Chapter II

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In Malamud’s view, man can achieve moral growth through self-sacrificing love and suffering. As such Malmud’s fiction is full of unending misery and suffering. “The suffering of the Jews is to Bernard Malamud the stuff and substance of his art; from it he has fashioned works of surpassing beauty and integrity and a sure place among the best writers of his time.”

The harshness of suffering, the crushing burden of poverty, the separation of the Jew in a world of gentiles are the hallmarks of Malamud’s fiction, like the fiction of any other post war Jewish American writer. Mark Schechnner observes that “the horror of the recent past stands behind all postwar Jewish-American Fiction.” Bernard Malamud in his fiction radically deals with the oppressed, imbalanced, disintegrated men searching restlessly for individuality and moral integrity. Malamud’s novels illustrate their protagonists involved in a battle against the destructive forces of their cultural and physical environments and eventually victimized by these evil forces. They struggle against the corrupting social and racial problems with a heroic determination and will, so as to defend their life and human attributes.

The major characters of Malamud’s novels are a baseball player, a grocery store assistant, an ex-drunkard turned college lecturer, a poor fixer man, an artist who is self-declared failure, a writer who is unable to finish his novel and a biographer. All of them have faced disrespect in one
The Malamud character is harassed by his sense of having been selected for suffering. He is isolated, unsuccessful, unloved, slashed and tormented by situations and circumstances. As he comes out into the fictional world, his impression and behaviour exposes his unworldliness and inadequacy. The society into which he comes to pursue chances for a better life, of course, is doubtful of him and hinders his entry. Pop Fisher, the manager of the 'New York Knights', is in the beginning reluctant to admit Roy Hobbs in his team. Similarly Morris Bober asks Frank Alpine, the stranger to practise some other means of earning his livelihood other than the grocery store. His wife Ida, dislikes Frank's presence in the store and compels her husband to turn the stranger out. Professor Fairchild's instruction to the new English teacher during his first meeting with him is quite repelling. Fidelman's involvement with Susskind, a Jewish refugee from Rome, gives him no hope to continue in Italy. Harry Lesser lives in Levenspiel's old, decayed building under the continuous threat of his being compelled to vacate it. William Dubin, the honourable biographer, has to continue his affair with Fanny in extreme privacy for fear not only of his wife, but also of Roger Foster who desires to marry the girl. In every protagonist, the social and cultural hindrances increase the feeling of loneliness and marginality. The absence of social freedom makes his life absurd and pitiable. He becomes a scapegoat to the hidden conspiracy of society and of luck.
The setting and atmosphere to which the Malamud protagonist is exposed convey continually the feeling that man born into this world, is forever condemned to failure and that the surroundings prevail for him are terrific and pitiable by the very presence of their existence. Marcus Klein remarks:

The radiant artifacts of Bernard Malamud’s fiction have been the shrouds and graves of Jews; rusty caftans and rusty black derbies, decrepit tenements, gloomy grocery stores smelling of poverty, of age and of inviolate failure--------- the Jewish community -------- which was traditionally denied the priority of existence, has been the constant condition of his sensibility.3

A typical Malamud character is separated from the society in which he lives by the clear fact of poverty. All Malamud’s protagonists have an impoverished, pain stricken, humiliating past which robs them of human essence and identity. Roy Hobbs, the protagonist of The Natural recalls his past like this: “After my grandma died, the old man damped me in one orphan home after the other, wherever he happened to be working---."He mentions his mother as “ ‘A whore’. She spoiled my old man’s life. He was a good guy but died young"4(P.174). Frank Alpine also has a humiliating, shameful past. He tells Morris Bober: “The week after I was born my mother was dead and buried. I never saw her face, not even a picture------. I was raised in an orphans’ home and when I was eight they farmed me out to a tough family. I ran away ten times, also from the next people I lived with” (p.30). Seymour Levin of A New Life is an ex-drunkard. His father was a thief and mother, a mad woman. He has taken to drinking for several years
before he comes to Cascadia College. His past is not any better than that of Roy Hobb’s or Frank Alpine’s. Levin recalls, “The emotion of my youth was humiliation. That wasn’t only because we were poor. My father was continuously a thief. Always thieving, always caught, he finally died in prison. My mother went crazy and killed herself. One night I came home and found her sitting on the kitchen floor looking at a bloody bread knife” (P.186). Yakov Bok’ the fixer, remarks about his own life in Shtetl in Tsarist Russia. “I have had to dig with my fingernails for a living. What can anybody do without capital? ------ I have been an orphan too long. All I have to my name after thirty years in this graveyard is sixteen rubles that I got from selling everything I own”(P.7). The protagonist ‘William Dubin’ of Dabin’s Lives remembers from his past that he has a younger brother who has drowned to death. And after the death of his brother, his mother “had become -------- mentally ill ----. After a failed attempt at committing suicide she died ‘at forty, of pleurisy and anguish”’(P.69). These are the descriptions of life which Malamud protagonists project. And as such a Malamud protagonist is a lonely, frustrated individual often haunted by the memory of his past.

In spite of the humiliating, obscure past, Malamud’s protagonists have great ambitions relating to material success in future, which they foolishly and innocently pursue. And these aspirations for worldly success act as tragic flaws in their character. For example, Roy Hobbs dreams of becoming the greatest baseball player. Frank Alpine dreams of becoming a
Crime King. As a result of cherishing these false dreams, a Malamud protagonist moves from failure to failure, from suffering to suffering. Hence they become victims of social surroundings, fate and of themselves; obviously inefficient of salvation in human terms.

In *The Natural*, Malamud’s first novel, both Roy’s weakness and society’s corruption assist his ultimate tragedy. The novel probes “the comi-tragic paradoxes of modern existence” as reflected in the “progressive corruption of a basically honest professional athlete.” As we examine the novel, we feel that Malamud is being thrilled by the question “Why does a talented man sell out?” which advocates a moral predicament. The novel not only challenges the question but also acts as a clue to the answer. It seems to suggest that in Roy’s moral deficiency talent and goodness cannot unite together forming an integrated self. Roy has turned up from an obscure village with extraordinary physical co-ordination, childlike ignorance and with firm belief that he would be the greatest player there ever was in the baseball. But Roy is unable to overcome his sensual weakness, which progressively prevents his career upliftment as a baseball hero.

Early in the novel, we find Roy Hobbs on his way to Chicago to make his career in baseball, which he wants to ‘hang on for ever’, (P. 10). He feels that he is “done for something very big” and that one day he would “break every record in the book for throwing and hitting” (P. 31). On the train he accidentally meets Harriet Bird, ‘the silver eyed mermaid’ with whom Roy
feels impatient to have sex. She offers him sex, but not love. Later we find
that after reaching Chicago, when Roy goes to her hotel room to have sex
with her, he meets with a strange incident. There he cannot fair well in his
crucial test by Harriet because he does not apprehend the unavoidable link
that associates all human beings. As a result, Harriet shoots him down
with a silver bullet. This makes him suffer for fifteen years.

In the second part of the novel, ‘Batter up!’ when Roy enters into the
baseball world after fifteen years, he is not a morally developed fellow. He
lacks mental maturity. Tony Tanner comments “the main focus of the book
is on Roy’s personal moral failure.”7 He is egotistic and self-centred with
strong desire for women, status, money and good food. According to
Wesserman, Roy’s weak point is clearly fixed in his “selfish infantilism of
spirit.”8 He is troubled by his own selfish, materialistic wants which he
hopes to accomplish. Since Roy has never learnt anything from past
experiences, he is destined to undergo suffering again. Thus Roy Hobbs
becomes “an archetype for all Malamud’s small heroes, who like their larger
Greek and Shakespearean counterparts- fall victim to a tragic flaw
aggravated by misfortune.”9 Roy’s habit of ignoring his past life acts as the
root cause of his inadequacy to cope with the present situation. As a direct
consequence, the corrupt, degenerate, materialistic world fascinates him.

