CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Growth of the American Novel

The impulse to tell a story is perennial and the delight in hearing one is among the earliest instincts. Story telling is one of the largest legacies of any writer and the narrative acts as a powerful mode of linking together the past, present and the future in a continual struggle towards the realization of the individual and the society. It is commonly agreed that the novel is the most acceptable way of story-telling and it is the perfect way of embodying experiences and ideas in the context of our time. Being the most characteristic and powerful form of literary expression, the novel today has acquired a prestigious position in literature. It corresponds in our civilization to the epic in the primitive stages of some races, to the drama of Athens and to the essay in the age of Queen Anne. Like all literary forms, the novel is indeed a mixed genre and its origin lies in a dozen different forms: Essay, Romance, History, Biography, Comic and Sentimental Drama and so on.

The novel also, more than any other genre, can give form to a set of attitudes regarding society, history and the general culture of which the novel is a part and this too is a strong reason for reading novels. Traditionally, it is flexible and indeterminate in its form. The novel has been subjected to continuous pressures from publishers, from editors, from readers with different tastes, vulgar to refined which tend to limit the acceptance of its artistic integrity with the same seriousness with which the lyric is accepted. Furthermore, the novel has suffered from the conviction that it is an inferior form. Moreover, many of the practitioners of this form have willingly created the impression that their art form is anti-intellectual and anti-artistic. Mark Twain beautifully summed up in the ‘Notice’ that precedes Huckleberry Finn: ‘Persons attempting to find a motive in this narrative will be prosecuted; persons attempting to find a moral in it will be banished; persons attempting to
find a plot in it will be shot.” (Twain) Even Faulkner enjoyed immensely the sport of pretending not to be a great writer. However, the novel, more than any other genre, is capable of containing large, developed, consistent images of people and this is one of the reasons that any one reads novels. Like all literary forms, the novel is also the fruition of a long course of development. The novel has gained an ascendancy over other art forms in the modern age and the importance of novel as one of the major forms has been recognized. The novelists of the modern age have given to the novel great literary care that was formerly given to poetry and drama, and have made it a work of art. The novel is indeed the epic of the modern age as it portrays men and society on a vaster canvas with their complex relationships and multiple aspects. The novel demonstrates more realistically and more thoroughly the conflicts of man with society and emphasizes on individual experience in relation to his social life. It portrays men and the society in their complex relationships. The novel seeks to record life with minute details and it portrays life in all its aspects and in variety. One of the recurrent motifs used is the motif of journey, especially personal and psychological journey which helps in moving from the position of a victim to a socially integrated self. Personal experiences, imagination, collective pressure, social constraints, all sustain the protagonist’s struggle for self affirmation. A humble attempt is made here to present a brief history of the American novel.

The American fiction suffered a slow and difficult start. In America, the novel in the formal sense began at the end of the 18th century. It is perhaps natural that it should have been preceded by the chronicles of adventure, the sermons, the diary, history, the essay and verse. It is certain that when the first formal efforts at novel writing appeared in the century, it was at a dull moment in the history of the British novel. The fictional impulse is seen quite clearly in the work of Francis Hopkinson. Some enthusiasts have
even claimed that his *Pretty Story* (1774) is the first American novel. The first novel of full length written by an American was *The Power of Sympathy*, published anonymously in 1780. It has been attributed to Mrs. Sarah Wentworth Morton. The novel may have been written by William Hill Brown, a playwright and the known author of a posthumously printed novel *Ira and Isabella* but the evidence is not conclusive. *The Power of Sympathy* publicized the embarrassing account of the love affair between prominent Bostonian Perez Morton and his wife’s sister. Such books served only to reinforce the moralist’s judgement against fiction. Before *The Power of Sympathy* appeared a much more important novel was projected in the mind of the author, even though he did not publish it until 1792. Hugh Henry Brackenridge’s *Modern Chivalry or The Adventures of Captain Farrago and Teague O’Regan* appeared in installments from 1792 to 1815. It was a picaresque romance which deals with the wanderings of Captain Farrago and his servant O’Regan. The object was satire and Brackenridge with his shrewd and penetrating insight satirized the hypocrisy of the lawyers, the clergy, the physicians, the scientists and the politicians. Another picaresque novel with a vigorous satiric note was written by the playwright, poet and novelist Royall Tyler namely *The Algerian Captive or The Life and Adventures of Doctor Updike Underhill*. (1820)

The novels of domestic life which followed *The Power of Sympathy* are of interest historically as an example of the depth from which the American novel arose. One of the early writers who achieved popularity was Mrs. Susanne Haswell Rawson. Her most famous novel *Charlotte Temple* has had a tremendous vogue in America. The most interesting aspect of Mrs. Rawson’s fiction consisted in its reflection of the current standards of morality in America. Her other novel *Reuben and Rachel or Tales of Old Times* was also a reflection of the standard of morality in America. The most universal motives, those of love and self preservation were constantly employed which account for
the wide popularity of books like *Charlotte Temple*. The models were largely British especially the novels of sentimentality, although there was a possibility of French influence because a large quantity of French literature was imported during that period.

The prominent and accepted novelists who subsequently dominated the American fiction were Charles Brockdon Brown, Washington Irving and James Fennimore Cooper. In fact, American fiction was established by the penetrating analysis of human passions in the works of Charles Brockdon Brown. He asserts a claim as the first American novelist and the ancestor of the American gothic. Charles Brockdon Brown, the best known writer of the early period, endeavored in vain to earn a living as a novelist and finally turned to translation. Washington Irving and William Cooper selected from life and history those themes and motives which seemed to them as important and created characters of heroic size and incidents which revealed new fields of discovery and exploration. With Cooper the novel spread upon a broader canvas, the high spirit of adventure carried heroic figures over sea and land. A man of immense physical and intellectual vitality, Cooper was temperamentally suited to the task of representing his time. His mind was at once liberal and analytic. He was a careful historian and he put in his novels many characters with their peculiar manners and prejudices. The genius of Edgar Allen Poe was brooding over fascinating problems of human identity. Nathaniel Hawthorne too was not only widening the sphere of the novel in his reincarnation of American history and in the supernatural, but in his novels and short stories, he was dealing with those human beings through whose sin and suffering, the beauty of moral triumph was to be established. Nathaniel Hawthorne with his *Scarlet Letter* marked the artistic culmination of the romance of America before the Civil War and slowly matured in his own field, the romance of the moral life. Herman Melville was an American novelist, short-story writer, essayist and poet who created an imaginative world in which the beasts of the sea rose to their contest
with man. His *Moby Dick* was hailed as one of the literary masterpieces of both American and world literature. He was also known for his posthumous novella *Billy Budd*. He was the first writer to have his works collected and published by the Library of America.

