

INTRODUCTION

Saul Bellow, recipient of the 1976 Nobel Prize for Literature is a reputed American writer. His presence on the literary scene of America as a novelist since 1944 has been phenomenal in its continuity. He is by now considered a classic writer and often discussed as successor of Dreiser, Faulkner and Hemingway. He has left an indelible imprint on the international literary world and is now one of the most celebrated authors of the age. With his witty and intellectual works, Bellow has not only won critical encomiums and worldwide readership but is also regarded as one of the most reliable and representative writers of the modern psyche. Ihab Hassan remarks:

... the reputation of Saul Bellow no longer depends on the favours of the cognoscenti. His career is now a matter of public acclaim. We rejoice in him as a writer of the mind; a social critic who weathered the depression years without benefit of dogma... (290).

For almost six decades now, Bellow has been exploring indigenous narrative forms and styles in each of his works. His inventive experiments are also an expression of his unceasing effort to represent the shapes and textures of contemporary life. Ben Siegel rightly observes:

In each novel he not only records meticulously his evolving responses to setting and culture, but he also ventures beyond his previous imaginative perimeters to make playful use of shifting narrative styles and forms. His realism often shades into romanticism and the absurd,
into social comedy and black humor, into psychology and the picaresque, into philosophy and satire (159).

Saul Bellow is not a static writer. As regards his dealing with the shapes and the disposition of the constituent parts of contemporary life, Kyung-Ae Kim also observes:

Bellow’s career as a novelist and man of ideas are both a proof and outcome of the intellectual adventure of his mind. In his writings the reader can trace complicated lines of ideological development. His works reverberate with Jewish mysticism (Hasidism) and Christian mysticism, with Freudian psychology, with English romanticism and nineteenth century Russian realism, and with Yiddish humor (11).

Bellow’s complex identity thus often puzzles critics and all attempts to categorize the writer often lead to difficulties. The dilemma that critics face in attempting to do so as Ellen Pifer puts it, is how they can “catch hold of that elusive and slippery authorial body, with all its multifarious surfaces and buried antitheses, without pressing it into some shape that distorts and simplifies?” (442). As a result, Bellow criticism has been always diverse, uneven and, more often than not, contradictory, nevertheless, his multifarious stances have always encouraged speculation and alternative readings.

Historically, the Jew has been chosen to suffer. While Christians attribute suffering to the single figure of Christ, the Jews believe that it is the Jewish people themselves, who suffer for the whole world and have no Christ-like or Promethean figure to suffer for man. The Jew, therefore, is
proudly aware of his special destiny as sufferer. Ancient Jewish prophets like Amos, Jeremiah and the second Isaiah had announced that suffering was evidence of the Jew’s “Unique covenant with God, proof of God’s concern, in that only those who are loved are chastised” (Grebstein 179). Suffering, therefore, becomes an integral and valuable part of the Jewish identity which obviously places a high premium on suffering. Because of his historical role as sufferer, the Jew “has cultivated, perhaps out of desperation, a feeling of pride in his painful mission” (William Friedman 98).

Although suffering has traditionally occupied the Jewish writer, it is only with the advent of World War II that it has received so much literary attention. It was only at that time that the persecution and suffering of the Jews became the focus of considerable curiosity and concern. Widespread interest in Jewish fiction, therefore, is principally a postwar phenomenon. This, suggests Friedman, “was due to fresh awareness of the enormous sufferings of the Jew. The reader was inclined to be more sympathetic to the Jews of fiction because of this awareness” (94).

After World War II, the Jew emerged as a new kind of culture hero. To quote Sanford Pinsker: “Jewish Characters were everywhere, always trailing clouds of allegorical suffering and looking as though they had just arrived from a four thousand year trek across the desert” (104). Grebstein comments that in hearkening to the Jew, the reader hopes to vicariously share some of the misery he has undergone; and perhaps even to gain a deeper insight into the meaning of life, for “who could better instruct us than the Jews, those most expert and experienced sufferers? Others had taken a beating, yes, but what other group in human memory had been marked out for genocide?” (104).

The Jewish sufferer has always experienced the anguish of rootlessness, rejection and alienation. He is by definition always “other”, an outsider wherever he goes. Even when the Jew arrived in America, he suffered from a
keen sense of exclusion in a non-Jewish environment. He was a “continuing anomaly” (Friedman 46) in his new surroundings. Understandably then, he experienced a deep feeling of alienation. The Jew who had come to America found himself “an outsider in the wilderness which is Gentile’s Promised Land” (Friedman 48). Finding himself culturally apart, he experienced much heartache, bewilderment and tension because of his dislocation. However, he gradually lost his strong sense of identification with Jewish culture and tradition, so that, “the suburban Jew, for better and for worse is far close to his gentile neighbours than to the vanished world of the East European Shetland” (Guttman 162).