At the age of thirty-two, Roy hopefully joins the team ‘New York
Knights’ as an outfielder. Bump Baily declares the team as ‘ the lousiest
team in the world’. It is highly unconstituted, disunited team. The team’s
promising player Bump Baily is a 'practical joker' who is not bothered about anyone, ever if it is his team’s manager Pop Fischer. Judge Goodwill Banner, the owner of the team, is an evil and crooked person, who works hard to send away Pop Fischer out of his job and “has by his sly ways forced all sorts of trades on us which make money all right but hurt the team” (P.60). Roy comes into this evil dominated atmosphere.

People like Judge Goodwill Banner, Gus Sands—the gambler and Memo Paris, whose only aim in life is to make money by any means, dominate the world of *The Natural*. The forces of evil work in the persons the Gus Sands, the Judge Goodwill Banner and Memo Paris and they never hesitate to cheat other innocent people for their own welfare. Roy falls after Memo Paris, the alluring woman of the American sensual world, who acts the role of ‘the destructive mother’. Earl R. Wesserman views Roy’s pursuit of Memo as “the selfish attachment to the terrible mother that introverts and blocks the psychic energy that could flow outwardly from the mature hero and restore the world”. And Judge Goodwill Banner is an entirely corrupt man with no chance of liberation from wicked ways. He is utterly selfish, crooked and hard-hearted. He is the apt representative of a morally corrupt, degenerate America. He has got clear conviction that the society prefers things to people and that its materialistic, corrupt ideas justifies the change of people into things, objects to be utilized.

During the stage of the hero’s assimilation into the society, the protagonist strives intensely to have socio economic triumph. Roy does
hard work to become the greatest in baseball. Roy, who has undergone a series of failures, comes to a place where success of any kind is a distant probability. Ex:- What Red and others call ‘Fisher's Famous Flop’ (P.59) refers to Roy’s meaningless past.

Further the Judge denies Roy a hike in pay and tells him instead maxims on ambition. Like ‘polonius’ of ‘The Hamlet’, the judge likes meaningful parables and in his room is kept a framed motto piece of various choice quotations. The Judge talks in a round about way, using high sounding phrases and idioms, showing his lack of feeling. What Roy gets for his request for an increase of salary is only maxims on the corrupting attraction of money. “What I am saying is that emphasis upon money will pervert your values. One cannot begin to imagine how one’s life may alter for the worse under the impetus of wealth seeking”(95). The Judge, the money worshipping owner of the New York Knights not only does not pay any heed to Roy’s requests for pay-hike but concludes the meeting by asking Roy to return the extra uniform given to him.

Memo Paris, the money minded seductress obviously working for Judge Goodwill Banner is a wicked woman. Memo remains an attraction for Roy, and in his passionate pursuit of her, he over satisfies his appetite and crumples. The second lengthy meeting between Roy and the Judge happens in the hospital and Roy is compelled by the judge to deceive his team. The Judge allures Roy by means of Memo Paris. He also promises to pay Roy thirty-five thousand dollars to cheat his team against the Pirates. As Earl S.
Wesserman says "The Judge is the futility of all codes artificially imposed from without religion, the law, codified morality, golden maxims, and he is an illustration of how they can be hypocritically applied".11

Yielding to the attractions of money and Memo Paris, Roy, in the beginning expresses readiness to betray his team because he is incapable of distinguishing between what is right and wrong. But eventually Roy develops moral sensibility, with the help of Iris Lemon and he beats the Judge and returns the money after his failure in the final try off.

"Roy took the envelope out of his pocket. He slapped the Judge's wig and eyeshade off and showered the thousand dollar bills on his wormy head -----------. The Judge made groans and pig squeals. With his foot Roy shoved the carcass off the table. He hit the floor with a crash and had a bowel movement in his pants. He lay moaning amid the betting slips and bills" (P221-222).

Roy's inefficiency to come to terms with his past experiences and sufferings is the result of his denial of himself. Even though he has gone through bitter experiences, suffering has never taught him to aspire the right things in life. In the end we see Roy walking along the street with great loneliness and frustration thinking about the emptiness with which he has lived his life. "He thought, I never did learn anything out of my past life, now I have to suffer again" (P. 222).

What Roy does not understand is that life too is a game of opportunities and circumstances and that one has to make life better by maintaining appropriate relationship with others. He remains in a condition of ignorance, refuses Iris Lemon, his only possibility of redemption. He does
not perceive that suffering is an assertion of oneness with other people – the partaking in other’s lives, thus redeeming their burden. It is the one “possibility of love.” Here Malamud suggests that “only when Roy loses his baseball life is he in a position to gain his new and more natural life with Iris and his child, which she carries, for Roy must suffer quite a bit and learn from his suffering before he can realize that if he tries to ignore his past, he will be destined to relive it”. Hence The Natural reflects the theme that one should suffer in order to achieve meaning in life. Suffering teaches us to want the right things at the right time. Suffering helps to develop moral discipline and mental balance necessary in life. Thus the novel acts as a clue to “the nature of forces against which his (Malamud’s) later heroes must struggle” and “the ritual gestures by which they must preserve themselves”.

Bernard Malamud’s The Assistant is the tale of a man’s attempts to transform himself into a good person. Ben Seigel comments that the novel is “a probing and disturbing study of modern man’s social and spiritual confusion.” Anyway Malamud has surely planned the book to be an interesting study of man’s “struggle for moral excellence and the wish to be good”. There are mainly two victims in The Assistant namely Morris Bober and Frank Alpine, representing the two phases of suffering, one relating to outward factors and the other due to mental conflicts. Morris is a characteristic Jewish sufferer to whom what the world offers throughout his life is unrelieved suffering. Morris Bober is a victim of fate,
opportunities, religion and society: “The right thing was to make the right choice but he, made the wrong. Even when it was right it was wrong”. 

William Goyen believes that the novel is “about simple people struggling to make their lives better in a world of bad luck”.

The Bober family is suffering terribly with the burden of unfulfilled hopes and desires. Morris Bober, an old man of declining health realizes the true spirit of suffering and views it as an essential aspect of human existence. His wife Ida Bober partakes her husband’s existential anguish.

Morris Bober and his wife Ida work hard for about sixteen hours a day in a tomb-like grocery store, seldom making out a living. The struggling daily work starts at six o’clock in the morning when Morris Bober gets up and goes to the store to give the first customer, a sour-faced Polish lady, her daily free bread. Giles B. Gunn says, “Suffering in this case is the one mode of both engaging the world and surviving it. It is the name of what you can achieve if you are fully human”. The business comes to an end very late at night. They keep working in the grocery store at odd hours and this increases their tension and misery. Morris and Ida are more than fifty years of age, and have abandoned their hopes and aspirations for better life. They have even abandoned the promise of a bright future for their only daughter Helen, because of their poverty.

After working long hours in the grocery store, Morris is fed up with self-hatred and disappointment at the poor income of the grocery store. The store is described several times as an ‘open tomb’. For them relief
continues to be an illusionary pleasure and not a reality. His only refreshment and relaxation from the tiring, grief stricken life of the grocery is the taking sleep in the afternoons. Morris's ambition of selling the store for moderate money and taking up some other business continues to be a dream all his life.

The setting of *The Assistant* thus seems severe, grim without any chance for economic progress or material success and there the traditional values of honesty, compassion and hard work go meritless and even absurd. The Bobers are such people oppressed by poverty, frustration and bad luck whom an accomplishing, materialistic and mechanical civilization has regarded as useless. America has shattered their hopes and aspirations. "He had hoped for much in America and got little. And because of him Helen and Ida less. He had defrauded them, he and the blood sucking store"(P.30). Surely Ida and Helen, caught in the American Materialistic Dream, which has already separated success from compassion, selflessness and morality, condemn or look down upon the value of Morris's real achievement in spiritual levels.