By the middle of the 19th century, the American novelists were beginning to turn from the heroic to the material of familiar life, and there was a transition from an idealistic to a realistic presentation of life. Characters drawn from the humbler walks of life began to take their place as central figures, and the tragedies of economic oppression were portrayed. At the same time, there still persisted the perennial interest towards romance and fantasy. This form often made use of realistic methods but its distinguishing quality lay in the unusual plots, powerful imagination and fantasy and the greatest names in the early fiction of fantasy is Mark Twain. Samuel Langhorne Clemens, well known by his pen name Mark Twain was a great humorist as well. His novel *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* has been called “The Great American Novel”. *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* is another noted novel of Mark Twain. He was also popular for his wit and incisive satire and was lauded as the greatest American humorist of his age. He won a worldwide audience for his stories of youthful adventures of Tom Sawyer and Huckleberry Finn. *In Green Hills of Africa, Prince and the Pauper, A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur’s Court* are some of his famous novels. In the seventies and eighties, Howells brought the realistic treatment of the average American to its height. The influence of Howells reached its climax stimulating novelists like Mary Wilkins, Margaret Deland and Hamlin Garland. The late nineties saw the first fiction of the great figures of the twentieth century. During the twentieth century, romance continued with Tarkington and several others to deal with the American scene or to escape from it into the historic past. There has also been a bitter criticism of American life. A group of liberals like Frank Norris and Brand Whitlock scrutinized the economic and social situation and proposed remedies for what they saw.
Writing upon The Great American Novel, Edith Wharton said that the scene may be laid in an American small town or in a European capital. It could deal with the present or the past, with great events or trivial happenings and it could be related to something greater. Speaking of the American modern novel, the year 1900 is an important year as this was the year in which many changes happened and a new world was born. Great technological advancement changed the attitude of the people and transformed the whole society. Americans felt that the twentieth century was the American century and therefore they felt a responsibility for it. The early years of the century experienced naturalism as dominant form while some hints of expressionism were also traceable. The second decade of the twentieth century experienced radical changes. World War I made many people and writers believe in decline of civilization. The American mind was under the influence of cultural disorientation and disorder. Writers of the twenties looked up at Europe for experience and manifested it in their writings.

Fiction surged to a new importance in the 1920s with Sinclair Lewis. He had begun his fiction writing during the war decade and in the 1920s he became the dominant American literary figure and he was the first American to receive the Nobel Prize for literature in the year 1930. His works are known for their insightful and critical views of American society and capitalist values as well as for their strong characterizations of modern working women. He was also known for his graphic art of description and ability to create new types of characters and blend into them wit and humor. Some of his famous novels are Babbitt, Free Air, and Main Street. William Faulkner is another successful novelist of the period and he won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1950. He was one of the most influential writers of the 20th Century and his reputation is based on his novels, novellas and short-stories. The majority of his novels were based in his native state of Mississippi. He was a man of immense intellectual vitality and he was temperamentally
suited to the task of representing his time. He has invented a host of characters typical of the historical growth and subsequent decadence of the South. His most celebrated novels are *The Sound and Fury, As I Lay Dying, Light in August, Absalom, Absalom!* etc. Earnest Hemingway was one of the most important and influential writers of the 20th Century. His fiction, especially his early work was dominated by two types of characters. The first type were people affected by World War I, people who had become detached and cynical, yet emotionally strong. The second type was a simple, plain-speaking individual of direct emotions. Death and violence were constant themes in Hemingway’s life and writing. Hemingway received the Nobel Prize for literature in 1954. *A Farewell to Arms, For Whom the Bell Tolls, The Old Man and the Sea, To Have and Have Not* are some of the famous novels of Hemingway. Hemingway’s novels brought a great change in the art of storytelling and gave a new dimension to fiction.

Nineteen thirties or the Age of Depression was the age of unemployment, urban despair and rural deprivation. America’s attention was drawn away from the world to the American himself. In the nineteen forties, America, the victor in World war II putting behind the Age of Depression started a new age in literature. Novelists tried to find new forms and cope with the requirements of the age. One of the prevailing notes in the fiction of the twentieth century was the assertion of the freedom of the will, a freedom intensified by the lack of a society capable of restraining individual action with its forms. It was a rebellion against the restriction of personal freedom. It was concerned not so much with economic conditions as it was with the limitations imposed by traditional barriers of convention. It is not merely for their reflection of American life, not for their sociological or economical or political associations, not for their rendering of history that we read them, but they are read for their imaginative re-creations of human beings in the art of
living within a society. Each novel is justified in its own way and that justification is literary. As Arthur Hobson Quinn says:

> Freedom to choose a subject anywhere in space or time, provided it is significant, and to treat it by any method through which characters speak the language which the heart understands and remembers – that freedom is the right of the artist in fiction. There is one law, however, he must obey: his conception and execution must have beauty as their aim, that beauty which moulds facts into truth, which draws hope from terror, and which clothes the weaknesses of humanity with charity that turns them into power. (Quinn 723)

Jewish-American intellectuals and Negro writers are the two main beams supporting the literary world of the present day America. Of these two, the Jewish-American writers have been so conspicuous in their activities that their achievements are enjoying a remarkable notice of the general public. Gradually the Jewish writers have emerged as a dominant movement in American fiction. It was a social movement that has had a great impact on the literary scene. Jewish American writers gained recognition as a distinct genre largely on the strength of their work. Saul Bellow, Bernard Malamud, Philip Roth, Joseph Heller, Cynthia Ozick and several others are some of the prominent American-Jewish writers. The Jewish-American writers have been increasingly rising in the estimation of literary critics and their popularity among the reading public has been rapidly growing. This is because their qualities as writers are equal to the standard of critical evaluation. This is also because they are Jewish, which means they are very active in describing the situations of the present world, they are picturing clearly and actually what is often called the Jewish situation. It has also been pointed out that Jewish-
American writers depict the present situation – anxiety, alienation, despair, discontinuity etc. to accommodate himself.

Saul Bellow has been one of the most successful American-Jewish novelists using the theme of the search for identity, the meaning of the Self in a world of uncertainty and fluctuating magnitude. Bellow has the most powerful mind among contemporary American novelists. He was a consummate story teller; he began as a realist, progressed into fantasy and ended as a comic novelist. He is concerned chiefly with emotional relations, love, jealousy, feelings of inferiority and superiority. He balances these motivations with a precise, delicate and unerring skill and no other American author is as adept as Bellow at converging subtle emotional distinctions. He offers a powerful perception of the workings of the human mind. The themes are universal and offer a portrayal of marginalized people everywhere. The novels are a blending of joy and sorrow, love and hate, hope and despair. They are a celebration of life in general and the Jewish heritage in particular. There are many novelists who represent the ugliness of the world as ugly. Bellow is that writer who can reveal the beauty and the hope beneath the surface and such a writer is a writer of encouragement. In contrast to the empty life presented by many, Bellow sees that life is a rich and inexhaustible tapestry of meaningful experience. By linking the specific Jewish traits to the problem of survival and identity, Saul Bellow made his fiction unique and an essential part of the American experience. The Jewish traits and Jewish background in Saul Bellow’s novels demand a study of the Jewish culture and heritage which have a vital influence on Saul Bellow and his protagonists.