Bellow’s Jewish background then, is the spirit behind his vision. Although the first two decades of the twentieth century saw Jewish–American novelists of great distinction, the novelists of the nineteen sixties have surpassed all of them in success and popularity. Saul Bellow, Barnard Malamud, Philip Roth, Norman Mailer and J.D. Slinger had flourished as the major Jewish–American novelists of the mid-seventies. In addition to these were other prominent Jewish-American novelists like Bruce Freedom, Leslie Fiedler, Herbert Gold, Leon Uris, Jerome Weidman and Herman Wouk. Together these writers have created an important body of work that has won “a good deal of high critical as well as of popular acclaim” (Angoff and Levin 7).

In an interview, Saul Bellow frankly tells D. Venkateswarlu, “Well, I am a Jewish Writer. ... I sympathise greatly with the Jews” (13). His Jewish heritage thus plays an important role in his works. Leslie Fiedler maintains that Bellow “emerges at the moment when the Jews for the first time move into the center of American culture” (2). The only major American Jewish writer to know Yiddish, Bellow’s rejection of the void of alienation, his strong assertion of life and conscience of universal connections thus reveal a moral vision that is integral to traditional the Jewish affirmation of life.
Saul Bellow admits that his Jewish heritage is a rich pool of experiences and values. The Jewish outlook he says, is one of the “foundations that I draw from in my art ... Certainly it exists within me, even as the events of childhood are impressed in every artist” (E. Fuchs 37). Concerning his own Jewishness, he asserts:

... it (Jewishness) is a fact of your life. That’s how I view my own Jewishness. That’s where the great power of it comes from. It does not come from the fact that I studied the Talmud, or anything of that sort. I never belonged to an orthodox congregation. It simply comes from the fact that at a most susceptible time of my life I was wholly Jewish. That’s a gift, a piece of good fortune with which one doesn’t quarrel (Kulshrestha C. 15).

Saul Bellow’s Jewish sensibility, like his Romantic transcendental sensibility, forms the core of his affirmative world-view. His protagonists test their experiences in the WASP World against the touchstone of a solid tradition and the World of the WASP Culture. The problem of the Bellowian protagonist is how to get out of the latter. The persona is a troubled figure trying as best as he can to live the life of a good man in a bad situation. His traditional past is a part of his present life but it is a past of which he has no clear knowledge. Hence, in a way, Bellow’s fiction is an attempt to explore his past too. Regarding this exploration Neelakantan says, “Bellow effects this exploration into the past by recalling the Jewish parables, anecdotes, and even the prophetic words of his illustrious forbears” (119).

It would be beneficial to probe Saul Bellow’s socio-cultural matrix to understand the depth of his affinities with the Jewish tradition and the
particular quality of Jewish experience that is characteristic of his fiction. The son of orthodox Jewish parents, Bellow came to Chicago when he was nine years old. Since his parents had originally migrated from Russia, he imbibed from them a love for Russian literature and culture. With such a cosmopolitan background, it was not difficult then for Bellow to assimilate into the WASP American culture. He entered the literary arena at a time when the Western protestant tradition had exhausted all its values. Along with other fellow Jewish writers like Singer and Malamud, he brought in some kind of an ersatz tradition to make up for the vacuous spiritual centre of the American literary stream.

Bellow projects his protagonists in keeping with his own experience and course of life in the WASP World. Most of his protagonists are Jewish though their life-styles have more in common with the Americans than their own forbears. As Goldman puts it, they remain “Jewish by default” (225). The kind of world that Bellow delineates is at once Jewish. As the critic Neelakantan observes:

The problem for the Bellow-protagonist is to escape from the spiritually devastating onslaught of the WASP culture into which he is assimilated and bring himself to sanity and clarity of purpose. The protagonist instinctively turns towards the core of Jewish experience that is part of his deep inner self, and this effort gives him the necessary resilience to face the contemporary wasteland before him and to move on towards achieving a positive affirmation of life (120).

This sense of abiding Jewishness manifests itself in the protagonist’s faith in the essential sacredness of life and community and in refusal to yield to
despair and pessimism. Bellow's overriding moral concern is clearly attributable to his Jewish outlook. Writing about the Jewish authors, Irving Howe observes:

These writers – let us call them the writers of sweetness – do not assume evil to be the last word... They do not condescend to the ordinary, or scorn the domestic affections, or supposed heroism to be incompatible with humbleness... We are repeatedly struck by the tone of love, that final register of moral poise, with which such matters as Sholem Aleichem and Peretz faced, the grimmest facts of life (Quoted in Clayton 34).

This remark could very well apply to Saul Bellow too. In its essential affirmative quality, Jewish literature keeps away the malignant tendency of viewing life as absurd.