"I said Papa was honest, but what was the good of such honesty if he couldn't exist in this world?---- Poor Papa ;being naturally honest, he didn't believe that others come by their dishonesty naturally. And he couldn't hold onto those things he had worked so hard to get. He gave away, in a sense, more than he owned--. He knew, at least what was good ----.People liked him, but who can admire a man passing his life in such a store?"(P.196).

Walter Shear comments:
"The Assistant deals basically with an implicit conflict between a heritage of ancient wisdom and traditional values and the American atmosphere of practicality and success, a conflict which not merely envelopes the character but since they are not fully aware of its influence—exists as a constant source of confusion and bewilderment."^{20}

In Morris Bober we find, an archetypal Jewish sufferer, a Job-like victim, who suffers continuously because it is the fate allotted to him. He is a toy of opportunities and of chance. Because of his unshakable truthfulness and firm compassionate conviction that people are far better than they appear, Morris is destined to remain in poverty and material wants. "Like Roy Hobbs, he does not learn from the past, he continues to believe human beings are better than their action; he continues in spite of all the evidence of suffering to extend the grace of trust".^{21}

The Bobers lead a life marked by ill luck and material wants. In fact, they are victims of circumstances. Morris painfully grieves about the shortage of material prospects for his honesty and hard work while the falsity and treachery of his ex-partner and neighbour Karp prospers. Malamud depicts three Jewish families living in the same area of Gentile locality in New York. They are respectively the Karps, the Pearls and the Bobers.

Julius Karp, a Jewish neighbour of Morris is a distinguished wealthy man, running prosperous business; He is the type of man who can live without any financial difficulty, even in the worst times. With cleverness, he has secured the liquor licence during the end of the prohibition period.
After that he has left the business of cheap shoes for the magnetic wine bottles. By this way, Karp has earned sufficient wealth in such a small, remote village. Karp makes money by selling the life destructive liquor which helps to decline the moral awareness of an ordinary man. Its dangerous effects are compared with the life providing milk of Morris Bober. Morris's disregard for the liquor selling is clearly reflected in his remark 'A business for drunken bums' (P.6).

Morris acts as the symbol of honesty, compassion and bad luck. He never thinks that Karp's prosperity is the result of his dishonesty and selfishness. When Karp gets frightened that those unidentified robbers might raid his store, he goes to Morris Bober and requests him to ring up to the police if the thieves appear. "The obligation to remain open in case Karp returns freezes Bober in the store, while Karp runs off and leaves Bober as the robber's only victim". Morris Bober has got great communal responsibility, whereas Karp tries to avoid the human relations that connects him with other fellow Jews.

The Pearls also act in a way as to resist the ethics developed by Morris Bober. While "He neglected the store----, Sam's luck with the nags was exceptional and he had nicely supported Nat in college until the scholarships started rolling in" (12). Like any brave man, who is ready to undertake risks, he spends his time thinking about the means of making money and material comforts. Such an initiation requires complete dedication and it demands that all the situations and opportunities
bringing in money should be exploited to the maximum, neglecting moral aspects. To Malamud and also to Morris Bober, such a commitment to material prospects acts as a foil to human values.

Nat Pearl also is not away from the selfish, money minded attitude of his father. As a second year student of law, he aspires to create for himself high social status by means of accumulating wealth. Under the worldly father's influence, he also likes to become part of the American Materialistic Dream and that his education, his job and his high worldly culture contribute for that purpose. Malamud suggests that Nat has selected the law because it provides opportunities for making money and power in society, by accepting bribe from other people. Nat might use the law for cajoling, reasoning and pardoning crimes. His associations with Helen Bober are attuned by Nat's assurance and not by his moral convictions. He has persuaded her to act in such a way, resisting her personally developed moral essence and values. To both Louis Karp and Nat Pearl, Helen seems to be an object to be attained and used. This adds to the difficulties of Helen Bober.

Though luck does not favour Morris Bober, his suffering does not crumple him. He is capable of extending compassion to other people leading poverty-stricken miserable life. Due to his unwavering personal integrity and capacity to undergo severe suffering, he acts as a "lightening conductor for the whole neighbourhood."
Frank Alpine, the hero of Malamud’s *The Assistant*, is a sensitive young man, a drifter, extremely poor, having no clear idea about the aim of his life and indefinite of his identity. The novelist describes the immediate impression of Frank Alpine, as expressed through the eyes of other fictional characters. Sam Pearl, a Jewish neighbour of Morris observes that the stranger (Frank Alpine) “looked bleary, unhappy—. He looks half in his grave” (24). Helen gets puzzled at his very appearance as “his eyes were haunted, hungry, sad; She---- had made up her mind to give him a dime, but instead he disappeared” (25). To Morris Bober, he “looked defeated, humiliated, like somebody---- who had lost out on something he had wanted badly” (28). Thus the image of Frank Alpine provided by Malamud suggests Frank leading the life of a victim.

Malamud slowly reveals the causes of Frank Alpine’s sufferings. He is not very much away from Malamud’s earlier character, Roy Hobbs. He shares with Roy Hobbs innocence, immaturity and sensual attraction. He comes to Bober’s grocery store with the aim of getting acquainted with Bober’s only, young and pretty daughter Helen.

From the time Frank enters Bober’s store, we find in him continuous mental conflicts due to saintly and criminal impulses. Frank Alpine has both saintly and criminal drives in him implied by his worshipping of St. Francis and his mingling with the criminal Ward Minogue correspondingly. Frank is troubled by the ambition to be saintly like St. Francis on one side
and the strong drive to define his identity by means of crime and violence like Ward Minogue on the opposite side.

Frank is extremely drawn towards Helen. In the initial stage, it is only outward fascination. He becomes so eager to have her that he watches through the bathroom window to see her naked. He also 'steals from Bober's cashbox everyday' (64). Though Frank justifies his action on the basis that he is assisting Bober to prosper the business, he gets restless and feels 'remorseful' in his inner mind and 'exhorts himself to be honest' (58).

Morris Bober acts as the divine father to Frank Alpine. By his relationship with Morris Bober, Frank perceives the true value of mutual suffering. Once when Frank gets doubtful about the extreme suffering of the Jews, Morris answers that a Jew suffers “to do what is right, to be honest, to be good.” This means to other people. ‘Our life is hard enough. Why should we hurt somebody else? ------We ain't animals----. This is what a Jew believes----’. ‘---If a Jew forgets the Law, Morris ended, ‘he is not a good Jew, and not a good man’ (p.106). This advice helps Frank to practise the good qualities of truthfulness, selflessness and hard work. Then he starts admiring the struggling and sufferings of Morris Bober, for the poor, pathetic people like Breitbart, the peddler and the drunken woman who waits for edibles, even though she has not paid her earlier credits to Morris. Thus Morris is a “saintly or sacrificial hero, Christ-like in spirit, who found
his being in victimization, and who acted, even though ironically as a redemptive figure, a 'savior.'”

After working as the assistant of Morris, Frank cultivates phases of reform. But he can not overcome the habit of thieving money. He once more steals from Bober's cash register to pay the bill for his encounter with Helen in the park. This time Bober captures him directly and rages out at him. In spite of Morris's mercy for the much ashamed grocery clerk, he turns him out, for he did not want the criminal around.

The nature of Frank is that he would spoil an adventure in briskness due to impatience. Hence, he is surrounded by a series of troubles. Even though he lovingly desires for Morris's daughter Helen, he himself assaults her while rescuing her from Ward Minogue's attack. By this very act, he destroys every possibility of winning her love. Later he feels hatred of himself. "He moaned; he got instead of a happy ending, a bad smell. If he could root out what he had done, smash and destroy it; but it was done, beyond him to undo"(p149).