**Jewish Culture and Heritage**

In the beginning, the Jews defined themselves as a biological group, as the seed of Abraham. Anyone born of a Jewish mother was thereby a Jew. But not all Jews were literally of the seed of Abraham. Judaism, the religion of the Jewish people, and
Christianity, despite their common origins, are religions of two very different types. Orthodox Judaism is a way of life and is seen as a civilization, as faith in actions rather than in dogma. The most eminent contemporary historian of Jewish history has written:

To this day orthodox Jewish ethics has remained in its essence national [i.e. concerned for the people of Israel] rather than individual, and this accounts, incidentally, for the otherwise incomprehensible legal theorem of the common responsibility of all Jews for the deeds of each. . . . What really matters in the Jewish religion is not the immortality of the individual Jew, but that of the Jewish people. (Baron 10, 12)

Christianity and Judaism approach each other at different levels and the problem of identity becomes even more complicated when the conversion of the Jew is to a secular creed. Among the orthodox, there is little doubt about who is and who is not a Jew. Among secular Jews definitions and conceptions of Jewish identity are many and it is accepted that anyone born of Jewish parents, anyone converted to Judaism, anyone who is thought by others to be a Jew, anyone who considers himself a Jew, is undoubtedly a Jew in the true sense.

Jews for centuries, lived on the fringes of western society, hopelessly confined to the ghettos, quite insignificant compared to the main stream society. They could not positively relate to the main stream society and this shriveled their creative impulse until the birth of Enlightenment. Enlightenment was a movement marked by emphasis on rationality than tradition, enquiry instead of unquestioning religious dogma and representative government in place of monarchy. Enlightenment thinkers and writers were devoted to the ideals of man. There were pioneering writers in the nineteenth century Yiddish literature like Shlolem Aleichem, I.L.Peretz and Mendele Sforim. In those days it was considered that creative writing was similar to idolatry and therefore writing novels
was disapproved. It was much later that the Jews began to interact with the cultural institutions of Europe and they became some of the most enduring prophets of social justice and humanistic culture in this world.

Between 1881 and 1914, roughly two million Jews immigrated to the United States and most of them came from Europe. There was a flood of Jewish immigration to America at the time of the century especially from Eastern Europe and a very peculiar but definitely fertile and inspiring group that came to be known as the Jewish-American emerged.

The Jewish immigrants have availed themselves of every opportunity of this ample democracy. They plowed its land; fought its enemies; governed its communities; saved its monuments made its discoveries; spurned its labor movement; wrote its literature and drama and comedy; ventured capital and brain front; and, above all spread ubiquitously like dandelion feathers traveling on the wind of freedom, to the next community or the next opportunity to take root and dwell and become involved. (Simons 2)

The first wave of immigrants that arrived in the New World met the full fury of American industrialization and its bitter extremes. It was the age of the rich and the age of the exploitation of the poor. More than the economic exploitation and the physical degradation was the even greater affront to the self, a sense of dehumanization that assaulted the immigrant in every aspect of his being. He was already quite used to poverty and suffering. He was also familiar with all degrees of hostility to Jews, and the immigrant found himself plunged into an urban, mobile, competitive, indifferent, fragmented world in which he was merely a non entity. It is no doubt true that the Jew has transformed suffering by means of irony and by endurance. It is quite true that Jews are expert sufferers. Irving Howe says, “The virtue of powerlessness, the company of the dispossessed, the sanctity of the insulted and injured – these finally, are the great themes
of Yiddish literature.” (Howe 51) Plagued by uncertainty, by cultural ambivalence, by a search for status, the Jews developed a unique capacity for understanding the sources of emotional suffering in others. Historically the Jews valued intellect more than any other people since the ancient times. As Alfred Kazin has remarked, “the age-old Jewish belief that the only possible salvation lies in thinking well, which is thinking one’s way to the root of creation, thinking one’s way to the ultimate reason of things.” (Kazin 3)

Shalom Aleichem gave expression to this Jewish dream of trust and faith in the American land which would uplift them and sustain them. In one of his poems “Shlof Maynkind” (Sleep, My Child), he says:

Sleep, my child, my consolation
Sleep and hush bye.
In America, your father
Oh, my dearest son,
You are still a little boy
Sleep and hush bye.
America is for everyone
A land of luck, they say,
And for Jews, a Paradise
Something beyond Price.
There they eat, as daily fare
Khab, oh my son,
There I’ll cook you chicken soup
Sleep and hush bye. (qtd by Landes 144)

The Jews believed that America was di goldene medine. (The golden land) However, for the immigrants, their Jewish life was both sweet and sour. Certainly there was
discrimination, sometimes manifested in the form of hatred. There were many hardships and opportunities were denied, but still America has been a land of hope and prosperity to all. While the struggle for acceptance was going on, there they were desperately trying to maintain their Jewishness in an alien environment. At the same time, they were also tired of anti-Semitism, weary of rejection and were hungering for acceptance. Anti-Semitism had a lot to do with people running away from Judaism or with their clinging to it. It cannot be said that everyone experienced anti-Semitism. If some Jews escaped anti-Semitism, some felt its bitter effects and forever were scarred by it. Many Jewish immigrants and ghetto dwellers, victimized by non-Jews were as bitterly anti-Christian as some Christians were anti-Semitic. For the American Jew, religion was and is paramount and there has been a resurgence of orthodoxy as well. In spite of the non-accommodative religious views, the Jewish experience in the US was indeed unique. More than any other immigrant group, Jews have found their way almost in every walk of American life. They have taken every opportunity the nation has to offer and have also given back to America all that was possible to enrich the nation. The Jewish immigrants from the very beginning have come closer to realizing the American dream than have any other group. Gradually they started feeling comfortable, accepted and secure. The Jews started getting involved in every walk of life even in the politics of America.

There are many virtues engrafted on the Jews for centuries, all of which tend to the preservation of their self respect and self esteem. Love of home, the inherent desire to preserve the purity of the family and the eagerness for education and self improvement are the amazing virtues found in the immigrant Jews. They regarded education as the prime source of success, the ticket to great success. They also have belief in the value of hard work and a strong regard for the role of the family. Another significant aspect of Jewish thought has been the emphasis on the similarity of all human beings in their essential
humanity and a commitment to universal brotherhood that transcends all distinctions and treats all human beings as human beings. The Jew has always been a figure of interest to other Americans because of the successful way that he has accommodated himself to his adopted country. Although he has known the problem of the immigrant, the Jew has burst the boundaries of the ghetto and has succeeded wherever permitted - in law, medicine, teaching, in journalism, business, science, fine arts etc. The Jews who came to America enjoyed a better life than they had known in their old countries. When they entered the Newfound World, they brought with them a sense of adventure, the quest for fortune and the keen desire to be freed from the tyranny of Europe. “The old master Europe, the master less America,” is D.H. Lawrence’s characterization of the immigrant experience. This was one of the main reasons why many Jews came to America, to live and progress without any outside pressure and control. The alienated Jews apparently got converted to Christianity or committed to secularism. They were motivated by positive values but there were times when they felt a devaluation of their selves.

