INTRODUCTION
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The dreadful awareness of the increasing gap between what man is and what he ought to be has motivated Bernard Malamud to think in terms of moral regeneration and to derive an idea of new life based on love, commitment and humanism. Malamud, right from the beginning, wants to present man as he struggles towards moral integration through self-transcendence. In Malamud's fiction the human values, love, suffering and compassion rather than material gains give meaning to one's life. Malamud's fiction reflects the novelist's moral concern, which he expresses as an eager quest through the protagonist's struggles, failures, sufferings, realizations and awakenings resulting in moral development. This grants him the status of a successful protagonist. In this book I am attempting to discover and define the content and nature of that heroism.

Moral development of the hero is what excites Malamud's creative imagination and his basic concern is the hero's quest for a meaningful new life. In the interview with Joseph Wershba, Malamud describes his fiction as "telling the story of personality fulfilling itself". Malamud's protagonists struggle for a new life after overcoming their futile past; suffering and compassion become instrumental in this change to a new life.

The quest for love is an important aspect of the protagonist's struggle for identity. Most of Malamud's protagonists seem to demand
the love of the people they come across. But in their quest for love, they attempt only to receive and are seldom prepared to give. Usually the protagonist starts with a narrow and sensual conception of love considering it not as mutual relationship but as a kind of possession. In Malamud's fiction the social evils exploit the personal weaknesses of the protagonists, thereby making a moral struggle for them. As a result, the protagonists very often meet with the wrong kind of women who pull them down, when they are most likely to achieve their aim in life.

In Malamud's fiction women are of two kinds-the nurturing women and the deceitful women. The nurturing woman gives support to the protagonist and helps him develop emotionally when he is in his lowest spiritual state. They tend to be soothing and understanding with an overlay of the spiritual. For example Iris Lemon in *The Natural*, Irene Bell in *The Tenants*, and Pauline Gilley in *A New Life*. The other type is the deceptive woman who offers the protagonist sex instead of love and is always engaged in making the protagonist leave his principles. Such women are very often marked by some physical handicap. Ex:- The sick breasts of Avis Fliss in *A New Life* or the limp of Zinaida in *The Fixer*. The protagonist often thinks that the offer of sexual favour to him is luck on his part, but we find that, unless the protagonist moves himself away from this woman and her attractions, he will be doomed.

We find in Malamud's protagonists a kind of development from a completely sensual and possessive conception of love to a kind of
love that makes them capable of self-transcendence. The ability to love is the outcome of the protagonist's various experiences in the society. His success or failure in the quest of love ultimately depends on his capacity to love, to accept responsibility in full view of the burdens and disabilities it involves. In Malamud, the understanding of the value of self-less love indicates the protagonist's moral awareness. It involves participation in the lives of others. In Malamud's world, a man's moral maturity, his sense of positive self is calculated by the strength of commitment to the woman whom he accepts. In Malamud's fiction, a character must perceive who he is and to whom he is responsible. By the end of the quest, the protagonist realizes that it is impossible to have an identity without selfless love and commitment, since "the centre of gravity no longer rests in the individual, but in the relation between things".

By self-sacrificing love, the protagonists in Malamud's fiction overcome their ego, cherished by the American materialistic dream. 'Roy Hobbs' of The Natural continues to dream of becoming the greatest there ever was in the baseball. 'Frank Alpine' collaborates with Ward Minogue, and commits robbery on Morris Bober with the hope of becoming a Crime King. 'Seymour Levin' comes to Cascadia as a man of principle, searching for a new life relating to a new mode of living as an English instructor, and to his teaching his own liberal humanistic interest in the arts. 'Yakov Bok' is fed up with the poverty and disgrace of
the Shtetl-life and goes to Kiev as a freethinking individual, being influenced by Spinoza. Fidelman’s failure in painting motivates him to become an art-critic and he goes to Rome with his first chapter on Giotto in a briefcase. ‘Harry Lesser’ of The Tenants has been writing a novel for nine and a half years -its theme being love, and is struggling to complete it. Dubin, at fifty-six, dreams of achieving all that he has missed in the past. Thus in each case, the dream of a bright future acts as an obsession, a personal preoccupation, a myth. Later when the protagonist understands the emptiness and inadequacy of this materialistic dream, the completely myth dominated existence, he is capable of self transcendence and hence moral development.