By this criminal act, Frank's guilty feelings rise to summit. He regrets and determines to compensate for his earlier lapses in every probable way. With a feeling of commitment and loyalty, Frank embraces much struggling and suffering in order to make the ambitions of Helen fulfilled. Since in Malamud's fiction to love means to suffer for that person, it is essential that Frank must undergo great suffering for his loving person, Helen: "Suffering is the one possibility of love. Therefore it is morality itself." So Frank toils
sincerely in the grocery store during the time of Bober’s sickness, and offers his self-sacrificing service to improve the condition of the Bober’s family. He prepares himself for that by going through the ordeal of severe mental and physical agony. Walter Allen finds “the theme of purgation through the acceptance of the burden of other’s suffering” central to The Assistant.

The end of Morris’s life is the most heart-breaking incident in the novel. When Karp’s liquor store is demolished by fire, he plans to purchase Morris’s grocery store so as to substitute the liquor store. Morris is delighted at the diversion of his business leading to good fortune. In that cheerful spirit he removes the snow on the roadside so that the churchgoers can pass through easily. Resulting from this charitable act, Morris gets severely infected by double pneumonia and thus ends his life in the hospital. Bober gives his life compassionately so that “other’s might live”. Before dying, Morris thinks deeply about his own life and makes an assessment of it. And Morris’s evaluation of his own life is full of deplorable, woeful and disappointing thoughts. “He thought of his life with sadness--. His mood was of regret; I gave away my life for nothing. It was the thunderous truth”(193). Even though Morris could not make any progress in material terms, he has attained a sure victory in humanitarian aspects. Many good people accompany Morris’s funeral. According to the Rabby, Morris is a real Jew. “He suffered, he endured, but with a hope--. For such reasons he was a jew”(196).
Frank’s befalling and getting out of the Bober’s grave during the time of his funeral is allusive of the assistant’s reincarnation. By acting in such a manner, he identifies himself with the dead grocer, which is the final complete act of self-offering. The Jewish Law, the essence of which is to suffer continuously for others, has prompted the young grocery assistant to make serious involvement with other human beings. After Morris’s death, Frank takes upon himself the task of running the grocery store to keep the Bobers away from financial difficulties. In a way Frank has selected eternal suffering to be his life. Thus the novel acts as pessimistic and hopeless in materialistic outlook but “the final effect is one of moral beauty”.  

The novel *A New Life* is an academic burlesque describing its protagonist Sy. Levin’s venture for a meaningful life. Robert Bowen says, “No other American novel gives as clear a report of normal state university life in the usual administrative procedures of departmental espionage, blackmail, subordination and assorted shenanigans”. Granville Hicks points out that it is “basically a serious novel, about the difficulties of leading the good life”. It investigates the development of the moral attributes of Seymour Levin. Levin’s vocation discloses “not man as teacher, but teacher as man”. Levin, Like Frank Alpine, is afflicted by his loveless, lonely and grim childhood, an aimless, unworthy youth and a troublesome past. He is such a man who has cherished a mode of life with clear intellectual awareness. Levin’s displeasure due to his isolated past and his separation from the society are the major characteristics of his personality.
His search is to unite and bring to harmony the unrecognized and unembodied self. Sy. Levin is a self-reflexive person overtired by the burden of his past mistakes. "Each day his past weighed more", 42 (p.177) for he had not yet started to live because he "no longer knew where to begin"(246).

Levin reaches Cascadia thinking "that a new place will inspire change-in one's (his) life"(15) and will bring about favourable surroundings for operating his humanistic conceptions to practical use. After reaching Cascadia, "Levin saw himself fleeing with both heavy bags when he learned the next morning that Cascadia college wasn't a liberal arts college"(p.22).

Levin is the classic Malamudian protagonist. He is a foreigner in every aspect-a city preoccupied easterner in a small western town, a Jew in the middle of the gentiles, a humanist in a college that has annihilated its liberal arts section immediately after World War I.

From the very beginning, after his arrival at Cascadia College, he sees a lot to condemn the English department. In the department literature is neglected for the teaching of grammar, a study whose most authentic book is the chairman's grammar text 'The Elements of Grammar'. The departmental objective as declared by Prof. Fairchild, Head of Department, is "to satisfy the needs of the professional schools on the campus with respect to written communication" (36). Even the composition work has its reader to follow 'Science in Technology'. The college trains professionals like engineers, foresters, farmers etc.; It is job oriented. A few literature courses are already prearranged for others; Levin is asked to teach only essays. The
students are interested only in securing marks and not in developing creative talents. The chairman, Orville Fairchild is boastful of his anti liberal arts department, which is in fact devoid of genius of any kind. As Gerald Gilley comments “The atmosphere is relaxed, There’s no ‘publish or perish’ hanging over everybody’s head. There are no geniuses around to make you uncomfortable” (p.33). The chairman, Orville Fairchild, considers Roosevelt as a real communist person and is very much happy to have eliminated a class work for the discussion of ‘The Communist Manifesto’.

Levin in his recently appointed post as chairman of the textbook committee, sees himself against the prescribed textbooks and the rules and regulations of the Cascadia English Department. Levin finds that his colleagues teach ‘The Elements of Grammar’ with the aim of making their students pass through the departmental objective grammar text, and that they admire not only the chairman’s antiquated text book, but also his age-old ancient political viewpoints. Levin finds himself surrounded in an atmosphere of cowardice where he earlier hoped freedom and courage. Even the nature seems to be deceptive. The wood that overshadows in the beginning of the novel becomes no wilderness at all, but the remains of the ancient forestry school.

Soon after his arrival at Cascadia, Levin learns from Gerald Gilley that Cascadia is a conventional, unprogressive state and that “we (the Cascadians) usually take a long look around before we commit ourselves to any important changes in our way of life” (P.25). Changes of any kind are
not experimented, because it might lead to bitterness and displeasure from the public. So Professor Fairchild's grammar text 'The Elements of Grammar' has gone through many editions. As Levin understands these realities, he feels very strong denial of his ambitions. His encounter with Fairchild, chairman of the English Department, brings into light more bleak truths. The old professor introducing himself in a formal way suggests Levin a little bit of wisdom. "You can't fell a tree, run a four-lane highway over a mountain or build a dam with poetry" (P.36). Such is the condition of the section named 'The Liberal Arts Service Division'. The professor explains in detail about two types of people in the teaching field. "One is the misfit who sneaks into escape his inadequacy elsewhere---and the other is the aggressive pest whose one purpose is to upset other people's applecarts, and the more apples, the better" (37-38). He refers to Leo Duffy, the revolutionary English lecturer discharged from his post, because of his new ideas and principles, with whom Levin is to associate himself during the period of his living in the Cascadia society.

Malamud pictures Levin in the novel as a reincarnation of Leo Duffy. He introduces Duffy for the first time in the novel in connection with Levin. Levin also cherishes in his mind Leo Duffy's ideas, ambitions and habits. Although he assures himself not to re-act Duffy's wrongs, he sees himself engaging Duffy's office and re-existing only to perform Duffy's luckless anti-social ideals. He also loves Pauline Gilley, whom Duffy had loved earlier. By inventing a character, which acts as an extension of Duffy, Malamud
foretells the vulnerability of Levin's condition at the college and in a way, also foretells his future. But Levin overthrows his probable fate by fighting continuously in favour of his principles. He fights for his ideals and in that way stands for 'order, value, accomplishment, love' (P.175) which are the features of a well-founded and reliable society.

Levin requests the authorities to eliminate some useless books from the prescribed syllabus and replace them with books representing the liberal arts. He enters into a debate with Dr. Gerald Gilley, a senior professor in the department about the necessity of introducing the study of liberal arts. Levin opposes the professor's viewpoint that the liberal arts do not contribute to the national purpose. Levin suggests that "The Liberal Arts- as you know-since ancient times-have affirmed our rights and liberties. Socrates-----"(24). Levin believes that mechanical and scientific studies cannot promote the spurt of the human soul. Therefore, they cannot make a suitable atmosphere for spiritual and mental freedom. Levin quotes Mill in order to emphasize his ideas: "Men are men before they are lawyers or physicians or manufacturers............"(255). In Levin's opinion, man's humanity is of utmost significance and democracy assures suitable surroundings for its free growth. But, only those who value life can have full faith in a 'democratic society'. Levin strongly feels that it is liberal arts that provide us the positive, spiritual aspects of life.