The renegade Jew in the limbo of lost identity is a sad phenomenon in the west. He is a self-hating, self-created, ectoplasmic figure also, having renounced his origins, realizes from time to time that he has also deprived his own children of a history. (Edelman 20)

But the Jews had to go on together because they had always gone on together. Theirs was indeed a community of fate to which one was born, from which one could not depart. They could not leave one another, they were all engaged in a common enterprise and hence they developed a mutual attachment which persisted all through.

The nineteen thirties and forties were crucial decades for Jewish people. The Jews experienced the worst tragedy of their race due to the Holocaust and the Jewish Diaspora. The Holocaust was the state sponsored persecution and murder of approximately six
million Jews by the Nazi regime and its collaborators. The Nazis who came to power in Germany in 1933, believed that the Germans were racially superior and that the Jews were inferior and an alien threat to the German racial community. In 1945 the Nazis killed nearly two out of every three European Jew. Along with the Jews whom the Nazis considered the main threat to Germany, other victims included Roman gypsies, mentally or physically disabled people including Germans. The Nazi authorities deported millions of Jews from Germany to ghettos and to killing centers called extermination camps, where they were murdered in specially developed gassing centers. They were moved by trains or on forced marches often called death marches to prevent the liberation of those prisoners. In May 1945 the German armed forces surrendered unconditionally to the Allies. In the aftermath of the Holocaust, many of the survivors found shelter in displaced person’s camps and a large number of Jews immigrated to various countries. This came to be known as the Diaspora. We can hardly think of the Jews without remembering the Diaspora or the life of the exiles. The Jews have been eternal wanderers and they have always been in the circumstances of anxiety, despair, alienation etc. It became very difficult for them to adapt themselves to the social surroundings and it was equally difficult to swing to the opposite direction. In a word they were in a state of dangling, shifting between two extremes. Due to the Jewish Diaspora, the Jew was universalized and mythologized as a symbol of twentieth century man, a homeless victim in an indifferent universe. The horrors of the Nazi camps gripped mankind with such fears that the pages of the post-war European literature were printed with terms like rootlessness, absurdity, monotony, disgust, fear, pessimism and so on. The war taught mankind the destructive nature of the atom bomb that might wipe out human race from the surface of the universe. This led to a sense of despair and a sense of loss of faith.
For the Jewish-American writers of these decades the main theme for fiction was the theme of identity. The quest for wealth and power was rarely a dominant theme, and even if it was central, a psychological issue was embedded with it. Jewish-American fiction also insisted on man’s mixed nature, between optimism and pessimism, between affirmation and despair. Although for many centuries, the Jews had gone through persecution which marred optimism, they still nourished hope and faith in God and a progressive future which have kept the Jews from despair. Both nihilism and romanticism were seen as wrongheaded and dangerous. The Jewish-American fiction was rich and abundant and reflected their anguish and joy. Some communicated a thirst for understanding and some yearned for justice. In Jewish-American fiction time, history and memory define human life. From the beginning the Jewish-American fiction was a poignant and inspiring record of failure and triumph, pettiness and heroism, shame and glory. It tried to delineate the story of heroic struggle for survival - individual and collective. However one significant aspect of Jewish thought was the emphasis on the similarity of all human beings in their essential humanity and a commitment to brotherhood that transcended all distinction and united all as human beings.

The most gifted of American novelists, Saul Bellow took up Jewish life and identity as the major theme in his novels. He always disliked being called a Jewish writer, but the fact remains that he was brought up in a deeply Jewish spirit and he had proper respect for God which is one of the Jewish traits even in modern America. He affirmed Judeo- Christian religious and social values more strongly than any other twentieth century writer. The Jewish environment and heritage have been imprinted on Bellow’s mind, soul and psyche. Bellow’s Jews were ethnic Jews in the sense they were born Jews and they belonged to this ethnic group but they didn’t bother much about their tradition. He also wrote about the burden of western intellectual heritage on the modern age. At the
same time, Saul Bellow was the least sentimental of Jewish novelists, one who made the Jew a central figure because Bellow naturally thought of the Jew as a man, as a combination of many conflicting traditions and inclinations. As an American writer, he could not separate himself from his past. He affirmed the Jewish way, a way that always took to Torah (righteous action) and ultimately to God. His Jewish background contributed to Bellow’s belief in man and his allegiance to life. This kind of belief is basic to Jewish culture. It is this belief that enabled the Jews to bear the blows inflicted upon the Jewish community throughout history. Great heroes are absent in the novels of Saul Bellow. The ordinary man is elevated. The little man, Dos Kleine Menshele, with all his imperfections is accepted. A wide range of ordinary human emotions is explored. The ordinary man struggling with his everyday problems is the core of Jewish American novels. The reader is asked to sympathize with the weak man struggling to survive in a feelingless, competitive world. However self-defeating and hapless the protagonists in Jewish – American literature are, they have to struggle to attain the ideal of menshlichkayt i.e. a readiness to live for ideals. What is glorified is intellectual pursuit because this shows the route to God. At the same time American elements are added in order to merge the American thoughts with Jewish thoughts. The problem of environmental adjustment is particularly pronounced for the Jewish American writers. Writers like Saul Bellow had to achieve a balance between two irreconcilable polarities. Historically the Jew belongs to a persecuted community and traditionally is the most mobile race. Moreover as a result of the Diaspora, he is perpetually haunted by a feeling of rootlessness which is an inborn sense of being a foreigner everywhere. This sense of isolation is constantly at war with the search for identity in an alien community. It is in this context of Jewish-American quest that Bellow’s defense of man acquires significance. The Jew invariably believes in his
capacity to redeem the world through God’s servitude. This is reflected in the American fiction written by the Jews, especially Saul Bellow. As Schulz says:

> The Jewish imagination … has been stirred by the aesthetic possibilities of radical sophistication which simultaneously entertains contrary intellectual systems, the secular view of man alienated in an absurd universe and the religious view of man enthroned in God’s earthly kingdom. (Schulz 26)

The main concern of this study is to present the protagonists of Saul Bellow’s novels as intellectual survivors, who are ultimately concerned with their dignity, humanity and community. Like Saul Bellow, who is a Jew by birth, almost all his protagonists barring a few are from the Jewish background. He consistently portrays characters struggling with the Jewish heritage of suffering—physical and spiritual. The Jew becomes a symbol of modern man, and the whole idea that: “modern man is an outcast from his own land of Israel and a wanderer in the Diaspora,” (Feinstein 88) is an obsession with Saul Bellow. Weighed down by pressures and faced with the existential crisis the Bellow hero struggles hard so as not to lose his individuality. Being painfully aware of his own failures, helplessness, and dependence, he alienates himself not only from the hostile and indifferent society but also from his own being. He whines under the pain of disgust, boredom and a sense of personal guilt resulting in self-hatred. Referring to this aspect of the American hero Walter Allen remarks: “The classic American novels have dealt not so much with the lives of men in society as with the life of solitary man, man alone and wrestling within himself.” (Allen 15) His loneliness, his rootlessness and his marginality have made him an outsider: “a sensitized outsider, what the sociologists call a marginal man, a kind of seismographic schelemiel.” (Baumbach 52)