Self-transcendence is a bitter experience for Malamud’s protagonists because it involves a great deal of suffering. As such Malamud’s protagonists are products of mass society, flexible to human frailties like sex, fame and social status. Originally their basic motives are ‘erotic’ in nature with an overpowering sense of egoism. As a result, they fail in their material ambitions and they suffer. However after each failure a new quest begins which ultimately results in self-realization and self-integration. Giles B. Gunn has said:

The experience of failure in Malamuds’s fiction is simply the testing ground of character; its purpose is to explore the possibilities for moral development and spiritual regeneration, which follow from a recognition of the fact of failure.
Then their visions of life undergo serious changes and they also become more disciplined now. The recognition of the reality and the inevitability of suffering underline their inward growth and moral transcendence, which has been Malamud’s basic concern. Malamud uses “Suffering as a means of defining self”. The quest of Malamud’s characters which initially begins as quest for material success and personal comfort is gradually changed into a moral quest.

Thus Malamud’s protagonists are by nature poor, exposed to suffering and endowed with the capacity of self-examination. Almost always, a Malamud protagonist is an ‘Outsider’. He constantly enters into an alien culture where both his values and the values of the society he enters are examined and evaluated. For example, Yakov Bok leaves his Jewish ‘Shtetl’ and goes to the non-Jewish quarter of Kiev, Russia’s holy city. This leads to a test of both Bok’s Jewishness and the Christianity of the inhabitants in Kiev. As a result, the protagonist is engaged in a two-fold search, first to come to terms with the society around him and the second, to arrive at a deep perception of his own nature or character. And during this period of his struggle for identity, the protagonist first alienates himself from the society around him and tries to live in isolation of his self. But he finds that he can not achieve his aim of creating an identity by remaining in loneliness and by refusing his human obligations to others. As a result he abandons his isolation and enters into tenable relations with others, compromising the demands
of his ego to those of society. Thus through his involvement with other persons, the protagonist arrives at a knowledge of his true self and hence at a deeper knowledge of 'who' he really is.

Malamud seems to indicate that there is a method of escaping the mortal limitations of the human condition. Man need not surrender to the isolation of himself. Instead he should accept his own identity—be it a Jew or Gentile, success or failure, and working within that identity, transcend himself and tear away the prison of his self and society. Thus he can maintain an adjustable relationship with the outside world, preserving his inner basic integrity of self. Thus in Malamud’s fiction, the protagonist seeks his identity through the search for self, love and understanding. So the special kind of heroism which Malamud bestows on his characters may be described as the protagonist’s transcendence of self, society and history.

Malamud’s protagonists are fighters by nature; they make continuous attempts to bring about a change in their moral attitude by learning from their failures. And their changing outlooks allow them to create a pattern of life, which assures them humanity, identity and morality; for Malamud believes that “man is always changing and the changed part of him is all important. I refer to the psyche, to the spirit, the mind, the emotions.”

Malamud’s novels, indeed are tales of suffering; “suffering is Malamud’s theme, and upon it he works a thousand variations: Some
comical, some menacing, some aus‘ere, some grotesque, some imaginative, others classic". That suffering is a discriminative ethnic experience of Jews resulting in its acceptance is a clear fact. Driven from their homeland, condemned to live as exiles and victimized everywhere, the Jews as a tribe have undergone suffering in different forms and the Jewish mind has been moulded by this experience. As such the Jewish religion itself puts stress on suffering as an essential experience for the Jews. In *The Assistant*, Frank Alpine has a wrong idea about the Jews. He thinks that the Jews suffer because they like suffering, for they are Jews. But Morris Bober replies that the Jews suffer, not because they want suffering, but because they suffer for the law “to do what is right, to be honest, to be good.” This corrects Frank’s wrong notion about the Jews and makes him sensitive to the values of righteousness, honesty and goodness. Thus Malamud views suffering as an essential instrument for moral regeneration.