Looking into the performance of his students, Levin is discouraged with his teaching. He at times finds himself "engaged in a great irrelevancy
teaching people how to write who don't know what to write" (107). “I can give them subject, but not subject matter. I worry I’m not teaching how to keep civilization from destroying itself ”(p.108). He wants to express his convictions of life by means of the liberal arts and in that way provide students their subject matter.

Levin strongly believes that a man’s worth is decided by his own courage to support his doctrines even in the midst of severe opposition. He has come to the west to contribute sincerely to the principles of democracy, humanism, liberalism and art. But his ideals are formed from his reading of books and are not strengthened by practical knowledge. Gerald Gilley notices that his incompetence as a liberal activist is caused mainly due to his false conviction that his mode of thinking is correct and others are wrong. Levin even tries to force his ideas on others without taking care to understand how the local people think.

Simultaneously, in his private life, Levin struggles hard to adapt his sensitivity to his moral ideals. Malamud thus reveals through the character of Levin “a sense of personal worth of the individual without labels, without faction—a sense that the hero must acquire for himself through his quest.”33 His first three love affairs do not satisfy him and as a result there forms severe self-hatred in his mind.

Levin’s association with Pauline Gilley throws light to his potential search for emotional integrity. His relationship with Pauline sways between reciprocal fascination and separation causing contradictory impulses. Both
want emotionally integrated life but are hesitant to take risk at the cost of their present state of social security. Levin and Pauline are both uncertain about their attitudes towards each other, as their association threatens the new life envisioned by Levin and the safety enjoyed by Pauline as the wife of Gerald Gilley. Pauline herself is confused by her unfaithfulness to her husband who is kind and generous to her. Levin's mental conflict increases, as he becomes more and more aware of the gulf between the ideals he proclaims and those he practises. Like Helen, Pauline also does not realize that Levin is her 'man of possibilities' and never feels any kind of dedication to him. Levin's moral progress also becomes unsteady, as he realizes that the only way for his redemption lies in securing emotional integrity, but finds himself incapable of making commitment.

Levin's dilemma relating to the choice between separation and devotion is evident in the short break in his relationship with Pauline. During this time Levin feels severe physical and mental agony. So, at last, he comes out with a clear vision, capable of doing justice to Pauline. Like Frank Alpine, who accepts Judaism, Levin accepts Pauline and rises to the status of a hero by "willingly taking a load of family commitments". He devotes himself to Pauline, as well as her adopted children knowing fully well, the difficulties it would create. One sees "the Jewish 'suffering' in Levin's final predicament-the moral assumption of the burdensome Pauline". He embraces the responsibility of supporting a family simply for the sake of his principles without any hope of job. Thus at the end of the
novel, "Levin achieves a kind of unsought heroism in sacrificing his career for the principle of love, a love in itself dormant, a memory beyond feeling". Grebstein points out, for Levin "Sex becomes love, and love becomes commitment".

Levin’s suffering comes from his assuming responsibility willingly for others. Thus Levin secures an insight into the significance of suffering and emerges with an identity refined by his devotion to others. Page Stegner finds, the novel mainly concerned with Levin’s "gradual commitment to becoming a man of principle".

Bernard Malamud’s next novel The Fixer shows his constant worry about man’s search for identity through struggling and apprehension of the past life. Ihab Hassan says, In The Fixer Malamud “distils history into a parable of terror and absurdity resisted, superhumanly, to the last” and “restores to all men not merely justice or dignity but a place, a meaning, in the universe”.

Yakov Bok’ the hero of The Fixer is a poor handy-man renounced by his wife and disappointed with his life. The fixer being an odd job man earns his livelihood by painting, plastering and fixing up broken things. Earning very small amount by fixing the broken things of his distressed Jewish community, the fixer denounces his fate and his survival. As a victim of fate, his father died early in his life. To add to his miseries his wife Raisl has deserted him after seven years of childless marriage. Drinking his tea without sugar, the fixer thinks more about his poverty. "It tasted bitter and he blamed existence"(p.5). So Yakov determines to leave
the Shtetl, convincing himself that the change of place would surely bring good luck. Like Roy Hobbs and Frank Alpine, he is a man of material ‘wants,’ “a full stomach now and then ……………”(12).

Severely pained by his failure in life, Yakov puts the blame both on himself and the external circumstances. “I've been cheated from the start” (11) regrets Yakov. At thirty he is completely frustrated about life. He remarks to Shmuel, his father-in-law, “Death is the last of my worries”(p.14). He does not obey his father-in-law’s requests to stay in Shtetl itself and starts his fateful journey to Kiev. “Yakov didn’t look back……. The past was a wound in the head”(p.13-14). And he discards the history of his race and his worthless past. As he marches towards Kiev, he has many fears in his mind about his unpredictable future.

Would he go on in the same useless poverty and drab experience amid masses of Jews as poor as he, or somehow come to a better way of life? – already thirty. Jobs for him were always scarce. With just the few rubles in his pocket how long would he last before starving? Why should tomorrow be better than today? Had he earned the privilege?(p.20).

Daringly undertaking the dangerous journey at the age of thirty, Yakov is on the way to his mental and physical breakdown. It is not so easy to walk along the road as he has envisioned. Until Shmuel escorts him the journey is easy; afterwards it becomes a series of difficulties. On the way the wagon breaks into pieces making the remaining journey extremely difficult. It is seen that these starting misfortunes act as a direct hint to the coming adversities, at the hands of the anti-semites. Bok’s incapacity to
activate the quick movement of the horse shows “the psychological inability to project movement from within himself”.

The boatman looking like Charon of Hell carries him across the Dnieper river. The unidentified boatman is an archetypal representative of the anti-semites. Hearing the word Jew, he rages out against the Jews and expresses his desire of the total massacre of the Jews by any means. He tells Yakov “I don’t mean kill a Zhid now and then with a blow of the first or kick in the head, but wipe them all out.....”(27). At this Bok gets frightened, drops his phylacteries (Prayer books) in the river and hides his Jewish existence. His throwing away the prayer books in the river suggest the disinheriance of his religion. Book goes on hiding his real identity. Having cut off his beard, he accepts a new name, discards his religion and plans to live with the inhabitants in Kiev.

In the Tsarist Russia the Jews were regarded as the most undesirable persons of the society. There were certain significant laws only for the Jews, which degraded them to greater standards of inferiority, both social and political. If they made any kind of wrong to other people, the Jews were subjected to pogroms. The anti-semites regarded the Jews as Christ-killers and threatened them that if they re-acted the crucifixion by killing innocent children, strict punishment would be awarded. They were also viewed as the devils’ agents working to degenerate the entire world.

In Kiev, Yakov accidentally meets a drunken man lying covered in the snow. The man, Nikolai Maximovitch Labedev is an active member of the
spiteful anti-semitic organization called 'The Black Hundreds'. As Yakov rescues him from the snow, he notices the black and white button attached to the drunken man’s coat, having the two-headed eagle sign representing Black Hundreds. Unaware of the fact that Yakov, his saviour, is a Jew, Lebedev employs Yakov as the plasterer of his house in an act of thankfulness. At first Yakov Bok holds back foreseeing danger. But later he accepts the job because of material wants. Having pleased with his work, Lebedev later appoints him as the overseer of his brick factory.

Yakov’s new job demands him to live in an area prohibited to the Jews. At the brick factory, Bok earns the displeasure of his colleagues as he catches them directly in the false accounts they provide. Because of his extreme career fidelity, Bok gets alienated from the rest of workers gradually. It is significant to note here that on the brick factory he used to run after two small boys who come there for doing every kind of naughtiness.