Like most Jewish American writers, Bellow too is concerned with the distressed, the imbalanced and the disillusioned man searching for identity and recognition in a society and ever-shifting values. In the absence of any ready-made substructure of unquestioned moral, religious, philosophical or even political diversifications to shape their works, writers are confronted then, with unanswered questions. Jewish writers thus attempt to bring before the people “a truthful image of the moral anxiety, haunting members of their generation” (Stevenson 309). Centuries of alienation and indescribable suffering have aroused in the Jews a distinctive response to the harsh realities of their lives. Long periods of suffering have given rise to ethical questions that are of great value and relevance to the world of today. As Rosenfeld...
rightly observes:

Alienation puts him (the Jew) in touch with his own past traditions, the history of Diaspora, with the present predicament of almost all intellectuals, and, for all one knows, with the future conditions of civilized humanity. Today, nearly all sensibility—thought, creation, perception—is in exile, alienated from society in which it barely managed to stay alive (69).

Although the Jewish Community has been afflicted with despair throughout history, yet it has armed itself with belief in man and his allegiance to life. This philosophy is basic to Jewish culture and hence to Saul Bellow’s fiction. In the face of grim facts and the prevailing climate of despair and pessimism, Bellow like his Jewish brethren, optimistically waits for a dawn of rejoicing and happiness. This day will not be created from outside but has to be created from the present world in which life goes on. In this struggle lies man’s holiness and knowing this, Bellow never devalues him. In keeping with his Jewish culture, we thus find in him a note of affirmation, and moral stability from which emerges his idea of selfhood. Although Bellow’s heroes are surrounded by uncertainties and the dark clouds of this age, we find that they never succumb to the power of these forces. On the contrary, they fuse their individual selves with the world and express their faith in universal brotherhood. It is this state that enables Bellow to keep alive his faith in human beings and in the possibility of his union with others. His heroes have strong family ties and although they despair, they are not “hollow men”. Their endeavour is to understand themselves in a state of alienation and they try to unburden their guilty selves in order to become worthy of entering community
of their fellow beings.

Keeping in view the condition of the Jews, Saul Bellow thinks of modern man as a symbol of hope and self-identity in the face of suffering and isolation. He regards this distinctive and identifiable Jewish experience as the reflection of the general human experience. The realization of selfhood is the ultimate goal of nearly all his protagonists who maintain a tenacious optimism even in the face of chaos and despair. By comprehending and coming to terms with the world around them, they attempt to free themselves. They go through the philosophical and moral complexities of life with a desire to affirm the possibilities of meaningful human lives. They appreciate the value of suffering and succeed in their quest for identity. They then assert their humanity and their relation to others. As Hoffman significantly remarks, “Bellow’s hero moves into society with a desperate hope that the human dilemma will be solved in community recognition and action” (80).

The critic Gerhard Bach has rightly pointed out that recent Bellow criticism increasingly tends to widen the scope of and focuses on the dialectic nature of Bellow’s works and his “personal development towards a more decided involvement in transcendental issues” (7). Ellen Pifer too, discovers in Bellow’s works, “the extraordinary way that this massive accumulation of fact and concrete detail tends to undermine itself – subverting the realists traditional faith in national circumstance and the world of appearance” (2). The religious character of Bellow’s protagonists, she thinks, goes against the grain of contemporary culture in that “Bellow’s fiction is radical in a profound sense; at the very source or root of his work, accepted notion of reality is challenged, undermined, overturned” (2). Bellow’s, religious sensibility is deeply implicated in the characterization of his heroes. His view is that a person’s true self finally emerges when he becomes aware that his life has a much larger transcendent meaning that he has hitherto been ignoring. His life
then becomes a kind of religious enterprise.

Bellow’s religious vision bears significant affinity with Zen Buddhism. Indeed, his connection to Zén is strong and he has made a number of passing references to Zen Buddhism in his early works as well as in later works. For example, he mentions “Zen Calm” in *The Bellarosa Connection* (44) and uses the term *moha* which in Zen terminology means infinite, in *The Adventures of Augie March* (450). Significantly enough, the very title of his novel *Seize the Day* is a catchword of the Zen spirit. In *Mr. Sammler’s Planet*, Mr. Sammler refers to “Maya, the veil of appearances that hangs over all human experience” (209). In the novel *Humboldt’s Gift*, Bellow describes Humboldt’s face as “Buddhistic”, “but not tranquil” (20). In the Collection of his short stories entitled *Him With His Foot in His Mouth*, Bellow describes the Zen Buddhist way of enlightenment. The Bellowian hero’s awareness of morality, disbelief of verbal reality, dedication to the search for enlightenment and mystical bent toward the inner vision and contemplative world, are all Zen inclinations. In an interview with Ichikawa, Bellow acknowledges his keen interest in Zen.

When I (Ichikawa) asked him (Bellow) about his interest in Buddhism and the Buddha, he replied, “Yes, I have (an interest). I read sayings of the Buddha in many editions and started when I was a boy, for there was a publisher here in Chicago, the Open Court Publishing Company, which used to publish Buddhist literature. So I read those things when I was still quite young” (21-22).