According to Malamud, “the living of life including its struggling and suffering is not simply the fate of man, but the privilege of man.” Suffering in Malamud’s view, “is the human lot, but we need not surrender to despair. To escape suffering is impossible; to live a good life in spite of it is not.” Malamud’s characters do not suffer indifferently, nor do they adopt disconsolate steps to elude suffering. They suffer silently and calmly, knowing that suffering elucidates the realities of life.
In Malamud’s fiction suffering is illustrated as a pain to be braved with dignity and reconciliation.

Malamud is very keen about the hardships of life. Through the description of the fatal struggle for survival Malamud suggests that human suffering is predetermined before existence. A typical Malamud hero does not seek suffering, but suffering is his destiny nevertheless. Malamud exposes a world that is narrow, grave and sombre. People like the Supreme Bookie, Gus Sands and Judge Goodwill Banner whose only ambition in life is to make money at any cost control the world of *The Natural*. The world of *The Assistant* is sick with poverty and criminality. S.Levin comes to Cascadia College, a society marked by intellectual stagnation and deceit. The Kiev prison, to which Yakov is unjustly put into is a perfect example of man’s utter inhumanity to man. The art critic Arthur Fidelman suffers indescribable miseries and humiliations in the hands of thieves, whores, pimps and homosexuals in Italy. The old and huge tenement house in which Harry Lesser lives is covered with poisonous creepers and plants. An atmosphere of severity, of fear, of violence surrounds it. Malamud “uses the setting as a metaphor for social and psychological conditions.” Thus circumstances are so odd that the individual is condemned to failure right from the beginning.

It is clear that suffering plays an important role in Malamudian hero’s quest for identity. But the protagonist’s outlook towards suffering
is more important; he who refuses suffering continues to suffer without any hope of success in his quest. On the other hand by accepting suffering as a precondition of existence, the sufferer is released from despair that shadows his existence and is entitled to lead a more meaningful, value-oriented life. This is what Malamud presents "a world in which sorrow is meaningful." His protagonists suffer acutely, but they are also secular men whose suffering is not always self-chosen and conscious, but undertaken completely for grand reasons or blessed with great rewards.

Malamud depicts in his fiction "the unquestionable dwarfing forces of modern society, the honest, often successful struggle of the individual striving to define himself as a man within a narrow range of active possibilities." In Malamud's fiction, "His characters go on a journey in search of experience, romance... a new life. This is of course, a classic mode in serious and tragic literature from 'Oedipus' to 'Heart of Darkness' where the spiritual or physical journey begins in innocence and ends in experience or tragic self-knowledge. Malamud's heroes must also learn to 'move from blind self-being to self revelation and reality'." In Malamud's fiction, to deny one's past means to deny one's own identity because the present can be understood only by appreciating the effects of the past. Love and suffering are interrelated and help the hero achieve that "inner discipline over his own desires and expectations", which ultimately defines his identity. With this attainment of self-
discipline and self-knowledge, the protagonist becomes competent enough to give as well as to receive love and attain equilibrium in relation to his self, his past and society.

Malamud's protagonists toil hard to save themselves from moral decay and they suffer to attain a human status more or less equal with other ordinary human beings. As a writer of fiction, Malamud creates an integrated moral vision based on certain common values—the supremacy of human aspiration, the regenerative power of love, the mystic power of meaningful suffering and self-sacrifice, the beauty of the human spirit. These aspects in Malamud's characters that are applicable to all human beings irrespective of time, space, religion and nationality carry them to a larger, more secular realm of humanity. Malamud says, "All men are Jews, except that they don't know it." And through suffering Malamud identifies the metaphorical Jew with human beings in general. To Malamud, the Jew is humanity seen under the double aspects of suffering and moral betterment.