Separated from his tradition and from society, the secular Jew in America was doubly alienated. He became a specialist in alienation, a symbol of isolation, a symbol of
wandering race and a symbol of suffering man. In the modern age of anguish and anxiety, age of threats and lamentations, an age which presents a continued affront to man, an age of vital issues like victimization, rebellion, racial discrimination, the Jew, the profound sufferer with his constant quest for identity has gripped the imagination of the American reader. But he is not a hollow man and his innate goodness leads him to the quest for freedom, for knowledge and for love. The knowledge he deserves is his ordinary knowledge, but that which will reveal to him the significance of life and death. Like the old Jewish Prophets, he wants to find answers for the metaphysical questions like what he is and what is the purpose of his existence? What is the design of the universe? What is the meaning of life? To seek such knowledge, the hero must struggle rigorously and relentlessly and so Bellow’s heroes suffer greatly. During this ordeal, he is also forced to recognize the darker aspect of reality but he does not resign himself to a pessimistic outlook. Instead his knowledge of the meaning of existence and mysteries of life and death enlarge his perspectives in order to accept life in its totality. In his novels, Saul Bellow shows his protagonists to be responsible for their particular conditions, their dilemmas and conflicts, but they are also capable of altering their conditions. The Bellow hero keeps faith in the human being and in the possibility in his union with others. Intellectualization, sense of responsibility and suffering by themselves and finally intellectual survival of his protagonists have given uniqueness to Bellow’s novels.

Bellow negates the devaluation of man and considers man as a mystery but with a sense of holiness that is innate in him. His approach to God is with full consciousness of being a virtuous man and not a miserable sinner. This is the legacy that is imprinted in the fiction of Jewish writers like Saul Bellow and Bernard Malamud. Malamud has stated:

I am quite tired of this of colossally deceitful devaluation of man in this day; for whatever explanation: that life is cheap amid prevalence of wars;
or we are drugged by totalitarian successes into a sneaking belief in their
dehumanizing processes; creators of our thing-ridden society. . . . Whatever
the reason, his fall from grace, in his eyes is betrayed in the words he has
invented to describe himself as he is now: fragmented, abbreviated, other-
directed, organizational, anonymous man, a victim, in the words that are
used to describe him, of a kind of synecdochic irony, the part for the whole.
The devaluation exists because he accepts it without protest. (qtd by Hicks
32)

Bellow opposes devaluation of the self and he believes in a tradition which affirms life in
the face of suffering, even after Diaspora which he reflects in his writings. Since the
appearance of his first book Dangling Man (1944) to Ravelstein,(2000) Jewish themes
permeate all his books. Bellow’s success strongly relied, in addition to his other skills, on
his Jewish themes, ethics, values and background. Indeed Bellow’s subsequent success
strongly relied, in addition to his other skills, on his Jewish themes, ethics, values and
Jewish background. Bellow presents a consistently Jewish philosophical view in all his
works. However Bellow has always opposed the trend of calling him as American-Jewish
novelist. He preferred considering himself as a universal writer and argues that even when
he deals with specific Jewish themes, characters and backgrounds, he was using them as
symbolic of the universal modern man. Most of Bellow’s protagonists are Jews and are
concerned with the freedom of choice, social responsibility, the preservation of human
dignity and individuality, and they have a staunch belief in the possibility of change. They
are also conscious of the presence of an ideal world lying not outside but within the
everyday world. Novel after novel, his heroes’ emergence from their various existential
crises and their return to a healthy equilibrium are linked with their return to their Jewish
identity. In true Jewish tradition, throughout his writings, Bellow struggled against the
isolating and destructive forces of defeatism and nihilism. He always worked towards the attainment of meaning, fullness and spiritual richness in life. In doing so, he has indeed deeply enriched Jewish–American literature and world literature, as well as his readers by making them aware of the world we live in and by making us more thoughtful and better people. While the overall perception of Bellow is Jewish, the milieu within each novel is generally non-sectarian. Bellow’s protagonists are not just accommodators to a particular establishment but they are forgers of new paths of experience. Bellow offers to us the highest degree that one may seek in literary wisdom. It is the kind of wisdom that is merged with beauty, ethics and aesthetics in one mould.

**Life and Works**

Saul Bellow, the acclaimed American Jewish writer, Nobel Laureate, winner of numerous awards, and a towering figure of the 20th Century literature, has secured his place as one of the most distinctive and significant writers of the post war era. He is undoubtedly one of the most written-about fiction writers of America. No other post World War II American writer has analyzed so humanly the effects of American cultural anxiety with the age of technology and rationalism, existentialism, and the legacy of high modernism. Scorning nihilism, alienation, pessimism, preaching against the void, and defending the masculine self, Bellow has affirmed Judeo-Christian religious and social values more strongly than other twentieth century writers. He has tried to restore the integrity of feeling, the meaning of ordinary existence, and the primacy of social contract to a society in which he perceives these things to be in eclipse.

The novelist Philip Roth felt that the backbone of 20th century American literature was provided by two novelists and they were William Faulkner and Saul Bellow and together they represented Melville, Hawthorne and Twain of the 20th Century. Novelist, critic and essayist Cynthia Ozick is of the opinion that of all the Jewish-American writers
Bellow was the most fearless and that he was a genius. He was best known for writing novels that investigate isolation, spiritual dissociation and the possibilities of human awakening. His characterization of modern urban man, affected by society but not destroyed in spirits earned him the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1976. Brought up in a Jewish household, he was representative of the Jewish-American writers whose works became central to American literature after World War-II. Bellow in such novels as *Herzog, Adventures of Augie March, Henderson the Rain King, Mr. Sammler’s Planet* and *Ravelstein*, examined the persistent anxieties of modern life with a romantic depth and relentless sense of humour. James Atlas, the biographer of Bellow, characterized the novelist as: “very engaging, very lively, at times rather tart and intolerant. He was never dull.” Mr. Atlas continued: “If you take the long view and assemble the syllabus of American literature of the last two centuries, he’ll occupy a very high place.” (Atlas 15) He ranked Bellow with such masters as Hemingway and Melville. His works exhibit a high and low culture, and his fictional characters are also a potent mix of intellectual dreamers and street-smart confident men.

Saul Bellow was born on June 10, 1915 in Lachine, Quebec, Canada, shortly after his parents had emigrated from Saint Petersburg, Russia. He had two brothers and a sister. He was raised in the impoverished suburb of Montreal, where his father Abraham was a bootlegger and a businessman. Abraham pushed his children to take full advantage of every opportunity they were afforded and Liza, Saul Bellow’s mother hoped to see her sons grow up to become great scholars. As a child, Bellow spoke French, English, Yiddish and Hebrew and was encouraged to pursue diverse academic interests. Bellow’s parents instilled in him both an intense desire to succeed and a sincere thirst for knowledge.