Although Zen Buddhism is not Bellow’s only source of thematic concern, it certainly is one of the many important sources. He draws upon various religious and philosophical frameworks to shape his hero’s quest for
self-discovery and the meaning of existence.

Modern scientific research has helped man in such a way that he has shown remarkable achievements in every field of life including nature so that he is now in a position to fulfil all his aspirations. However, inspite of uncountable triumphs and innumerable achievements, man feels powerless in his individual life as well as in society. He yearns for a sense of identity in the clamour of everyday existence. Likewise contemporary American novelists like “… Bellow, Wright, Ellison – all are concerned with the meaning of identity in the modern world, the nature of good and evil, the possibility of fulfillment in the contemporary society, the course of value in a world without God, and the possibility and meaning of action in an ethical vacuum” (Lehan 64). Bellows’s protagonists, being reflective and introspective, by nature, possess the desire and an innate capacity for a conscious awareness of their existence. Faced with the existential question of identity, they confront their inner and outer realities and eventually arrive at self-discovery. As Lionel Trilling suggests: “In its essence literature is concerned with self, and the particular concern of the literature of the past two centuries has been with self in its standing quarrel with culture” (293).

While writing his first novel, *Dangling Man*, Saul Bellow could not escape the spirit of the twentieth century. The protagonist of the novel, Joseph, strives for meaning and individuality in a perverse and meaningless universe. Unable to participate in social relationships and experiences, he is overtaken by a sense of despair and non-being. Joseph aspires for a position in the United States Army but his induction is delayed by bureaucratic ineptitude. His unemployment leads to a sense of lost identity in society, which he is able to overcome only when he is in the company of other men on his induction into the United States Army. This leads him to conclude that nothing can be achieved in a vacuum and that there are no values outside of life. He now
understands fully that he can make his life meaningful only by relating to society. He is now willing to reach out to others through whatever means including "regimentation". In the end of the novel, he says:

I am no longer to be held accountable for myself, I am grateful for that. I am in other hands relieved of self-determination, freedom canceled.

Hurray for regular hours!
And for the supervision of the spirit!
Long live regimentation! (159)

A strong sense of optimism thus permeates Bellow’s fiction, changing the surface agony and suffering into triumph. His protagonists face demoralizing forces and find strength to live in society. In the face of nihilistic forces that constantly work towards man’s insignificance, man can show his worth by maintaining his dignity. Through hard labour and courage, man can hold all the unseen victories all around him. Profoundly involved with the situation of modern man, Bellow’s fiction thus explores man’s struggle for recognition through a meaningful relationship with others and affirms that man is able to realize and recognize himself even in the most disastrous situations.

At a time when it had become common for writers to champion anti-heroes, Saul Bellow has been commended for creating deeply human characters that readers could identify with. His works pursue the timely question of what it is to be fully human in a baffling world. In his opinion a person may be psychologically and emotionally tenuous, but he is also capable of great dignity and majesty, for he is created in the image of God. Of course, the obstacles of the world challenge him and impede his understanding but this creature has enough power and ability to overcome such hurdles. In Bellow’s
view, life with its kaleidoscopic experiences is after all worth living. Man can have a positive approach to life only if he partakes of and enjoys such experiences.

Bellow’s love and compassion for mankind affirms the potentials of human existence. Love, he believes, plays a significant part in man’s life. Moreover, it is sacred in the world. If life is holy, love is holy. Self-transcendence is a painful process and it involves a great deal of suffering usually connected to an elaborate and ritualistic trial of love. This trial by love ultimately forces a self-examination in which man realizes his past mistakes and the need to feel concerned for others. Bellow’s protagonists ‘too, transcend the disorder that surrounds them and find meaning in the power of love and moral commitment. Bellow’s thematic concerns are amply evidenced in his protagonists who outrightly reject the absurdist philosophy of the modern age and through love yearn to forge a humanitarian personal ethic. The novelist has been commended for his humanistic celebration of sensitive individuals and is regarded as a unique spokesman for humanitarian ideals in American literature.

Bellow’s works also show how modern man, entangled in the complexities of life, faces the maddening and irresistible pressures of the Cybernetic age. His characters are torn apart by tensions and conflicts that force them to discard the values of society and shie away from it. They are thus hopelessly overtaken by a deep sense of alienation. As Jeane Braham remarks, “his heroes are marginal men, ‘isolatoes’ who by circumstances of chance or will have separated themselves from family and friends and who must discover the significant pattern in their own experience before they can re-enter the community” (38). Fully conscious of the fact that man cannot shut himself out from society, Bellow acknowledges that self-being is real only if it is in communication with another self-being. Alienated man sinks into gloomy
isolation but he can reveal himself in the act of discovery only in communication with others. Isolated beings disappear into nothingness. Bellow’s heroes realize that it is only community recognition that can solve the human dilemma. As Marcus Klein rightly observes,” Bellow’s heroes travel from alienation to accommodation” (52).