In Malamud's works true Jewishness is the ability to suffer wholeheartedly, with a purpose. The agreeable suffering on behalf of others is a symbol of Malamudian hero's having reached maturity and identity. Malamud has once told. "It seems to me that the writer's most important task, no matter what the current theory of man, or his prevailing mood, is to recapture his image as human being as each of us in his secret heart knows it to be, as history and literature have from the
beginning revealed it." As a novelist Philip Roth said, "what it is to be humane, to be humane, is his subject. Connection, indebtedness, responsibility, these are his moral concerns."

Though Malamud writes mostly about his Jewish experience, he does not write for the Jewish community in particular. Malamud proclaims in an interview “Jewishness is important to me, but I don’t consider myself only a Jewish writer,” Malamud says in another interview,” I have interests beyond that, and I feel I am writing for all men.” Actually Malamud’s vision of life is entirely secular and therefore one finds it rather difficult to discriminate exactly a Jew or a Gentile in his fiction. For example, ‘Frank Alpine’, a Gentile in The Assistant finds out at the end of his struggle for moral betterment that there is a Jew in him. In the same way, Yakov Bok, a Jew suffers not only for himself, but for all the innocent victims of man’s inhumanity to man. Sy. Levin of A New Life fights for humanistic ideals of freedom, love and brotherhood relating to all human beings.

Malamud’s characters are not active Jews, nor are their minds formed by a strong sense of community. Morris Bober has not even gone to a synagogue throughout his life and he even tastes a piece of ham whenever he feels his tongue dry. Similarly Yakov Bok abandons his belief in the Jewish God. Arthur Fidelman, Harry Lesser and William Dubin are Jews only by birth and not by actions. In Malamud’s last novel, though the protagonist Calvin Cohn advocates Jewish faith among
the apes, it is told that he has earlier abandoned his religious studies and that his belief in God has seriously reduced. Malamud is not bothered about the external practices of the Jewish life; he is concerned about the spirit of Judaism as also the spirit of the moral experience through suffering and compassion. With Jewishness Malamud affiliates the best qualities in man-honesty, humanism and goodness. For Malamud, “Rituals and customs are mere surface trimmings; all that matters is the human heart; that is man's essential dignity and responsibility to his fellows in a grim, inhuman world.” Morality is the readiness to accept responsibility. A protagonist's glory and the source of his suffering come from the perception of his commitment, duty and responsibility to his neighbour.

Malamud’s idea of Jewishness is clearly expressed in *The Assistant* when Frank Alpine asks Morris Bober what a Jew is; Morris Bober replies that in order to become a Jew all you need is a good heart. Thus according to Malamud, a Jew becomes a symbol for any good man engaged in a struggle against the disgracing and dehumanizing forces of the modern world. So any man who suffers for others and who aspires to be better than he is can be called a Jew. Thus Judaism, for Malamud is simply an origin of humanism.

Since Malamud views suffering as the common destiny of whole humanity, the Jews become representatives of good men struggling to face the dehumanizing pressures of the modern world. According to
Malamud the Jew is specifically a dramatic symbol for man's battle in the modern world. What might have been in the past a problem special to Jews is today the entire mankind's problem. There is the strife for roots within. Thus in Malamud's works, the Jew becomes a solitary man who represents the hopes, fears and possibilities of twentieth-century modern man. And as such we find in contemporary America, the Jew is assimilated into the mainstream of American life, the division between Jewish Americans, and other Americans fast disappearing and "the Americans becoming imaginary Jews".19

