. The very fact that man is alive is his victory. Death is his failure. Hence the struggle is always at the physical level. It is not Nature but man who is responsible for all the problems created by him" (91). Banerjee further asks Amirtham why the later could not live according to the physical laws: "Look at the dog which is running after the ball. Does that dog have any other problem except the present challenge, that is, how to catch the ball?" (91). Amirtham does not agree with this view and says that man differs from an animal. The conversation with Banerjee helps Amirtham realize the fundamental aspects of human life. The end of the novel shows Amirtham, the "rebellious sheep that ventured to break away from the flock," the "mouse that tried to escape from the trap," waiting for the
return of his wife. Like the pilgrim in Nissim Ezekiel's poem, "Enterprise," Amirtham affirms that "Home is where we have to gather grace" (13).

**CB** presents the theme of affirmation resulting from the knowledge of the meaning of death. Mukunthan realizes that death is the ultimate reality when he sees Mishra on his death-bed. Mishra was one of the most powerful persons in the political circle in the past. Now his reasoning ability is slowly fading away and his face has become "expressionless" (**CB** 253). Mukunthan tells him about the independence of Bangla Desh. But Mishra does not make any response. Mukunthan reflects on seeing the condition of Mishra: "He would have forgotten everything about Bangla Desh. He may be living in his childhood or adolescent stage again. He may have lost his identity. Yet there is a ray of light in his eyes! Is he recollecting the happy moment when his mother kissed him? Is he thinking about how he spent his childhood days with his friends? Is it a reminiscence of his love affair with some young girl?" (**CB** 253). Mukunthan wonders how people in the government approached him for help when he was using his money and intellect but now "when his agreement with life is coming to an end, only the oxygen cylinder and saline bottles are his company!" (**CB** 254). Mukunthan thinks about the dream-like quality of human life: "Is everything a dream? What is the difference between dream and reality? If we consider self-consciousness an obstacle to the attainment of ultimate knowledge, the Advaita experience may help us realize that everything is a dream... Before Death, which is the ultimate reality, all the other things are only
pseudo-realities" (CB 255). Mishra’s death makes Mukunthan get an awareness of the real meaning of human existence. Mukunthan finally comes to the conclusion that human life is a priceless treasure.

Mukunthan goes near Mishra and notices the tear drops coming down his cheek. He imagines as if Mishra were talking to him: “Do you know the girl who kept me in bliss when I was eighteen? How many gardens of flowers did I see when I was twenty-five! How many love-poems have I written in my life! All these things have become meaningless now! See the tears coming down my cheek. This is the great reality” (CB 256). After Mishra’s death, Mukunthan meets the Prime Minister who asks him to continue his service to the nation. Mukunthan learns to affirm life with all its complexities.

Parthasarathy's *magnum opus*, KP, calls for more vigilance on the part of those at the forefront of the fight for social justice, political emancipation and economic prosperity. The novel portrays social and economic repression against the downtrodden. The dehumanizing attitude of the landlords is attacked vehemently through a number of incidents in the novel. KP depicts the miserable life of the poor people who live in a village near Tiruvarur in Tanjore district, Tamil Nadu. Gopal, who has done his doctoral research on sociology, comes to the village from Delhi to spend a few days, but stays in the village for two years. During this period, he has written only one letter to his friend, Siva, who is in Delhi. In order to know what has happened to Gopal, Siva comes to the village, and finds his friend being engaged in the revolutionary activities against the
landlords. The clash is between the landlords represented by Kanniah Naidu and the poor peasants represented by Gopal, Palani, Vadivelu and Ramaiah. Parthasarathy portrays the character of Kanniah Naidu both from the social and the psychological perspectives. Kanniah Naidu is impotent and this defect manifests itself in various dimensions. He wants to take revenge on nature and on fellow human beings. He makes use of the caste factor to turn the fury of the villagers against Gopal and Siva. In a moment of despair, he sets fire to the huts of the poor peasants, killing a number of women and innocent children. The novel ends in an optimistic note that finds its full expression in the words of Gopal, who takes a firm decision to flight vehemently against the landlords: "I'm going to be immersed in the river of blood that belongs to the oppressed people. All the strength of the poor peasants should come to me. I'm not a coward" (KP 254).