Several American novelists are primarily concerned with the attitudes and beliefs of the individual that result in success or failure in his attempts at integration. They have tried to explore those volitional and evaluative elements in human life that direct his volcanic energies and drive into channels of activity when faced either with the elemental forces of life or with the irresistible pressures of society. They have tried to place man in situations where he responds with his whole vitality and his responses are unambiguous and unequivocal. It is in such irreducible moments of life that the individual is able to test the validity of his values likewise, Bellow too deals with old established counterclaims of the individual versus society vis-à-vis the individual in self-conflict. In his works, he forces in a direct way, the timely issue of personal obliteration and consequent degradation that every social trend seems to manifest and confronts the terrifying implications of an impersonal, mechanical society. His distinctive achievement, lies in his depiction of the individual trapped in an almost unchanging and indifferent society. This juxtaposition of a static society with the organic individual informs all his novels. Being aware of such a society, the individual with his dreams, aspirations and idealism, finds a place for himself and thus establishes a personal identity that helps him maintain his honesty and integrity in society.

Bellow believes that, “Human life is ultimately a mystery” (12). What then is his reaction to it? Harper asserts that, “The exploration of this mystery, in all its complexity and contradiction,” (63) is the purpose of Bellow’s art. The individual’s desperation and yearning to connect to a meaningful life in his
community is what Saul Bellow deals with. His heroes confront the oddities of life and search for ultimate order in a world of chaos. Working hard towards a consistent and integrated self, their quest is both to organize and to create a self that would require no further organization. At war with themselves, they aspire for a social organization that they can become an inseparable part of. They move in society physically as well as mentally to keep their selves intact. The major concern of the novelist then, is the desire to connect man and the world he lives in, which is the basic urge that underlies all ideal constructions.

Saul Bellow himself likes to explore new possibilities in life. On winning the Nobel Prize, he told a reporter that he felt it was time for him to move on to writing about people who resisted the forces of their time. Man’s drive toward the exploration of greater possibilities thus ensures the continuity and progress of the journey of life. Like Bellow, his protagonists never cease to move on despite the disappointments of life so that life for them becomes an endless series of expeditions and explorations. Bellow calls himself a writer and a teacher but he clarifies that he does not intend his works to be didactic, for he offers no moral constructs or lessons to be learnt. Thus it is the reader who has to look within himself to draw his lessons and arrive at his own conclusions in life. Bellow is only a facilitator who provides easily identifiable situations and conditions. The exploratory nature of Bellow’s fiction is suggested through its pervasive emphasis on the journey metaphor which he traces back to the picaresque tradition, that he believes has become an indistinguishable part of the present age. For Bellow the idea of the picaresque and the novel form are inseparable. He explores fully the potential of the picaresque form, to probe the profundity and complexity of the American spirit as well as to enlarge the narrative possibilities of the contemporary novel. The form of his early as well as later fiction is picaresque as is evident from their episodic structure and the position of the protagonists. By making the hero move from one episode to the other, Bellow’s interest lies partly in showing
the rise and fall of the hero’s fortunes among arbitrary conditions and partly in capturing his sense of struggle for order in chaos. His hero’s journey helps in bridging the gap between lofty human ideas and the harsher actualities of existence, by supplying the missing link between individual and society. Desperate for insight, Bellow’s heroes move on, staring at the world in wide-eyed innocence, seeking to penetrate surface appearance. When Bellow describes any scene, he seems to nurture the hope that his contemplation will unlock the mystery of his hero’s quest. His heroes represent the same desperate struggle for life. In his works, Bellow goes about the business of ordering life, seeing it through and working it out. Most of the central characters in his novels journey to places that yield a new order of activity and expectation. Their fundamental problem is to accommodate and assimilate this new experience into their world. Being endowed with imagination and sympathy, they arrive not only at a deeper understanding of themselves and the world, but also at an ability to articulate their inner lives. Nevertheless, very often their receptiveness to the new is usually hampered by values and attitudes that are derived from their class and culture. In their quest they are thus exposed to forces that help or impede them. As Ihab Hassan observes:

The sense of cosmic wonder Bellow preserves through his novels lightens the solemnity of the spiritual quest his heroes undertake. The quest is presumably for freedom, for knowledge, for love. This is old hat. But true seekers, Bellow shows, never know where their quest will come to rest. Freedom, knowledge and love are merely versions of the real; they give the quest its form without determining its end (291).

In community life, a person comes in contact with various types of people so
that he looks out for their positive as well as negative attributes. Although he may be influenced by negative attributes yet Bellow is profoundly concerned with reflecting the significance of positive actions. Such actions help not only to comprehend life’s complexities in a wider sense but also enable him to approach God or at least the reality of an ethical life. As Chirantan Kulshrestha remarks:

Bellow considers it possible for an individual to step into religious life through a self-generated yearning for significance and to approach God through an acceptance of ordinary reality and the norms of ethical conduct (53).