During his stay at the factory, on one Passover day he rescues an old Hassid from the assault of a group of boys. Yakov cleans his wounds with his old shirt and provides accommodation for the whole night in his room. Thus when the catastrophic incident happens, the murder of a Christian boy and the recovery of his body injured with thirty-seven deep wounds, all chances of performing the crime falls on Yokov’s head. The matzos of the old Hassid act as the root cause of the ritual murder charge that is raised against Yakov. According to a scientist from the
Kiev Anatomical Institute, the boy had his blood extracted from the body 'possibly for religious purposes'. The anti-semitic Russian bureaucracy asserts that Yakov killed the Christian boy and collected his blood so as to make the conventional matzos. Yakov’s identity is soon disclosed, and he is arrested for the crime, which he actually did not commit. Thus his two compassionate works result in his imprisonment.

When Yakov is arrested, he thinks in the beginning that he is to be sentenced for some offence of the law and it takes sometime for him to comprehend the grave attributes of the charges against him. Only when he faces directly the spectator of the prosecution who is an anti-Semitic person, does he understand that he is the prey of a gigantic, treacherous plot.

Yakov’s hard life in the prison, signified by mental and physical torture, exposing him to the cruellest conditions of existence is a living death. After his confinement in the prison, Yakov has to fight against fear, solitude and madness. From the time of his living in police custody, Yakov Bok feels completely alienated from the external surroundings. He is strictly prevented from human communication with the people of the society and is denied all kinds of lawful support. Finally Bok is imprisoned in the jail for about two and a half years without any indictment. The prolonging of Yakov’s indictment by the government officials is part of their plan to afflict mental torture on Yakov so that he might confess the crime. His authorities
will not reveal to him what day it is or when he can hope to have his indictment.

Time blew-like a steppe wind into an empty future. There was no end, no event, indictment, trial. The waiting withered him. He was worn thin by the struggle to wait, by the knowledge of his innocence against the fact of his imprisonment; ----------. He cried out of the deepest part of him, a narrow pit, but no one appeared or answered or looked at him or spoke to him, neither friend nor stranger. Nothing changed but his age (238-239).

Yakov makes use of broomstraws to count and mark days, weeks and months even though he has no correct idea of the day he has entered the prison confinement.

Yakov is subjected to the most dehumanizing torments both mental and physical. While he is in the common cell, only Bok is oppressed with severe beating because he is a Jew and because he is believed to be the cruel murderer of a twelve-year-old Christian boy. The jail room in which he has to live in loneliness is the worst. It is extremely hot in summer and freezing like ice in winter. The prison is always dark, dirty and stinking. Bok is provided with the dress that stinks of human sweat.

More than that they give him daily “a bowl of watery, insect-ridden soup, and a slice of stale black bread”(177) and exposes him to regular ill treatment. Consequently at times he gets affected with diarrhoea. The jail authorities threaten to kill him by poisoning his food. So he becomes highly conscious abut the food. He starves for six days fearing that he is being given poisoned food and forces the prison warden to take him to
the kitchen. By inflicting all types of strains on Yakov, the prison officials force him to confess a crime that he has never performed. Bok's shoe nails have pierced through his soles, making his legs very painful. Even then nobody in the prison gives him any instrument to mend the shoe nails.

Initially when Bok comes to the prison community, Bok gets acquainted with two three persons among the prisoners. Then he gets acquainted with a fellow Jew, a government representative named Gronfein, who assures to help Yakov by convincing Yakov's story to the Jewish community. Also Yakov sees the Investigating Magistrate, though not the prosecutor, trying to help Yakov. But when Gronfein betrays him by conspiring with the prison officials, Bok is changed from the general prison compartment to a special solitary cell in which "All day the fixer walked in his cell, sometimes he ran, five steps, three, five, three breaking the circuit to hurl himself against the wall, or smash his fists against the metal door with prolonged cries of grief" (P. 182).

He speaks loudly, grumbles, cries, has hallucinations and hopes, but nobody hears or answers him. The prison guards will not allow him to speak to himself. Thus they experiment every method to crumple both his soul and body. Bok puts all his expectations on Bibikov, the faithful Investigating Magistrate.

Even though Bibikov is clear about the truth, he cannot prove that Marfa Golov, the mother of the assassinated child and Marfa's lover are
the culprits of the child’s tortured death. Bibikov is an optimist who puts all his faith in the ruling government and the law. “Bibikov underestimates evils, the range and profundity of anti-semitism and he assures Bok that the charge and penalty will be minor”. For about half of the novel, Bok expects Bibikov to get the proof necessary to demonstrate that Marfa acts the main role in murdering the child. During this period, once the prison guard in carelessness leaves Bok’s cell open and goes away. Bok comes out of the prison room and walks a long distance to meet the prisoner in the coming cell. Bok gets shocked at the sight of Bibikov, the Investigating Magistrate hanging himself in the cell, after being taken into custody for his soft corner towards Bok. With Bibikov’s suicidal death, Bok gets disappointed for he has no one to seek help. “Who would help him now, what could he hope for?--- ‘Mama - Papa’ he cried out, ‘Save me ! Shmuel, Raisl! - anybody - save me ! Somebody save me !” (P. 183).

The death of Bibikov acts as the turning point in Bok’s life. The most pathetic incident of the prison life is that Yakov is compelled to crawl to the infirmary on his extremely painful, pus-filled legs. There the surgeon operates on his legs without advocating anaesthesia. He dislikes Jews. This is revealed when he tells “This is good for you, Bok”--- “Now you know how poor Zhenia felt when you were stabbing him and draining his blood, all for the sake of your Jewish religion” (186).
Later Yakov is to undergo the dehumanizing examination of his body for which he is removed of all clothes. The warden inspects his whole body including armprints and genitals. In the beginning the search is only twice a day but later it increases to six times a day. The miseries of Yakov in the prison increase systematically day by day. He is tied to the wall for chatting with outside people. During night he is strained to stand in stocks like Kent in King Lear; Yakov is afflicted with the worst dishonours probable. Thus Yakov Bok while undergoing suffering “wonders why God would let his Chosen People suffer the way the Jews have to suffer throughout history”.

In the meantime Grubeshov collects the old man’s baked matzos and the blood stained old clothes from Bok’s room at the brick factory to prove authentically his crime. These things are used as evidences against him and “both demonstrate the impossibility of escape from his Jewish conscience”. The wrong assertion of Proshko, the foreman adds to the difficulties of Bok. Proshko doubts Bok of working hard to raise a place of worship in Podol. He falsely certifies his having witnessed the old man and Yakov praying together and pursuing the Christian boy out of the brick factory. This increases the doubt that Yakov along with the old man has killed the boy for ritual practices. A bottle of jam seen on Yakov’s table is elucidated to be a bottle of blood. Furthermore Marfa’s false evidence helps to complicate the situation. She identifies Yakov as “The Jew Zhenia told me about, who had chased him with a long
According to Marfa Golov, the Jews are hard criminals and sexually degenerate persons, though she herself is the burglar and assassinator.

Yakov's loneliness grows in the prison. Having deprived of doing anything, his hands ache 'of emptiness' (201) and the fixer returns to thought, invariably to Spinoza. The passing of urine and the sweeping of the solitary cell are his only works to do. "Bok struggles against the formlessness of his prison". Yakov at times talks to himself to prolong time; sometimes he thinks about his past life and recalls from Spinoza that "life is life and there's no sense kicking it into the grave" (77) and sings psalms when he feels terribly lonely. He goes through the prison rules again and again, keeps his clothes tidy and calls to mind stories of Peretz, Sholem Aleichem and Checkov. He remembers "things from the scriptures--------.He could, in a sense, sense the Psalms as well as hear them" (207).

