CHAPTER I

Introduction

Political and Social forces always make their imprint on a literature. Especially in America, where the democratic process brings the people into immediate familiarity with and sensitive response to cultural forces, the literature had responded quickly to such pressures. The end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century had experienced worldwide upheavals, such as the two world wars, the spread of Communism and the rise and fall of fascism, and such localized or national events as the great Dust Bowl disaster to Mid-west agriculture. The increasing urbanization and the concentration of population in suburban areas, the advent of the automobile, the radio, the moving picture theaters, and the electrification of rural America are the factors that modified the social, cultural and literary life of the nation.

American Literature reflects the practical concerns of the people. In their attempt to survive in a wilderness mainly factual prose, fiction, and poetry shows immediate concerns of the early settlers. It conveys the information and persuades the readers. It also records the events, describes the landscape, and invokes God. They are considered as a literature of struggling endurance rather than a literature of imaginative leisure. They compensate for what they lack in grace, style, and artistic balance by their vividness, power and charm. Moreover the colonial sermons, diaries, letters, travel narratives and historical accounts provide a firsthand information in regarding the life, ideals, rigors and progress in settling a new land. In addition, they supply insight and introduce themes in the new World environment which became uniquely American.
National events and the social and the political changes influenced the writers and the reading public. They had developed interest in psychology and sociological studies. There were Southern writers, New England writers, Western and Mid-western writer and urban writers. The hybrid nature of the racial heritage has been a pronounced factor in the cultural life and in literature. The problem of racial assimilation formed the basis for literature.

Naturalism as a literary movement became a part of the American scene. Naturalism was related to the developing sciences at the end of the century. For thirty years it was a focal point for literary battle, a term of abuse used by the detractors. As a literary method, it attempted scientific objectivity in the treatment of the natural man, and emphasized the overpowering aspects of his environment or of his passions and instincts. The naturalistic writers inclined toward determinism in viewing man, questioning the principle of free will. For half a century and more, naturalism was a dominant bias of American fiction.

The recurring themes in American literature appeared from the earliest time to the present have universal appeal. The infinite promise of an undeveloped land; the drive and determination of people seeking freedom or adventure; the moral underpinnings of a Puritan ethic; the challenge of abandoning old ways for a new; lure of an ever receding frontier; and the restless movement in search of a fulfilled life made its literature unique.

Every country has its ideal, but America has always had its own dream. The American dream exhaled an original blend of the spirit of enterprise, the longing for an ideal, and passion for liberty. It involved a land where one could live well with expectations and
dreams that Columbus had for a virgin Continent. It had a far reaching vision of the future and that appeared in the fantasy versions such as science fiction or contrarily the American Nightmare.

Many themes reappear in different dress during different literary periods. The search for identity, individualism, freedom, moral struggle, and rebellion vs. conformity were the burning issues of the period and preoccupied the minds of the Americans. To establish an identity, the colonists had to define their place in the new world, their connections with England and their relationship with God. The search for identity took the form of a personal quest as Benjamin Franklin strives towards moral perfection. According to Canassatego, identity is established largely through an appropriate education. Jonathan Edwards sees identity as formed and tempered by the just hand of God. Closely linked to identity is the theme of Individualism. Many elements contributed to individualism, and among them the sense of personal accountability before God, resulting from Protestant Reformation.

Freedom meant many things to early Americans and appeared imminently attainable. According to John Smith, it meant the spirit of adventure. It was also possible to challenge the new beginning. Benjamin Franklin defined it as the right to overcome humble origin by using one’s abilities. The freedom journey was described by various writers such as La Salle, Columbus, Smith and Bradford. On the other hand the journey embodied the hardships that immigrants encountered as they traveled from one land to the other.

Initiation took a variety of forms in literature. Personal initiation appeared in individual selections depicting the sufferings of the nation. Many aspects of the Frontier
was also depicted. Columbus and La Salle recorded the success and failures of the orders given to an untamed land. The Frontier offered a subject for speculation and appeared in the light of its cruel or benevolent effect on settlers life.

Today, the Americans see the world as a place of passionate moral struggle. It tests the individual and the national commitment to virtue and moral right. Moral struggle—the drama of good vs evil has been the prominent theme in American literature. In earlier works, Satan appears as a flesh and blood and plots for the human downfall. Thus, evil was presented as the formidable inner force. According to the Puritan, Jonathan Edwards’s human beings are prone to sin. Nathaniel Hawthorne examines his Puritan spirit by looking into the psychology of sin. The theme of sin and its ensuing guilt became the obsessive center of his fiction. Hawthorne examined the effects of adultery, deception and betrayal in his novel *The Scarlet Letter* (1850). He focused the results of the sins of distrust and alienation in *Young Goodman Brown* (1835). Goodman accepts the Puritan view of human depravity and also accepts that evil is the nature of mankind.

Melville’s view of life’s tragic dimensions was similar to Hawthorne’s. The latter was obsessed with guilt resulting from evil. But Melville was concerned with the origin and nature of evil. His novel *Moby-Dick* (1851) involves a universe, where good and evil are inextricably linked. The novel portrays good and evil in richly symbolic terms and presents a true picture of evil in the squalor of the nineteenth century. Harriet Beecher Stowe and Fredrick Douglas attack the conscience of a nation that permitted slavery, while Seattle protests the government’s confiscation of his land.