Bellow’s fiction reflects his deep concern for upholding life and celebrating it despite its hard conditions. He is above all “a celebrator of life” (137). As he himself asserts, “I have been given the gift of life and it’s more than I know what to do with” (221). His characters too show concern for other human beings in society. However, in the post-war period of atomization, uprooting and universal alienation, many of Bellow’s characters too, “refuse society’s values and dislodge themselves from its drift in order to celebrate independence and freedom of self alive”(Tanner 7). Thus they alienate themselves but again accept life as it is.

As an anthropologist, Saul Bellow basically views human life as a struggle, and in his fiction, presents it in the most intimate human terms. Alfred Kazin, in a perceptive article “My Friend Saul Bellow”, rightly thinks of Bellow as a “wrestler in the old Greek Style” (51) and asserts that “never in his life or work has he lost his prime sense of existence as one man’s contest with terrible powers” (53). The terrible powers to which he has referred to are both internal and external. While the socio-economic set up including the reality figures constitutes the external power that threatens Bellow’s
protagonists with total breakup, internal powers are manifested in the form of certain ideas and ideals, feelings and emotions, against which an individual fights in the hope of transcending them. Bellow is fully aware of the spirit of despair that has overtaken contemporary human life yet he rejects contempt for community, doctrinal isolation, nihilistic tendencies and a break with the tradition that exalts human beings. He accepts life as it is and refuses to be overcome by a negative philosophy. This optimism is clearly reflected in his contention that although modern mass society is frightful, brutal hostile to whatever is pure in the human spirit, a wasteland and a horror and the modern artist can never be reconciled to its thefts, its lies, its wars, its cruelties. It is only what it is, one can do more than complain about it.

He asserts that man has the ability to cope up with all forms of maddening and frustrating ideologies. He has a deep faith in man and human possibility and believes that it does not diminish even in the worst circumstances. The unending cycle of crises that began with the First World War has formed a kind of person, one who has lived through terrible, strange things, and in whom there is an observable shrinkage of prejudices, a casting off of disappointing ideologies, an ability to live with many kinds of madness, an intense desire for certain durable human goods – truth, for instance, or freedom or wisdom. There is disintegration. Much is disintegrating but human beings are experiencing also an odd kind of refining process.

Bellow believes that life is worth living even if it is degrading. Hope, faith and love in Saul Bellow’s vision are the great and sustaining forces of life. These forces of life build up the basic principle underlying his work. In his essay, “Distractions of a Fiction writer”, he reiterates:

... this caring or believing or love alone matters. All the rest, obsolescence, historical views, manners, agreed views of the universe is
simply nonsense and trash ... if we do care, if we believe in the existence of others, then what we write is necessary (Quoted in Hicks 20).

Bellow's belief that there is inherent energy in man for growth, redemption and imagination through which life can be made beautiful, reveals his vital links with the optimistic tradition of his predecessors:

Like his predecessors, Bellow as neo-transcendentalist sounds again the themes of nature, self-reliance, freedom, individual heroism and renewal of universal contacts, yet he affirms the possibilities of democracy and civilization while lamenting the failure of Americans to realize all of their possibilities (Porter 195).

Rejecting the "hollow man" concept of characters and "the tone of elegy" in modern literature, Bellow attacks the wasteland writers but does not overlook the contemptible and the rancorous. The cloud of darkness hangs over his works which highlight the catastrophies, emotional bankruptcy and the burdens of urban life that crush the individual. His heroes yearn for happy times when all brutalizing forces would be eradicated from modern life. This dark side of his vision cannot be ignored, for it is in man's struggle against such opposing forces that his endeavours of self-discovery and dignity are located. This struggle to escape darkness describes the psychic condition of his heroes. The writer has consistently defied the strongly established tradition of modern literature that sees life as a sterile wasteland doomed to death and predition. His resistance to the "wasteland Ideology," however, does not originate in the unrealistic assumption that everything about life is good but in
his awareness that the 'bleak' picture of life painted by the wasteland artists, is far removed from reality. For Bellow, shrinking away from life in an aloofness does not constitute the role of the writer. The writer, he firmly believes, should be guided by his finer intuitions in exploring the contours of life and asserting its possibilities. According to Bellow, most contemporary writers believe that modern society is "a human anthill" and in their self-inflicted despair write novels that are devoid of the concept of the self. He argues that if modern society with its domineering technological façade curtails private development, it also helps a large number of individuals to earn their living. He does not agree with the view that there is less 'selfhood' in the modern world or the day of the self is over. Writers, in his opinion, should write with the knowledge of what this human being is and what exactly is right or amiss with him.