A period of illness from a respiratory infection at the age of eight taught him self reliance and provided an opportunity to satisfy his hunger for reading. He spent a year in
hospital with nothing to do but read. It is reported that he decided to be a writer when he first read Harriet Beecher Stowe’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*. When Bellow was nine the family moved to Chicago, the city that was to form the backdrop to many of his novels. Bellow’s mother, Liza, died when he was seventeen. She was deeply religious, and wanted her youngest son Saul to become a rabbi or a concert violinist. But he rebelled against what he later called the “suffocating orthodoxy” of his religious upbringing. His life-long love for the Bible began at four when he learned Hebrew. He also grew up reading William Shakespeare and the great novelists of the 19th century. He began writing at a young age.

In 1933, he entered the University of Chicago but later he joined North Western University, where he graduated with honors in Anthropology and Sociology. He wanted to study Literature, but he found the English department to be anti-Jewish. The English Department Chairman told Bellow to forget his plans to study the language. He said that no Jew could really grasp the tradition of English Literature. Bellow perused his master’s degree in anthropology at the University of Wisconsin. But he abandoned his studies to become a writer. It has been said that Bellow’s study of anthropology had an interesting influence on his literacy style and anthropological references pepper his works. He returned to Chicago and married a sociologist named Anita Goshkin. In Chicago he taught at Pestalozzi-Froebel Teachers’ College from 1938 to 1942 and worked for the editorial department of the *Encyclopedia Britannica* from 1943 to 1944. From 1944-45 he served in the US Merchant Marine and while serving with the merchant marine, Bellow wrote his first novel *Dangling Man*. After war he returned to teaching, holding various posts at the Universities of Minnesota, New York, Princeton and Puerto Rico. In 1947, he won a Guggenheim Fellowship for his second novel, *The Victim*, and moved to Paris. He started to write *The Adventures of Augie March* which he published in 1953. It exhibited Billow’s
considerable skill, and marked a profound stylistic break from his previous two works. The novel went on to win the National Book Award.

When Bellow returned to the United States, he settled in New York for ten years. He published Seize the Day in 1956, and shortly after, married Alexandra Tsachacbasov but within four years of marriage, the union dissolved. Soon after, Bellow published Henderson the Rain King and in 1959 he married yet again- this time to a teacher named Susan Glassman. The family moved to Chicago, where Bellow assumed a professorship in Letters and Literature at the University of Chicago. In 1964, Bellow published Herzog, which won him a second National Book Award and he was widely hailed as the new “major” American writer. Shortly after the dissolution of his marriage to Glassman, Bellow published Mosby’s Memoirs in 1969 and Mr. Sammler’s Planet in 1970. Humboldt’s Gift, his next novel was awarded the Pulitzer Prize in 1975 and Bellow married yet again, this time to Alexandra Ionesco Tulcea, a Romanian-born professor of theoretical mathematics. Propelled by the success of Humboldt’s Gift, Bellow won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1976. The committee commended him for his outstanding portrayal of “a man who keeps on trying to find a foothold during his wonderings in a tottering world, one who can never relinquish his faith that the value of life depends on dignity, not its success, and that truth must triumph at last.”(Nobel Committee)

A host of other works followed, including plays, journalistic accounts, short stories, critical essays and social and political commentary. To Jerusalem and Back (1976) is a travelogue. The Dean’s December (1982), More Die of Heartbreak (1987), The Bellarosa Connection (1987), A Theft (1989), Something to Remember Me By (1991), The Actual (1997) and Ravelstein (2000) are the other novels that Bellow wrote. Bellow also wrote several plays, the most important of which is The Last Analysis. Bellow likewise, tried his hand at literary criticism, and published pieces in The New Republic, The New York Times Book
Review, The New Leader and other journals. In 1989, Bellow married Janis Freedman. The couple moved to Boston where he began teaching in the Boston University. He had three sons - Gregory from his first wife, Adam from his second wife, Daniel from Glassman and a daughter named Naomi from Janis Freedman in the year 1999. Bellow died in his house on April 5, 2005 and was buried in the Jewish Cemetery in Vermont.

Bellow has been called the Brain King, the seer with a Civil Heart. His friends considered him to be one of the few unpolluted people in this planet. Some consider him to be one of the most cultivated men of our century. As a writer he has been associated with predecessors such as Melville, Twain, Whitman, with picaresque story tellers like Fielding, and great humorists such a Rabelais, Gogol, metaphysical poets and novelists from Donne and Blake to Dostoyevsky.

Saul Bellow’s first published novel Dangling Man portrays the thoughts and discomforts of Joseph, a young man in Chicago who quits his job in expectation of being drafted into the army during World War-II. It is written in the personal voice of the protagonist whose principal domain is his own sensibility, and whose principal audience is he himself. A series of bureaucratic snags holds up his induction. He isolates himself within the confines of a room in a cheap New York boarding house and is being supported by his wife. As months pass, he quarrels with nearly all his friends and relatives, succumbs to fits of anger and despair, hates the physical decay of his elderly neighbours and is haunted by death anxieties. He, who was deeply interested in studying the great writers of Enlightenment, completely stops reading. Finally, he admits that his experiment has been a failure, his perspectives have all ended in four walls and his search for an enhanced being cannot be conducted in this manner. He gives up his struggle to live with his freedom and demands that he should be taken into the Navy without any more delay. He is last seen standing in a line of military recruits being examined by an elderly physician,
prior to entering the Navy. The novel drew an amazing critical response and was reviewed by nearly every major journal and newspaper in the country. There seemed to be a general agreement that Bellow had written an important novel with style, mastery, brilliance of thought and sharp language.

*The Victim*, Saul Bellow’s second novel is the story of man’s struggle to free himself from a state of victimization. The central character is Asa Leventhal, a Jew who has been emotionally scarred in childhood by his mother’s madness. He failed to have a good relationship with his father, lost both parents, and entered the post Word War-II American workplace carrying with him his personal fears. The absence of his wife Mary deprives him of one source of support. Troubles begin for Asa when his brother’s wife Elena calls him to attend to his sick nephew. The hospitalization, death and burial of his nephew affect Asa. Then there appears Kirby Allbee, a former acquaintance who blames Leventhal for his hardships. During these crises, the matter of identity comes to the forefront and compels Leventhal to rethink of his status in the social system and he indulges in a personal self evaluation. Leventhal’s problem is seen through Allbee. A concern for humanity becomes perceptible only when Allbee poses a situation in which human issues are involved. Finally Leventhal expresses a human concern which arouses feelings of love and affinity. Through Allbee, Leventhal learns more about himself and he makes the best out of the worst.

*The Adventures of Augie March*, Bellow’s most exuberant and nostalgic book, is set in the Depression era in Chicago. Written as a picaresque adventure, it presents a remarkable account of Augie March and his brother Simon. Bellow portrays their fatherless family comprised of their gentle but witless mother, adopted Grandma Lausch and her poodle Winnie and also a remarkably rich neighborhood. Augie, who is also the narrator, is a man of no commitments. He wanders from place to place, never getting so
deeply involved in any experience. His experiences are endless in number and infinite in variety. He works as a stock boy in a department store, sells trivia in a railway station, steals and sells books, becomes a coal salesman, enters the underworld, falls in love twice, trains an eagle to catch giant lizards, joins the merchant marine and finally marries and settles in Paris. Even in the end, Augie lacks commitment. The novel is a lively, boisterous comedy but the main subject of this novel is the development of Augie’s mind and character and through varied experiences, his attaining maturity and finally the recognition of his identity and role in the world. The Adventures of Augie March brought wide acclaim and won the National Book Award for Bellow.