Through suffering heroes, who are moved by compassion, Malamud analyses the method of redemption, reasserting the triumph of the human spirit. A positive view of man is the impulse of Malamud's creative imagination. The consistency and logic with which Malamud depicts the probabilities of human triumph over adverse circumstances are but qualities supplied by that faith. Having fully aware of the ambiguous fate of man in the present day impersonal world, Malamud rejects the defeat of the human spirit in an individual. It is sure that man suffers, but by making a few adjustments to the world, he can find some pleasure and peace in life. Malamud believes in the innate goodness and inborn capabilities of man; He thinks that each man is able to learn from his suffering and to become better morally and spiritually.
Although Malamud's characters seem to be victims predetermined to fail and lose, they are not just passive victims of fate and circumstances, because they have in them the capacity to resist or change. They have the spiritual strength within. In fact Malamud himself resists reading his fiction as "writing about losers" and states in an interview with the National Observer that "One of my most important themes is man's hidden strength. I am very much interested in the resources of the spirit; the strength people don't know they have until they are confronted with a crisis." This inner mental strength of characters comes from their compassion to other human beings. e.g.: Compassion in Roy Hobbs of *The Natural* emerges very late in the form of his understanding the feeling and love of Iris Lemon, and it gives him the strength to tear away the corrupt compact with Judge Goodwill Banner. It also enables him for further suffering. Compassion in Seymour Levin of *A New Life* gives him strength to give up his job and assume the responsibility of Pauline Gilley and her adopted children.

Bernard Malamud illustrates in his novels the hidden potentials in man, which always prompts him to fight for the preservation of his life and moral essence. The protagonist having discovered the emptiness of his existence is now in a position to see the possibility of a fuller existence than the one he has been living. Bernard Malamud proves through his adventures into the human psyche that man has enough
physical and spiritual capacity to overcome the destructive forces of society and to find a viable system of values.

And as such, a Malamud protagonist may seem to be a doomed figure, even less than he really may be, but Malamud claims him to be “more than he seems”. Malamud’s protagonists ‘Frank Alpine’ of The Assistant, ‘S. Levin’ of A New Life ‘William Dubin’ of Dubin’s Lives are very ordinary men with no extra talents or capacities. Yet they have the spiritual courage to make very difficult moral choices. ‘Yakov Bok’ the title character of The Fixer spends most of his time in prison waiting for a trial, which he does not know when will happen. He reacts to this calamity alone, and even in the midst of continuous torture and isolation, he does not lose his hold on mental process. As a result, he fights for all innocent victims and finally emerges as a universal hero of all people at all times to come by transcending the national, social and racial barriers. Thus in Malamud’s fiction, even though the protagonist appears to be incapable of achieving the little worldly success he aspires for, has the inner strength in him. The protagonist has tremendous potential for heroism, which he achieves by transcending himself and the world.

Malamud’s concept of heroism is defined in his very first novel The Natural, where Iris Lemon, the spokesperson of Malamud, tells Roy Hobbs the worth of a hero. She tells ‘without heroes we are all plain people and don’t know how far we can go’. That is the reason she hates
to see a hero fail. According to her, the hero is not for himself, but for others. The function of the hero is to be the best and become a model for others to follow. And this heroism can be achieved not merely by breaking records in the fields, but by winning also as a man. That is by ignoring his selfish desires and understanding his responsibilities towards others.

First and foremost Malamud asserts moral integration of his heroes. This internal unity can only be gained when the hero breaks the prison of his self, and comes out into the open to interact with the society. In the process of this mingling with the society he commits mistake after mistake for which he has to suffer. This happens with most of Malamud’s protagonists, but his ultimate protagonist is the one who faces the suffering bravely for the sake of others. Morris Bober, Frank Alpine, Yakov Bok and Sy. Levin are the perfect examples of this kind. Then the protagonists start respecting not only their lives, but the lives of others too. They achieve a state of equilibrium and hence feel responsibility towards others and then struggle to fulfil these responsibilities. During this struggle, they move from immaturity to maturity, from ignorance to knowledge. This gives them the status of successful protagonists. Thus “The character courageous enough to accept his ignominy without being crushed by it is the true hero of Malamud’s opus”.22
Notes and References


9 Sandy Cohn, Bernard Malamud and The Trial by Love (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1974) p. 13.


12 Marc Goldman, Bernard Malamud’s Comic Vision and The Theme of Identity”. p. 96.


17 Ralph Tyler, "A Talk with the Novelist; Bernard Malamud," The New York Times Book Review, February 18, 1979, p. 34.


