CONCLUSION
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Bernard Malamud, through his art, intends to create moral aspects in man and hence his vision is primarily moral. Malamud’s protagonists are fighters on a moral realm. Rituals, surroundings, other characters and even objects act as part of the moral battlefield. Malamud asserts that a good novel should basically deal with the human experience. Malamud appreciates credible human experience in the art of writing because “what moves me (him), moves me (him) to art”.¹

So far we have gone through the moral growth of Malamud’s protagonists in all his eight novels. Now we will analyze the main features of his protagonists, which later help to establish a character as Malamud’s ultimate protagonist.

At the beginning, Malamud’s characters struggle for a workable set of morals and a better way of living. They appear as ordinary men, often less than ordinary men. But they are sensitive about the lack of material prospects in their native places. As a result, they leave their homes in search of better opportunities, only to return with new perspectives. Some protagonists like ‘Yakov Bok’ in The Fixer move from small villages to big cities in search of good luck. Others travel very long distance, crossing continents and oceans, but ultimately are drawn back to their hometowns. Ex.:- Frank Alpine, Sy. Levin and Fidelman.

The course of experience of a Malamud character is as below. A poor, lonely protagonist seeks identity in the society in order to attain material
prosperity and also to escape from the wounded memories of the past. In the beginning, all Malamud's protagonists attempt to run away from their past as they have failed to fulfil their ambitions and have just made "botches of their lives". Initially, the protagonist's notion of identity is completely egoistic and he works hard to realize his selfish desires. In the process, he commits the same mistake again and again, with the result that the feelings of guilt and remorse oppress him.

However, his struggle goes on and is rewarded with success to some extent. But soon he comes to know about the inadequacy of his materialistic dream, which has motivated him to pursue connections with the society. Also the protagonist gets confronted with "the indestructibility of his past". He discovers that it is not possible to get rid of one's past and hence he comes to terms with it.

The protagonist's changing attitude prompts him to develop a new mode of life, which offers him identity and status. Gradually he perceives his own weaknesses and capabilities. Also he realizes that the materialistic world cannot make him its victim, as he has got necessary spiritual strength to defend his life and human essence. He sheds his initial timidity and defends his newly developed spiritual values at any cost. In this way, he compels the society to succumb to the moral values, formulated within him by means of struggling and suffering. This is the stage where he attains heroism by transcending both himself and the society, through his
newly acquired values. And he learns to adapt himself to those moral values of his choice.

In *The Natural*, even though Malamud deals apparently with the game of baseball, he is mainly interested in “the drama of moral issues”. Roy fails both in life and in baseball because of his selfish preoccupation. He tries to fulfil his materialistic ambitions and hence gets dejected. Also he rejects his past sufferings. But towards the end, he recognizes his past errors and also makes out his inability to learn from his past sufferings. Compassion dawns in Roy very late, in the guise of dedication to Iris Lemon, the very embodiment of suffering. Hence though Roy fails to win the game, he gains victory on the moral level.

*The Assistant* manifests Malamud’s views on compassion. Out of compassion, both Morris Bober and Frank Alpine assume interpersonal responsibility of each other. Its protagonist, Frank Alpine is very sensitive to the suffering of the Jews. But, later he learns to accept suffering as the common destiny of the whole mankind. In this way, he grows to the level of a hero and achieves moral integration. He assumes responsibility of Bober’s tomb like grocery store and in the process, sacrifices his life and freedom, for the sake of others.

‘Sy. Levin’ of *A New Life* exemplifies Malamud’s ardour for liberalism and literature as against conservatism and vocational courses. He has already gained an insight that life is holy and has presently accepted the job of an English teacher at Cascadia college. His perception that love
means commitment guides him to take upon himself the responsibility of the burdensome Pauline and her adopted children. At last, Levin even dares to leave his job with regard to his 'principles'.

In *The Fixer*, Malamud deals with the touching story of mental and physical agony, suffered by an ordinary man in the Tsarist Russia. Yakov Bok', the poor fixer leaves his native place, in search of better chances of prosperity in Kiev. There he gets arrested on charges of the ritual murder of a twelve-year-old Christian boy. While in prison, the authorities torment him with every kind of mental and physical torture. But the continued suffering enlightens Yakov's moral vision. It leads him to develop compassionate attitude towards others. Then he determines to live and fight, first for his Jewish community, then for Shmuel and at last for all suffering people, regardless of religion and nationality. By this novel, Yakov proves that however deplorable life's conditions be, the individual can still maintain his human values.

In *Pictures of Fidelman: An Exhibition*, Malamud deals with the relationship between Fidelman’s life and art. Malamud’s already published six episodes are made into a picaresque novel. Fidelman, the self-confessed failure as painter takes up the career of an art critic. But he fails in that profession too. He lives in his egoistic world, without any respect for life and its values. But Fidelman learns to be compassionate towards others, when Susskind steals his brief case containing his first chapter on Giotto. Fidelman’s final liberation occurs when Beppo redeems him from his false
pretensions by destroying all his paintings. He teaches Fidelman the art of blowing glass and also the meaning of life. Hence, at last, Fidelman triumphs as a man.

**The Tenants** dramatizes Malamud’s treatment of culture conflict and the difficulty of creative process. The hostility between the two racial groups causes anxiety and distress. Absorbed in their own work, both the Jewish writer Harry Lesser and the black writer Willie Spearmint fail to understand each other and both move to violence. At the end of the novel, we find the cry of Levenspiel for mercy and compassion, ‘Hab rachmones,’ which is the message of Malamud to the present day world.