Seize the Day is Bellow’s most read book and it is a compassionate tale, widely considered one of Bellow’s best novels. Tommy Wilhelm, at 42, is in the midst of what seems to be a serious decline. He is separated from his wife and family, estranged from his father, unemployed, and broken. Over the course of one day, Tommy reviews the shape of the past and attempts to plot the course of his future. Seize the Day centers on a complex father-son relationship. Tommy constantly changes his mind to complicate matters. Dr. Adler, his father is a highly successful surgeon but is arrogant and he spurns his son’s emotional plea for financial help and care. He is embarrassed by his son’s repeated failures. He lies to his friends of his son’s financial strength. Wilhelm never took money matters seriously and he becomes a victim because he ignores the power of money. He becomes a wiser man in the end of the novel.

Henderson the Rain King is undoubtedly Bellow’s most loved book. In this comic fable, Eugene Henderson, a discontented 55 year-old American millionaire, decides that money and all that money can buy is not enough. Henderson, after he was alienated from his wives, children and friends and also feeling guilty over the death of a maid at whom he shouted, uses part of his inherited wealth to finance a spiritual pilgrimage to Africa. He
travels to Africa, lives with the African tribes and becomes a god when he convinces them that he is able to make rain. Trekking deep into Africa with a guide, Henderson comes across two tribes-the meek, cattle-loving Arnewi and the lion-loving Wariri. He tries to impress the Arnewi tribe by his deeds. He tells them that he will single-handedly kill the frogs that are desecrating the cattle’s drinking water, but in doing so, he also blows out the wall of the cistern and loses all the water. He gains wisdom from Queen Willatale who tells him-man wants to live. He goes to the Wariri, a dangerous tribe dealing with death. By lifting up the huge wooden idol Mummah, Henderson becomes the Rain King. He and King Dahfu become friends. Dahfu teaches him to imitate a lioness assuring him that he can redeem Henderson. But Dahfu is killed while trying to capture a lion and Henderson runs away from the tribe to avoid being made king. He brings back with him to civilization, a lion cub, containing the spirit of Dahfu. Henderson is reconciled to reality and he is now returning home, to be a better husband and to start a belated medical training. The story of Henderson the Rain King is the success story of a man who achieves peace and contentment through an illumination of his own nature. The book offers Bellow’s trenchant and comic analysis of literary modernism. Through Henderson’s mystical impasses we read Bellow’s comment on the utter failure of nihilistic existentialism to teach us anything humanizing about the nature and meaning of death.

The main character Henderson is reportedly based on a close friend of Bellow, but Bellow has also claimed that, of all his creations, Henderson is the one most like himself.

*Herzog*, one of Saul Bellow’s most celebrated novels, portrays the slow decline of Moses Herzog, a failed writer, teacher, husband and father, as he charges through life unable to face the mistakes that have crippled him and wounded those around him. In a state of emotional and intellectual chaos, he spends much of his time in random, disconnected thoughts that often take their form in letter writing which are addressed to
God, the long dead, the recent dead and the living but most of his letters are unsent. 

Herzog in burdened like so many of Bellow’s characters, by the weight of the past. He must get the weight off his back, but there is the inability to come to terms with his own nature. The fear of death is also at the core of his guilt and his ideas. However in the course of the novel Herzog is partially redeemed because he accepts himself and he accepts his death. Herzog is found trying to move away from selfhood toward brotherhood, to community. He realizes that unless he lives in brotherhood, a man is not human. With sensitivity to humanity, he is able to affirm the common life. Herzog won a National Book Award in 1964.

*Mr. Sammler’s Planet*, Bellow’s next novel written in the year (1970) won Bellow the National Book Award in 1971. The protagonist is Mr. Artur Sammler, a 74 year old polish Jew who is partially blind. In the 1920s and 1930s he served in London as a correspondent for Polish papers and journals. Just prior to Word War-II he, accompanied by his wife and daughter, returns to Poland where his wife becomes a victim of the mass murder and he gets separated from his daughter who was hidden by the nuns until after the war. After the war he and his daughter are reunited and are brought to America by a wealthy American relative. When the novel opens he and his daughters are in New York. All these years Sammler has had little to do and he plays the role of the detached, observing philosopher. However he is not a recluse but quite the opposite. He has friends who seek him for his wit and counsel. The world gets in his way with questions that confuse Sammler. *Mr. Sammler’s Planet* is the story of a man who finds himself in a world of mad encounter caused by an imbalance between the two forces of science and religion. Sammler can ensure the possibility of a new world but is unable to ascertain if it will be better. He spurns his friend Dr. Lal’s idea of colonizing the moon and opts for remaining on this doomed but human planet where there is essentially love and hope.
*Humboldt’s Gift* is a comic novel that portrays the spiritual plight of Charlie Citrine. Charlie is a writer who is constantly affected by a feeling of emptiness and by his troubling memories. He is a Chicagoan with a taste for low pursuits but possesses a poetic gift he has almost lost. Through his friend, the poet Von Humboldt Fleisher, Citrine learns the importance of the spiritual, and through a gangster named Cantabile Charlie is reawakened to his responsibilities. In this novel, the question that confronts Charlie is “how to be a man” in the materialistic and antihuman society in which he lives. He faces a spiritual crisis. Oppressed by contemptuous women and insincere friends Citrine is pressurized to find some solace and also know the reality of life. In fact, the ultimate question that emerges in *Humboldt’s Gift* is how to overcome the anxiety of death. Humboldt’s death educates Citrine to realize the importance of “inner life.” Death arouses the importance of spiritual attainment. Citrine at the end of the novel, triumphs over his inhibitions and is able to go ahead. Finally Bellow through Charlie is able to say that the human being can be saved, saved from the death of the soul. *Humboldt’s Gift* is one of Bellow’s most successful books, and won the Pulitzer Prize for fiction.

*The Dean’s December* has been called a rather wintry piece lacking the comedy of *Humboldt’s Gift* and it met with a cool critical reception with many receivers reacting unfavourably to the heavy freight of idea in the novel. Albert Corde, the middle-aged Dean of a Chicago college, journeys to Bucharest with his wife to see his dying mother-in-law. The post-war world gives rise to moral and ethical problems. It is during this period that Corde is exposed to two systems in the world and both seem to be devoid of the humane code. He is an idealist but is disillusioned completely by the city culture of Chicago when he notices the diminishing of the human factor in Bucharest as well. In a simple attempt to sort through the events of his own life, he gets affected in criminal cases and finds that he understands himself less with each revelation. Corde struggles against
several odds and survives a moral battle in order to achieve a spiritual success. Corde is confronted with the brutality of mankind, yet he attempts to preserve his belief, despite the brutality that he sees around him, that life is sacred. The novel has been written with Bellow’s trademarks namely intellectual and psychological depth and insight. *The Dean’s December* is a moving portrait of a man’s effort to take his own measure. The message that Bellow wants to give through *The Dean’s December* is that love culture is required in order to survive the growing materialistic trends in contemporary society. It is Bellow’s first novel after being awarded the Nobel Prize.