Probing the nature of Bellow's aesthetic, one can notice his strong faith in the power of the imagination. The pre-eminent position that Bellow accords to the imagination places him in the tradition of the Romantics who believed in transforming powers of the imagination. In Bellow's opinion, the imagination has a redemptive character which is capable of imposing order upon chaos. If all great art weighs the mass of common human experience and develops a meaningful perspective on it, the unique quality of such art can be seen to spring only from a centrally established imaginative source. Bellow believes that imagination is vital to his craft. Writing about how the imagination operating unconsciously in a work of art ensures order and clarity, Bellow remarks:

The fact is that a great many novelists, even those who have concentrated on hate, like Celine, or on despair like Kafka, have continued to perform a most important function. Their books have attempted, in not a few cases
successfully to create scale, to order experience, to give value, to make perspective and to carry us toward sources of life, toward life giving things ("The Future of Fiction" 216).

A novel, according to Bellow, looks through the chaotic world of experiences and ensures order. The principle that guides such movement is the imagination. The complexity of modern life, notwithstanding, the imagination for Bellow, remains a potent force through which order can be evoked. In fact, the distractions of modern life place a responsibility on the artist to make an effective use of his imaginative faculties.

Not only does Bellow insist that the contemporary writer recognize the right role of imagination in literature but he also wants such literature to align itself to the intellect. Talking about American fiction, Bellow says that while other branches of learning show an intellectual vibrancy, novelists seem particularly shy of using ideas and thoughts. Literature produced in America in the twentieth century has largely remained didactic and is also divorced from the intellect. Bemoaning this tendency in literature, he is quite optimistic that things would look up for the American novel when the imagination releases itself from the shackles of assumptions and starts celebrating common humanity:

The imagination is looking for new ways to express virtue. American society just now is in the grip of certain falsehoods about virtue – not that anyone really believes them. And these cheerful falsehoods, beget their opposites in fiction, a dark literature, a literature of victimization, of old people sitting in ash cans waiting for the breath of life to depart. This is
the way things stand; only this remains to be added, that we have barely begun to comprehend what a human being is, and that the baker’s daughters may have revelations and miracles to offer to keep fascinated novelists busy until the end of time (“The Future of Fiction” 219).

Bellow’s aesthetic also incorporates a fervour for morality that is typical of a classical sensibility. The interplay of a liberal secular imagination and an intensely realized quest for a religious moral order, lends his novels a unique vigor that does justice to both the world of the senses and that of the spirit. For Bellow, the issue of moral purpose is inseparably intertwined with the artist’s imagination. As he himself puts it: “We call a writer moral to the degree that his imagination indicates to us how we may answer naturally, without strained arguments, with a spontaneous, mysterious proof that he feels no need to argue with despair” (“The Writer as Moralist” 62).

Bellow is of the view that the most serious moral function that the novel has to render is to generate new ideas about mankind. He believes that the novelist should “discover” these ideas, instead of “inventing them as he has been doing at the movement” (“The Future of Fiction” 220). He sees no justification for writers to continue their profession if many of them “did not feel the existence of these recognised (human) qualities” (“The Future of Fiction” 220). A novel, in his opinion, should be comprehensive enough to capture in its web the variety of the endless human enterprise and at the same time generate insights into the mystery of being human. In his classic Nobel Lecture, Bellow says:

A novel is balanced between a few true impressions and the multitude of false ones that
make up most of what we call life. It tells us that for every human being there is a diversity of existence, that the single existence is itself an illusion in part, that these many existences, signify something, tend to something, fulfill something; it promises us meaning, harmony, and even justice (“Noble Lecture” 88).

He has always expressed his belief that writing is an intense spiritual activity. He views writing as an attestation of a man’s belief in the meaningful continuation of human species, which is to say that the artist attests to the power of human love. The writer should, in his view, recognize the need to work or cultivate certain permanent human impulses and capacities which are good for the soul. What is more important to the writer, however, is his belief in the soul, in these bleary times. He advocates that the writer should affirm the power of the soul if he is to be taken seriously:

Just now writers are asking themselves how can they be interesting, and why should they be taken seriously. Interest follows power, and they do not appear to command the sort of power that is now valued by most of mankind – the power of states or institutions, the power of money or resources, the power politics, of science and technology, the power that once belonged to religion, the power of ideas, etc. What can make a writer truly interesting is an inadmissible resource, something we all hesitate to mention though we all know it intimately – the soul. I don’t know what else can possibly
obtain and hold the attention of the modern reader who has already become peculiarly difficult to reach. ("A World Too Much With Us" 8).

Although Saul Bellow is quite sympathetic to the modernists' perception of the world in disarray, their categorical assertions and attitudes about life are unacceptable to him. He would like to have the writer explore reality rather than assume it. Unlike most contemporary writers, Bellow does not totally subscribe to the modernist version of reality and tries to look for more contemporary alternatives. He says that there may be harsh truth of life and these truths should be admitted also but men should not stop hoping. He further adds that there may be some truths which are, after all, man's friends in the world. He emphasizes the need for the contemporary writer to discover reality for himself first and then project his vision in his work. In his Nobel Lecture, Bellow succinctly crystallizes his position on modernist writers and his contemporaries:

But I am drawing attention to the fact that there is in the intellectual community a sizeable inventory of attitudes that have become respectable – notions about society, human nature, class, politics, sex; about mind, about the physical universe, the evolution of life. Few writers, even among the best, have taken the trouble to re-examine these attitudes or orthodoxies. Such attitudes only glow more powerfully in Joyce or D.H. Lawrence... they are everywhere and no one challenges them seriously. Since the twenties, how many novelists have taken a second look at D.H. Lawrence, or
argued a different view of sexual potency or the effects of the industrial civilization on the instincts? ("Noble Lecture" 86).

