Isaac Bashevis Singer, the Nobel Laureate, occupies a leading place among the Jewish fiction writers in America. He does so, for he writes in Yiddish while the other Jewish Writers like Saul Bellow, Norman Mailer, Philip Roth and Bernard Malamud write in English. Though he lived in America for more than five decades, Singer wrote mainly about the Polish Jewry that was almost wiped out from the face of the earth in the Nazi holocaust. In all his books, Singer makes an attempt to recreate the traditional Jewish society which tried to preserve its unique identity amidst all odds.

It was in the Eighties that I was introduced to Singer’s writing by Dr (Mrs) I H Pandya, then Reader in the Department of English, South Gujarat University, Surat. The first book that I read was The Magician of Lublin. The novel captured my imagination to such an extent that I read some more novels by him. The more I read, the more puzzled and fascinated I became, for the novels were not just simple and straightforward stories of love affairs as they appeared to be, but they were, at the same time, serious and contained in them the discussions of some of the eternal problems which have continued to plague mankind for centuries. When I decided to work on them, it became clear to me that in all his works, Singer predominantly attempts to discuss the loss of identity that disturbs the pious Jew and consequently shows how he regains it.

Another reason that drew me to Singer’s novels was its universal appeal. Though his novels mainly describe the Jewish cultural world, they are not merely confined to the Jews. On the other hand, they take up the problems of the modern man, irrespective of his nationality or ethnic identity. Most of his protagonists show the predicament of the modern man who is always torn between the strong pulls of faith and doubt.
Since I have made an attempt to study the issue of identity, I have concentrated only on those major novels wherein the issue is explored in all its dimensions, especially with reference to exile, slavery, freedom, redemption, and protest.

I am deeply indebted to my Research Guide, Professor D S Mishra, for his able guidance and constant encouragement. Without his valuable suggestions, the study would not have been completed.

I am also grateful to Dr R P Jadeja who evinced a keen personal interest in my study, and encouraged me to accomplish this task.

I am equally grateful to Dr Javed Khan for his cooperation in going through the typescript minutely and for offering valuable suggestions.

I also thank Dr R K Mandalia for his good wishes.

My thanks are due to Shri Pranava Dave who generously shared his rich stock of books.

I extend my sincere gratefulness to the ASRC, Hyderabad for offering me TS grants and for providing me with their excellent library facilities. So am I thankful to the American Center, Mumbai, and the CIEFL, Hyderabad.

I owe my thanks to the staff of Bhaikaka Library, Vallabh Vidyanagar, and to Shri P A Parikh, the Librarian of H M Patel Institute of English Training and Research, Vallabh Vidyanagar.
I extend my gratitude to the Director of H M Patel Career Development Centre in Vallabh Vidyanagar, Professor R C Desai, for allowing me to use the computer facilities in the Centre.

I extend my sincere thanks to Darshan Gajjar and Amit Upadhyaya who word-processed my manuscript with great perseverance and brought it out in computerized form; and to Pappu for the photocopying work done in record time.

Vallabh Vidyanagar
29 December 1997

P S Joshi