KP has contributed immensely towards drawing attention to the exploitation existing in the social system. The portrayal of such situations of violent aggression and exploitation is a clear indication of Parthasarathy's commitment to focus on the yearnings and aspirations of the poor. While describing the sufferings of the less-previleged members of the society, Parthasarathy strikes an optimistic note by focusing on the gradual build-up of the revolutionary activities, aiming at finding a solution to the degrading experiences of the poor.

The treatment of the theme of faith in human possibilities even in the moment of a threatening crisis in KP invites comparison with Festus
Iyayi's novel, *Violence*. Iyayi portrays the sufferings of the downtrodden and emphasizes the need for the reconstruction of society. The beginning of *Violence* shows the pathetic plight of Idemudia and his wife, Adisa: "He and his wife, Adisa, were tenants in one of the low mud but zinced houses along Owode Street. Adisa, who had been sweeping the badly-cemented floor of the room dropped the broom and stretched her hand across the table which stood against the window... The broom was so short that she had to stoop substantially to sweep clean (1). The standard of living of the people in *KP* is not better than that in *Violence*. The only difference is that *Violence* depicts discrimination on the basis of colour whereas *KP* shows discrimination on the basis of caste. In *Violence* the exploiter class is represented by Obofun and Queen; in *KP*, by Kanniah Naidu and his relatives. Iyayi shows how the poor people suffer at the hands of powerful people when Queen denies the wages to be given to Idemudia. Queen makes Idemudia and his friends work hard in off-loading the five hundred bags of cement but is not willing to pay the money to the workers. Obofun attempts to exploit Adisa's poverty to satisfy his sexual needs. Similarly, in *KP*, the poor peasants work hard in the paddy fields but get only a little because all the fields are owned by Kanniah Naidu and his relatives. Kanniah Naidu keeps many women in the neighbouring villages as concubines in order to hide his impotency. When Vadivelu criticizes him, commenting on his impotency, Kanniah Naidu takes a cruel revenge on him. He subjects Vadivelu and Pappathi to sexual abuse. Both *KP* and *Violence* prove that the oppressor will not hesitate to go to any extent in
taking revenge on the helpless people. **Violence** attacks the dehumanizing attitude of the exploiters who have devised the social system according to their convenience: “The type of economic and hence the political system which are operating in our country today brutalizes the individual, rapes his manhood” (185). Iyayi puts forward his view through one of the characters in **Violence**: “I feel and think it is necessary that all the oppressed sections of our community ought to take up arms to overthrow the present oppressive system. The system has already proved that it operates through violence” (185). **KP** and **Violence** have many similarities and end in an optimistic note. Both the novels portray the emergence of a revolution which will pave the way for the upliftment of the downtrodden. Both focus on the need for the preservation of human dignity.

**TA** shows how a woman, who is deserted by her husband because of his dislike for her dark complexion, faces the challenges in her life. The novel deals with human emotions in a complex manner. Booma is separated from her husband, yet she does not plunge into despair. Her behaviour appears to be eccentric to others because she is not able to come out of her frustration totally. Madhavan, who comes from Madras to Delhi so as to join the All India Radio, supports her whenever she has “intellectual restlessness” (**TA** 20). Sasi is another woman separated from her husband because she could not tolerate his callousness. The conversation between Madhavan and Sasi throws light on the existential condition of Sasi. Madhavan refers to the story of Ulysses and his mariners and points out that when Ulysses is returning to Ithaca after the
and that of Nirmala and thinks that Nirmala should learn about the essential goodness of human life from Thanjamma.