Bellow’s tenth novel *More Die of Heart Break* illuminates in great detail the tragicomic manner in which modern heterosexual relationships have failed. The centre of consciousness in the novel is Kenneth Trachtenberg, a self appointed guardian for his uncle Benn Crader. Uncle Benn is a world class genius in botany but a total duffer when it comes to women. After fifteen years of being a widower, Benn suddenly decides to marry Matilda Layamon. Benn’s marriage, instead of making him happy becomes a cause of anxiety, disorder of instability in his life. The novel expresses bitter disillusionment with sex and marriage, as the main purpose is to make money in a society which by itself is acquisitive in nature. For Kenneth female attractiveness is the main spring of marriage. He has an emotional weakness for Treckie’s female attractiveness, but it is Dita Schwartz with her rough skin who reveals to Kenneth the true meaning of love. *More Die of Heartbreak* tries to emphasize the need of love in a society which is getting materialistic and callous to the institution of marriage. The realization of inner beauty is the emotional response to outward pressures and it comes as a manifestation of love.

*A Theft* is a novella in which Bellow talks of hope and affirmation as the revival of values that he expects to take place. It tells the story of a many-times married socialite named Clara who pines for her first love and cherishes the emerald ring her lover gave her.
When it is stolen, she feels she has lost not just a piece of jewellery but she has lost the sources of all the strength she has. For her, memory helps in restoring symbolically the loss of values and love and finally the recovery of the ring also emphasizes the same theme. In the novel, there is the conversation about the failure of marriage, the future of divorce, and the failure of heterosexual relations. The book, however, had a mixed response. While some praised it for its faith in heterosexual romance, others complained that the book lacks mythic or metaphorical power.

_The Bellarosa Connection_ is a wonderful piece of work in which the Holocaust forms the background against which is placed a gentle soul waiting to redefine life in terms of values that are evading in the materialist world. The narrator, retired owner of Mnemosyne Memory Institute recollects the story of Harry Fonstein from the records of his institute and narrates the tale of Fonstein’s escape from Hitler’s atrocities. He survives the Holocaust with the help of Billy Rose the great New York producer who refuses to accept gratitude from Fonstein. It takes a life effort for both Fonstein and his wife Sorella to make Billy Rose accept the reality of their feelings. In the process they also realize the manners that prevail in the high cultured materialistic society of America. Their untimely death makes the narrator comment on the importance of remembering in life. With awakened feelings and a sense of the true importance of memory, he connects to his personal and his Jewish past and turns to prayer, a prayer for the dead.

_The Actual_ is a wise and dazzling work of fiction and in this novel, Bellow writes comically and tragically about the tenacity of first love. If tells the familiar story of on old adolescent love which is finally admitted to and resumed. The story is about Harry Trellman, an aging businessman who has never belonged anywhere: not in the Chicago orphanage where he was sent by his mother, not in high school, not even in the streets, where his vaguely Asian features set him apart from the rest. Harry has always been a
keen observer, a trait noticed by billionaire Sigmund Adletsky who retains Harry as his advisor. Adletsky is sharp enough to realize that Harry harbors some intense feelings for a certain woman Amy Wustrin- the object of some forty years passion, Harry’s “Actual”. Through Sigmund, Amy walks unexpectedly into Harry’s life and this time he is not letting her go. The novel has one of the most familiar of Bellow’s themes, the failure to recognize the beloved or the “actual.”

With *Ravelstein* (2000) Saul Bellow returned to longer fiction. Inspired by the life of his close friend Allan Bloom, the book dealt with a celebrated Professor dying of AIDS. It is the portrait of Abe Ravelstein, a mega successful Jewish Academic who realizes that he might be dying. He invites his friend Chick to write a biographical study of him. Bellow portrays Ravelstein as a larger than life character. The book is Saul Bellow’s fictionalized memoir of University of Chicago. It has been called a biographical novel, a eulogy, a memoir, the chronicle of friendship in the disguise of fiction. The novel also has many autobiographical references and it celebrates the friendship between Saul Bellow and Allan Bloom. Although *Ravelstein* is not about the Holocaust, it is sprinkled with several accounts of Nazi atrocities and subsequent emotional responses to the horror. *Ravelstein* has given Bellow a chance to explore the astonishment of life, the inevitability of death and the misery of being left behind. The novel provides a sketch of Allan Bloom’s personal history and career.

Bellow has written short stories, some of which are collected in *Mosby’s Memoirs and other Short Stories* (1968) and *Him with His Foot in His Mouth and Other Stories* (1984). A non-fiction book on Israel *To Jerusalem and Back; A Personal Account* (1976), several plays, and a number of essays, some of which are collected in *It All Adds Up* are Bellow’s other works. *To Jerusalem and Back; A Personal Account* was written after he returned from Israel. The book describes Bellow’s travels, his interviews with
Israeli and American leaders and his conversation with the powerful and the humble. The book also presents Bellow’s minute search into the problem. Bellow concludes that the situation in Israel is even more dangerous than he had supposed, for he finds that nations and leaders do not act consistently. He feels that both Arabs and Jews act irrationally creating a dangerous situation. *Him with His Foot in His Mouth and Other Stories* is a loose collection of short stories made significant by Bellow’s style. Here he turns from the public realm to the private or personal one.

Saul Bellow is a master of narratives and he is a remarkable stylist who can move with ease from formal rhetoric to the language of the street. Bellow’s greatest strength as a novelist is his style, which is fluid and rich, picking up the rhythm and energy of Yiddish and the plain speech. His style is precise and lucid and gives off an air of absolute integrity. Again and again Bellow has followed his imagination wherever it may lead. In an era of experimentation he has been a realist. When alienation was popular, Bellow celebrated accommodation. Bellow’s characters are colourful and his situations appealing. One of Bellow’s central themes is the density of life portrayed in his novels. Another theme is the experience of transcendence and the fact that the issues that confront us are ultimately metaphysical and religious. A society that can invent the inner life but give it no nourishment, a universe that requires the self to struggle in order to survive, a protagonist seeking to cure himself of some unknown malady- all these are the typical Bellow themes. Bellow is also a great comic writer; perhaps America’s greatest since Mark Twain. In his works he explores the tragicomic search of the urban man for spiritual survival in a materialistic world. In fact Saul Bellow is an unusually talented writer engaged in the art of fiction, and there is in his work the fusion of intellect, integrity and power of writing. He projects in his novels the crisis of the modern urbanized world with its dehumanizing
impact on the people at large. He depicts a rare depth of observation of human nature, and the power and strength of his realistic portrayal makes his works all the more convincing.