Bellow values individuality to the extent that man is sensitive to himself and to the world around him. The individual tries to first understand himself in a society that continue encroaches upon his individuality, but the sensitive man refuses to give in to social pressures and examines his situation from a vantage point, by temporarily withdrawing from the world. In this state, however, he remains a manic depressive until he reaches illumination, a kind of light that suddenly flickers from the heart of darkness which he has penetrated. This light finally leads him back to the world where he would like to live in solidarity with his fellow beings.

Saul Bellow’s later fiction is intimately concerned with the dialectics of being contemporary and is structured around paired concepts such as appearance and reality, death and transcendence. The novel *The Dean's December* probes random violence and the intimate family life of its protagonist, Dean Corde. Here Bellow highlights a new bid for freedom and combines the political with the literary in a fictional mode. The novel juxtaposes the problem of individual freedom in the East European Country of Romania with the social problems in Bellow’s home town of Chicago, especially the plight of the black “underclass”. Dean Corde reacts strongly to the problems of Chicago, of the West and of democracy in general. He talks about “Western humanism, civilized morality, nihilism East and West (68).

The novel *More Die of Heartbreak* deals with the anguish caused by marital discord, in the life of Benn Crader, a professor of Botany at a university. Crader takes the disastrous decision of entering the world of modern desire. His nephew Kenneth Trachtenberg, the narrator of the story, takes keen interest in introducing the opposition of two cultural patterns, Russian and
Western, transcendental and rational, which runs through the novel. He contrasts the American and the Russian mentality. While the Americans who are governed by a strong sense of self are quick to confess their faults, if any, the Russians under a totalitarian system do not accuse themselves but find fault in external circumstances. Bellow shows how Benn, who is guided by his scientific insight, fails to understand the world, for he does not possess a deep insight into human relationships. Benn, finally, understands all this. He takes flight once again on a scientific expedition to the North Pole to re-establish his bonds with the vegetable world. He tells Kenneth, “You see, they’ve assembled an international team of scientists for the purpose of special researches. And I signed on two days ago, to check out lichens from both poles, a comparative study, and work out certain morphological puzzles. Not acute puzzles. Matters of rather special interest” (334).

The novel *The Actual*, stands as a mature distillation of Saul Bellow’s creative works. It restates the main issues and ideas that are spread over his entire fiction. The protagonist of the novel, Harry Trellman, always remains a drifter, haunted by the sweet memory of a lost-love. After having carried out his shady business deals in the Far East, he returns to Chicago. Coincidence brings him together with his high-school sweetheart Amy Wustrin – the only woman he has ever loved. She has grown old. Her husband, Jay has died and Harry comes forward with a proposal for a marriage saying “… I hope you’ll have me” (*TA* 117).

In Saul Bellow’s new novel *Ravelstein*, Chick is the narrator. He is preoccupied with a world in which the great-souled man, Abe Ravelstein, is confronted with his nihilistic evil, his nemesis. Ravelstein is the embodiment of a free thinker, scholar and teacher in search of truth and virtue. Inspite of being attracted by the nihilistic writings of Celine, his Jewish humanism shapes his outlook. When he sees tropical parrots surviving in the Midwestern winter,
these birds seem like Jews surviving in a hostile environment. Revelstein says that the parrots "even have a Jew look to them (170). After Ravelstein's death, Chick's heroic struggle to overcome his illness and fight for his life in a hospital is an affirmation of the Jewish outlook that connects man with his community.

The purpose of this study is to examine Saul Bellow's vision of life as expressed in his later novels. Glimpsing the modern age, Bellow perceives modern man's ambivalence: in the peak of his powers and the limits of his strength, in his aspirations and defeats. The structure is liberal in its emphasis on the power of the human spirit and tragic in its ultimate recognition of human limitations. For nearly four centuries how there has been a tension between this thrust of the individual and an absolute resistance. Man's tragedy lies mainly in the conflict between an individual and the forces that destroy him. Saul Bellow's fiction deals with modern man's dilemma in a faithless age — an age which is governed by nihilism and loss of individuality. It shows how man, at war with his self and victim of the forces of the world, isolates himself and through the process of isolation ultimately realizes the realities of life. By passing through this painful process, he eventually takes a firm decision to connect himself to the world and lead a meaningful life. Bellow thus places premium value on spiritual self-renewal as a means of social reconstruction. These themes will be the focus of ensuing chapters, which deal with the above-mentioned novels that have been briefly outlined.
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