**NN** ends in an affirmative note. At the outbreak of cholera, people forget caste differences and the untouchables are allowed to stay inside the temple. "Castle and rituals become meaningless before the catastrophe" (**NN** 243). All the people of Maruthur accept the plan of establishing a co-operative society based on collective work in the fields. Samuel finally overcomes his dilemma and decides to remain at Maruthur to serve the people. Parthasarathy portrays realistically how the discrimination on the basis of caste disappears when the forces of Nature rage against man and how survival becomes the most important factor. **NN** is a powerful novel that shows how man has to battle not only with artificial forces but also with such forces of Nature like the flood that threatens the habitation of the people at Maruthur.

**UV** is a psychological novel that shows the result of the suppressed emotions of a person. Vembu Iyer loves Avayam but he is separated from her because of his mother's dominating behaviour. He reaches the stage of autism and lives in his own world. His son, Ambi, comes from Delhi to see him. The novel focuses on the transformation in the character of Ambi, who is separated from his wife, Sweety. Ambi realizes the significance of affirmation when he meets the old man who quotes the last words of Hamlet, "The rest is silence" (**UV** 43), which perfectly describe the condition of Vembu Iyer. Moorthy's advice helps Ambi understand the value of tolerance and acceptance of reality.
**CVC** portrays the emergence of the new woman who is no longer a slave to traditions which reflect male-domination. The central character of the novel is a journalist who revolts against the social system. Aarthy works as a journalist exposing the exploitation of woman by man. She is an ideal combination of revolutionary spirit and optimistic outlook. While affirming the essential goodness of human life, Aarthy never hesitates to fight against the oppression of women. She writes about the corruption prevalent in the co-operative society but the editor is not willing to publish the article because he does not want to earn the wrath of the politicians belonging to the ruling party. Once Aarthy wrote an article, describing the sufferings of the poor women in an estate in Ooty. After its publication, the publisher of the magazine had to suffer a lot economically because “all the government advertisements to the magazine were stopped immediately” (*CVC* 130).

Aarthy believes that women have been exploited and victimized for centuries by male-dominated societies in India and so she insists on the need for reconstitution of the society. Through the character of Aarthy, Parthasarathy criticizes the negative aspects of rituals and mythologies: “Damayanthi, whose husband had deserted her like a thief in that midnight, is described in this male-dominated society as an ideal woman because she considered her husband God! Ram, who sent his wife without believing her words, could establish an ideal society! How could these things be possible?”(*CVC* 134). Aarthy avers that men are responsible for
all the corrupt practices and violence in society in the present world. Parthasarathy presents a strong note of feminism in CVC.

The characters of Aarthy and Adalarasu stand for the good and the evil respectively. Aarthy exposes how Adalarasu has kept the land that belongs to the workers in an illegal manner. She successfully overcomes the hurdles created by Adalarasu. CVC portrays the plight of women in India and their quest for freedom. The novel depicts how women are denied their social and domestic rights because of gender bias. Taking the feministic point of view, Parthasarathy insists that women should immediately be brought into the social and political mainstreams for their empowerment.

A close analysis of the theme of affirmation in the novels of both Bellow and Parthasarathy reveals that the theme is presented from an existential point of view. The novels do not end in a note of despair. Having been placed in existential situations, the characters learn to affirm the essential goodness of human life. Both the writers discuss the concept of freedom of choice and responsibility. Both focus on the inextricable and complex nature of human condition and the deceptive influences of a confused reality in the post-war world, but insist that man should not lose his vision of life even in moments of calamities. Both present the uncertainties of human life, but do not take a nihilistic attitude. Both stress the need for affirming human dignity in the midst of colossal suffering. Both are conscious artists, advocating the reconstruction of society on the basis of humanism. The following chapter explores how
these two writers adopt their techniques so that the form may contribute to the theme effectively. The focus will be on craftsmanship.