At this condition, the image we have about Bok is that of a tormented sufferer. He thinks seriously about the purpose of his life as to why a poor and honest fixer man suffers so much in the prison. Yakov feels dejected at his destiny and he gets frightened of the cruel prison authorities inclined to put blame on him by any means. He condemns the fate, external factors and anti-semitism, which are responsible for his misfortune.
Yakov gets separated from the anti-semitic Tsarist Russian culture because he is a Jew and from Judaism because he asserts himself to be a freethinker. Jew is the only word used by the prison authorities to refer to him. The history and the religious label which Bok wants to escape cling to him more than ever and are the chief causes of his confinement.

On the very first day of his prison life, he gets wondered at the enemity of the Russians towards him and thinks ‘if they know me could they say such things?’ The more Yakov tries to separate himself from Jewishness, the more he is drawn towards it. His chief crime the housing of an injured man whom he has saved from violent mob of boys suggests that he cannot forget Judaism completely. “He finds himself in history with a vengeance. His search for a new freedom of opportunity has brought him to the most liberal prison in Malamud’s work”. The rejection of his Jewishness is caused mainly because of absolute material wants in the anti-semitic social structure. Now Bok views himself as the captive of his past, of his own manners and of his culture. He becomes acutely conscious of the ineffectiveness of all his labours to secure freedom from the confinement and he curses himself for his lack of foresight.

Gradually Bok becomes confirmed about his inescapability from the impact of history. “We’re all in history, that’s sure, but some are more than others, Jews more than some. If it snows not everybody is out in it getting wet. He had been doused. He had to his painful surprise,
stepped into history more deeply than others—it had worked out so" (P.314).

This new knowledge which he has gained by his sufferings in the prison, makes him aware of the fact that participation in history is a crucial ingredient of the individual’s survival. The only means to preserve one’s self honour is to engage oneself for social causes. He must dedicate himself seriously for those in a similar entanglement. The hardships imposed on Yakov have an enlarging impact and bring forth a renewal in his outlook of struggling and responsibility. His extended suffering educates him that suffering in reality enhances character. Ben Siegel comments that Yakov’s suffering has “toughened his character and will, stripped him of arrogance and false pride, and increased his compassion and charity, thereby enabling him, as Shmuel has admonished, ‘to fix his heart’”. He endures suffering and proves that “human dignity can be maintained even at the most minimal levels of existence and among the most brutal examples of mankind”.

Yakov’s moral development towards maturity is reflected in his moving away from solitude and undertaking suffering voluntarily for the sake of others. After Shmuel’s visit, Yakov’s abandoning of the pre-plan of committing suicide as a means of escaping the hardships in prison exhibits his inclination towards assuming communal responsibility. After a dream sequence in which he envisions Shmuel dead, Yakov gets the insight that while suicide will liberate him from much suffering and pain,
his existence in the prison might possibly save other lives. We find in
him “the shift from egotistical self concern to a sense of involvement with
others”\textsuperscript{49} Hershinow has rightly described that suffering in Malamud is
the result of the “conflict between human freedom and human
limitations”\textsuperscript{50} At last, Yakov decides to live and suffer for his fellowmen.
Malamud pictures the Jew as a ‘schlemiel’ figure in order to evolve as
Hershinow has said “the idea of regenerative power of suffering”\textsuperscript{51} Thus
for Malamud, suffering is more than a test or a norm. It is life itself, with
all the complexities it involves.

\textbf{The Tenants} analyses the anguish of the artistic technique as well
as the twisted web of the forced relations between the two cultural
groups-the Jews and the blacks. Malamud’s love of humanity involves
the ill-fated blacks. He feels, “We, as a society have to redress the
balance”\textsuperscript{52} In this book, Malamud’s attention is on the significance of the
strained period on humanity, typically denoted in the reciprocal anguish,
suspicion and guilt, of the black writer Willie Spearmint and the Jewish
writer Harry Lesser. Exploring profoundly into the mind of the black and
the Jew, Malamud has succeeded as Morris Dickstein remarks, “in
dramatising the world of pain and anguish in \textbf{The Tenants}.\textsuperscript{53} The fear
cast along the novel, anyway betrays Malamud’s diminishing faith in
humanity. He has once remarked that “My faith in humanity has been
bruised to some degree”\textsuperscript{54}
Harry Lesser is a Jewish writer to whom art has become a preoccupation with life. His anxiety is implied in the very beginning of the novel. “I’ve got to get up to write, otherwise there’s no peace in me”\(^{(p.9)}\). He has already issued two novels. The first one was a great success and the second was a failure even though it was purchased by the movies. Now he is working on his third novel, which he intends to make a masterpiece. “My deepest desire is to make my third my best”\(^{(P.13)}\). He feels it has ‘the potential of being a minor masterpiece’ and demonstrates in it his innermost conceptions of art and life. So he works on it relentlessly day and night for about ten years. Yet the novel is incomplete for want of a suitable ending. Harry Lesser toils hard to get a proper ending to his unfinished novel, an ending with love at its centre. But the irony of the situation is that, being away from the practical world he does not know much about love. The novel is highly autobiographical, but Lesser views it as something elevated than life itself. “Home is where my book is” \(^{(P.6)}\).

Harry Lesser is continually made upset by his Jewish landlord, Irving Levenspiel, who goes on demanding him to leave the tenement building so that he can knock down the house “to set up a modern six storey apartment building”\(^{(P.20)}\). But Lesser remains indifferent to the requests of his landlord and refuses to vacate the age old, decomposing building, his ‘pleasure dome’, till the finalization of his best novel. The landlord even tempts him by offering bribe up to ten thousand dollars for
leaving the tenement. But Lesser is bothered about his own problems regarding his art of writing. He ignores Levenspiel. “If I don’t write this novel exactly as I should----. After that folly what good can I expect from myself? What would I see when I look in the mirror but some deformed fourassed worm? And what’s my future after that with the last of my movie money gone?”(P.20). And Harry turns a deaf ear to the landlord’s series of distresses. “For Christ’s sake, what are you writing? -------. Art my ass”, remarks Levenspiel, “in this world it is heart that counts. Wait, you will get yours one of these days, Lesser; Mark my words”(P.22). Absorbed in his art, Lesser does not perceive the feeling of the heart.

After a short time, Willie Spearmint, a black ex-criminal attempting to be a novelist, enters into the stress dominated world of Lesser. Referring to Harry Lesser and Willie Spearmint, it is told that Malamud has invented two standardized images of two different ethnic subgroups- Harry Lesser as “another version of the introverted, tortured Jewish intellectual” and Willie Spearmint as “a sort of pre-fabricated black”. Willie Spearmint is also a novelist, writing at the present time a novel, which he claims, “might be fiction but ain’t nonetheless real”. While Lesser writes about love, Willie says his book is about ‘me’. For both of them, writing has become an obsession, more than life itself.

The confrontation between Lesser and Willie, both personal and ethical, forms the major thrill of The Tenants. Lesser is a formalist who is excellent at following the rules of writing but cannot invent good
theme. His difficulty is that he is not able to “see or feel except in language” (85). After sometime Willie shows the original copy of his work to Lesser to read. It is a catalogue of the Negro’s ill-treated experiences in an atmosphere governed by the white people. Having gone through the manuscript, Lesser remarks that Willie’s work is of poor quality because it does not follow any standard form. He comments that the part of the novel dealing with self-story would have been better if Willie had paid proper attention to the narrative technique and form. He also remarks that one cannot produce a good book of literature simply by writing down a negro’s various experiences in the society. Humiliated by Lesser’s comments, Willie retorts that the autobiographical part “is pure made-up fiction that I invent as I go along”. Willie who is already biased against the white cannot accept Lesser’s genuine criticism in the proper spirit. He regards Lesser to be a white man unsuitable to evaluate the black experience. “This is a black book we talk in about that you don’t understand at all. White fiction ain’t the same as black. It can’t be”(60). He also declares that “I am art. Willie Spearmint, black man. My form is myself” (p.61). Both the writers try to recognize themselves through their corresponding books. Harry is human, generous minded and hospitable. His aim of art is universal. Harry tries to establish himself through his art; “he writes his book and the book shapes his sensibility” (P. 147) But just the opposite, Willie’s aim is racial and revolutionary. He writes about the “black people crying out we are still slaves in this fuckn country and
we ain't gonna stay slaves any longer" [P.60). Thus as Lesser proclaims love to be the central idea of his book, Willie's writing has moved him to the actual experience of love towards the black people.