In **Dubin’s Lives**, William Dubin, an established biographer is troubled with the problems of marriage, love and infidelity. Dubin, because of his secret relationship with a girl named Fanny, enters into a clash between commitment and lust. Towards the end of the novel, the conflict ends with the return of Dubin to his wife as a loving husband. The last novel **God’s Grace** is a fable. It describes the struggle of an ordinary man to establish a cultured society with the help of some chimpanzees, a gorilla and some apes.

Malamud’s characters struggle, to overcome their own moral weaknesses and to attain moral integrity. In the process, they suffer continuously, because suffering acts as the only way for redemption. While suffering, the protagonist gains knowledge of the self and the world. Hence the character learns to view life at a different perspective, based on the
human values. Ex:- Yakov Bok's continuous suffering in the prison activates the human qualities in him to the extent that he wants to live and suffer for the sake of all oppressed people. In this way, he becomes the champion of the whole human race.

Malamud's ultimate protagonist is the one, who suffers willingly for the well being of others. Morris Bober, Frank Alpine, Sy. Levin and Yakov Bok are perfect examples of this type. By means of struggling and suffering, they learn to value not only their lives, but also the lives of others also. They realize their responsibilities towards others and strive to carry out those responsibilities. On the other hand, the protagonists who deny their obligations towards others fail in their quest and at last betray their lives. ex:- Harry Lesser, Willie Spearmint and Calvin Cohn.

In Malamud's fictional world, loving a person implies accepting responsibility of that person. It is through love that the selfish protagonists realize their commitments towards others. We find in Malamud's heroes, a kind of development from a purely sensual, erotic feeling of love to a love that encircles their fellowmen, irrespective of sex, caste and colour. Ex:- In the initial stage, Frank Alpine's love is purely sensual. But towards the end, his love grows to the level of compassion. He gets ready to suffer in Morris's grocery store for the sake of all men, regardless of any sexual overtones. According to Ducharme, Malamud's central theme is "redemption through suffering endured out of love".\textsuperscript{5} Thus suffering, commitment and responsibility form the major characteristics of Malamud's protagonists.
Malamud’s heroes suffer constantly in their struggle to affirm their humanity in adverse circumstances. They sacrifice their material comforts on account of others. In Shechner’s words, it is exactly this ‘commitment to otherness’ that forms the major aspect of Malamud’s vision. Through his fiction, Malamud conveys the message that transcendence comes, only through compassionate attitude towards other people. It is in defence of the human that Malamud’s fiction proceeds. In Malamud’s world, it is very difficult to separate between humanism and morality. And the moral man in Malamud’s fiction is the compassionate man, the ultimate protagonist.

Even though most of Malamud’s protagonists are Jews, their jewishness act as a means to associate them to relentless suffering. Through suffering, the unique experience of Jews, Malamud connects all human beings. Hence all his protagonists are marginal Jews, not orthodox ones. ex:– The speech given by Rabbi at Morris’s funeral suggests that Morris Bober was not a Jew in the traditional way. Frankie, the rabbinical student in The Magic Barrel doesn’t believe in God; Bok leaves the ‘Shtetl’ denying his Jewish religion and Jewish God.

About his heroes being Jews, Malamud tells that he has selected the Jews because he knows them best. Malamud always associates suffering and goodness with the Jews. Also he views suffering as the common experience of all human beings. Malamud has once told “There is nothing particularly Jewish about the experience”. Even though, the major characters of Malamud’s fiction are Jews, he never emphasizes Judaism or
the ethnic identity of the Jews in his fiction. In Malamud, we deal with neither “the Jew’s story of suffering nor with the Jew’s discovery of an identity in his group, but with modern man’s dilemma”. Malamud’s Jew is an ordinary human being beneath his Jewishness. Hence he suffers as a common man with no special regard to his Jewishness. In Malamud’s viewpoint, Jewishness means struggling, suffering and endurance for the sake of others. It is this Jewishness that Malamud universalizes in his fiction. Hence in Malamud’s moral world, Jewishness becomes an expression of oneness with others.

Though tormented by suffering, Malamud’s protagonists never attempt to flee away from their problems. They fight with all the force against the subtle pressures inflicted on them, to deny their humanity and integrity. Eventually, these protagonists secure certain measure of success in their battle against the adverse circumstances and uphold the worth of the individual. Even though their dreams remain unfulfilled, they are not totally crushed by those factors. Instead, they turn to themselves for moral freedom and spiritual growth. Finding it impossible to change the world, they learn to change their attitudes in order to adapt themselves to the world and to retain their own individual identity. And they realize those human values rather than material values should guide their lives, if they are to achieve moral integrity. Thus towards the end, they attain true freedom and dignity through the resources of wit, intelligence and understanding. They gain this new identity by turning defeat into victory.
and by assuming the burden of responsibility, relying on the inborn potentials.

After a comprehensive study of Malamud's fiction, we realize that, in his fictional world, Malamud deals with the most terrifying problem, which the contemporary man faces. Malamud, through his writings, expresses his moral concern regarding the threat of a man's identity by the inhuman conditions of modern life. He reveals this through his protagonist's struggles, weaknesses, insights and realizations, which eventually result in his moral integration. Hence he rises to the status of a successful protagonist. In short, Malamud "has created a protagonist who seems fully human, who cannot be lightly satirized or made ridiculous, who can take advantage of the full range of his intelligence and perceptions, who emerges from his ordeal as a compromised but nonetheless an honest man. He is a very strange phenomenon in contemporary fiction: he is a hero."
Notes and References