The relationship between the two grows more and more inconsistent and complex, each opposing the other, yet a bit more moved towards each other. Willie has missed his contentment of writing under Lesser's influence. He concentrates now a great deal about structure and technique. Even then he does not stop his writing. The Jewish writer on the contrary works hard but cannot get hold of Willie in love. Even though Harry Lesser is a perfect formalist, he cannot proceed, for want of ideas and struggles in vain to complete his would-be masterpiece. Willie Spearmint, the black writer has the genuine negro experience but cannot provide a consistent form. The difficulties of structure and theme bewilder both the writers so intensely that they are actually secluded from the reality of life.

Being despaired at his unimaginative power, Lesser once goes to an art gallery. As he comes out of the gallery, he accidentally meets 'Irene Bell', Willie's 'bitch'. They discuss about Willie and his art and also they talk about themselves. She reveals that, after fostering love for Willie, she began to develop 'a real understanding of herself'. She realizes:

Outside of his love for black people I don't really think he loves anything but his work. Otherwise I think we'd've been married by now. Willie was always conscious of his colour but it's more so now. The more he writes, the blacker he becomes" (93).
When Willie is absorbed in his writing, Lesser makes use of the situation to get acquainted with Irene. He chases her with his ‘long want’ and is prepared to own her.

The strain between the two advances to its summit when Harry reveals Willie that he is in love with Willie’s white girlfriend, Irene and that he intends to marry her, after the finishing of his book. Willie responds aggressively. He lashes Harry. Willie then pilfers and destroys Lesser’s manuscript in vengeance for stealing his girlfriend and denying him of usual family life. But Harry does not sit inactive, lamenting his loss. He thinks that “the book is not the writer, the writer writes the book” (137). Hence Harry begins writing the book once again with fresh aspirations though he feels still uneasy with Willie and Levenspiel.

The absurdity of Lesser is that he favours rewriting his book about love than marriage with Irene. He, for the time being, controls his plans about marriage and family life on behalf of his book. When Irene reminds him about their marriage, Lesser says “That’s what we’ll do..... As soon as the book is out of the way” (132). Irene at once gets irritated at Lesser’s attitude and remarks, “What do you know about love?” (P. 45). Lesser also thinks, “I write about love because I knew so little about it” (97). Irene realizes that both Willie and Lesser thinks in the same way regarding love and marriage. “You’re both alike” (109). She has already given up Willie and now she bids farewell to Lesser too. Here Malamud
implies that one should value life to art. But both the novelists of The Tenants do not realize this fact.

Lesser's anguish at rewriting his destroyed manuscript summons back the feeling experienced by Fidelman. He works hard without rest for recreating each chapter that Willie has burnt. "I'll rewrite it, I am the writer" (137). But the 'double labour' does not bring the expected result. He recalls the ideas but cannot put on paper as he has done in the first draft. He laments about the earlier writing, 'a good book to its about-to-be-end'.

Lesser's disappointment regarding his incapacity to rewrite his book prompts him to destroy Willie's typewriter. The end of the novel reveals both Lesser and Willie acting brutally. One dark night, they both come across a bush, somewhere in Levenspiel's decaying heap and murder each other.

"They aimed at each other accurate blows. Lesser felt his jagged axe sink through bone and brain as the groaning black's razor-sharp sabre, in a single boiling stabbing slash, out the white's balls from the rest of him" (P. 173).

Thus Lesser cuts off Willie's head with an axe and Willie assassinates Lesser with a razor sharp saber. The book's aspired end comes here, in an atmosphere of terror, after which we here only Levenspiel weeping for mercy. The word 'mercy' is recited one hundred and fifteen times at the end of the novel. Jacob korg remarks that mercy "leaves the pages of the book altogether and hangs in the air, becoming a supplication addressed to the universe in general". 57 The terror which
prevails throughout the novel throws light to the need of compassion. The book is not just a tale of black-white relationship. For Malamud it is a "sort of prophetic warning against fanaticism" and it argues for "the invention of choices to outwit tragedy".58

In *Dubin’s Lives*, Malamud deals with a writer’s plight in the middle of his psychological problems. Its protagonist ‘William Dubin’ strives with the biography of D.H. Lawrence for whom passion alone constituted life, but who sarcastically lived a life distinguished by impotence at a young age. Dubin’s endeavour to write the biography of Lawrence ends in his own defeat. We find Dubin himself experiencing impotence with his wife.

All of Dubin’s sufferings do not stem from personal reasons alone. He has an unhappy family upbringing, his family life with his wife Kitty has been a dejected one, and his children are neurotic. More than that Dubin has inherited his father’s ‘inertia, fear, living fate-out of habit, compassion, impure love” 59(p.100). All these factors add together to make him a lonely person. He takes pleasure in seclusion. “Being away from home or occasionally remaining alone there, awoke moods he rarely experienced----”(48). His selection of privacy to human friendship engrosses him in his writing work so deeply that he ignores his obligation towards his wife and children. His wife Kitty often complained: “I am married to you, not your book”(P. 178).
Dubin's strain and exertion turn to suffering when he falls in love with a young girl named 'Fanny Bick' whom Dubin's wife has appointed as a 'cleaning person'. During his romance with Fanny, Dubin delves deep into the secrets of the human flesh and gains a new perception of Lawrence. Divided in his sincerity towards Fanny and Kitty, he now understands the significance of family, order and self-control. During his mental torment he recognizes the importance and solemnity of human life. He clearly perceives Lawrence's viewpoint that "honesty is more important in marriage than fidelity".

Suffering pursues Malamud's heroes. They are redeemed and disciplined by it and as a result they become true human beings. Malamud views suffering as a device for moral regeneration. It initiates the protagonist to grasp his social obligations and communal responsibilities. Suffering guides to self-knowledge and accomplishment of identity. Suffering promotes the integrity and humanness of individuals.

Malamud's attitude towards suffering is mentioned in clear terms. "I am against it', he says, ' but when it occurs why waste the experience?" This is the reason all his novels earn their spirit from the unique experience of suffering. As such all his protagonists submit to extreme suffering, which is not always undertaken willingly.

In Malamud's fiction, the protagonist's individuality is established by his understanding of suffering. A Malamud protagonist is in the
beginning an innocent, immature person. However at a certain stage in his life, he becomes sensitive to the holiness of life and this awareness directs him to strive for a new life. Suffering at this phase receives meaning. Sidney Richman points out that suffering in Malamud is intended to liberate not only the sufferer but also for whom he suffers. The motif of worthwhile suffering as mentioned here suggests “the quest for moral resolution and self realization.”}\textsuperscript{64}
Notes and References


11. Ibid, P. 54.


15. Ben Siegel, RAF, P. 206.


17. Bernard Malamud, 'The Assistant', 1957. Oxford University Press. All further references in this chapter are to this edition indicated by page numbers parenthetical in the text.


25. Marcus Klein; ANMC, P.263.


51. Ibid.


All further references in this chapter are to this edition indicated by page numbers parenthetical in the text.

56. Sheldon J. Hershino, BM, P. 98.

57. Jacob Korg, "Ishmael and Israel", Commentary May 1972, P. 84.


59. Bernard Malamud, 'Dubin's Lives', New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1979, P. 100. All further references in this chapter are to this edition indicated by page numbers parenthetical in the text.

60. Sheldon J. Hershinow, BM, P. 136.