It is surprising that evil was such an obsessive concern and reform. It is Zealously pursued in an era dominated by the optimistic philosophy of transcendentalism. It is
maintained that evil is merely a part of a divine or cosmic plan and beyond human understanding. Even Thoreau who tested the ideas of Transcendentalism, while espousing them sought governmental reforms. Writers like Melville and Hawthorne satirized Transcendentalism and throughout their work devoted themselves to dramatizing the power of blackness. Even before Hawthorne and Melville, Edgar Allan Poe created a world controlled by mysteries. The sinister forces are beyond rational control and that often led to disaster and death. Later, American writers found that evil linked with chance determined human fate. Modern American writers find their way to the theme through a kind of dark comedy known as black humor. Flanery O’Connor has made his fictional trademark the symbolic presence of the devil in an absurd world. America’s strong Puritan heritage with its enduring image of life is a continual struggle with Satan of good vs evil. It continued to be the central theme in American literature.

In the twentieth century, individualism received its strongest and vivid expression. The theme runs throughout Ralph Waldo Emerson’s work and inspired such essays as *Self-Reliance (1841)* a call to the readers to discover and rely on their selfhood. Emerson’s friend and disciple, Henry David Thoreau took Emerson’s theory and put it into practice by going to live alone at a pond near Concord to experience individualism. Walt Whitman made the theme of individualism so much his own that he is known as its most eloquent port.

Mark Twain found the theme of individualism among the frontier motifs that characterized all his books. His early work *Roughing It (1872)* suggests that self-reliance is needed by all the settlers in order to survive, especially in a land with a less social...
comfort and structure. His characters like Huckleberry Finn and Tom Sawyer always fall back on their own resources, plain common sense or native shrewdness to endure. Emily Dickinson applied the theme of individualism to her poems.

The American theme was a combination of many things. Some of them included spiritual longing, material enterprise, the quest for freedom and equality that led to the founding of nation. The earliest American settlers saw America as an embodiment of their hopes. It was a land of infinite resources and opportunities where they could construct the ideal society and acquire material goods. Though not Utopia, they at least offered some promises of spiritual and material fulfillment. Some people like Benjamin Franklin looked beyond their reach.

During the nineteenth century, the American theme took a social direction. The works of Harriet Beecher Stowe and Fredrick Douglas answered questions of freedom and human capabilities. From the early American writings, it is known that prosperity is God’s reward for hard work. The self-improvement maxims in Franklin’s Poor Richard Almanac (1739) became the guide book for generations of ambitious Americans. He was the writer associated with the rags-to-riches theme. Horatio Alger wrote about boys who rose to fame and fortune through hard work, clean living, and bravery. Later, the American dream began to lose its glitter. It was discovered by those who pursued the American Dream. W.E.B. Dubois’s Of the Meaning of Progress (1903) offered little hope for the dreams of the rural blacks at the end of the nineteenth century. Scott Fitzgerald deflates the winter dreams of his romantic protagonist. But John Steinbeck’s Leader of the
people (1933) delivered an eulogy to those whose dreams died with the end of frontier expansion. J. Alfred Prufreck's works projected the prototype of the modern fictional anti-hero, whose dreams were remote and unattainable.

In *The Glass Menagerie* (1948) the American dream, suggested by gauze curtains and romantic lighting, where its counterpart, the American Nightmare, grounded in the claustrophobic tenement, are pitted as foils. The narrator’s dreams, the mother’s attempts to recapture the graceful decorum of the old south, the daughters fragile fantasies, and gentleman called it as rosy optimism. Many writers of modern fiction have produced futuristic works, set in a technological nether world, and explored the American nightmare.

World Wars, depression, racial strife, fear of nuclear holocaust, and other events of recent history have caused contemporary writers to reexamine some of the traditional values and dreams. In order to face the complexities of the modern life it has to be changed. But those who feared did not have faith in optimism and it disappeared in the twentieth century writings. William Faulkner, in his Nobel Prize acceptance address, pointed out the conspiracy against modern humanity, its compassion, sacrifice, and above all its ability to endure and prevail. He also reminded them about their special duty to lift the heart of humanity by chronicling its nobility and encouraging its dreams.

Life is a journey judiciously represented in literature. The voyage is from birth to death or from innocence to maturity and wisdom. The journey of Huckleberry Finn was one of the most famous journeys in American literature. He grows in wisdom and experience as he travels down the Mississippi and ultimately heads out for the new territory and away from the evil and hypocrisy of civilization. John Steinbeck’s *Grapes*
of Wrath (1939) portrays a poor family on its journey from Oklahoma to California, a trip consciously modeled upon the exodus of the Jews from Egypt to the promised land. Many of the selections from the United States Literature deals with voyages and quests, both physical and spiritual. The theme of the journey has been pre-eminent in part because the continent was large and much of the population lacked deep roots. There was always hope for renewal.

Material growth fostered cultural growth and expansion. It created a climate in which writers forged a new literature. It was a literature typically American in theme and often characterized by the nation’s mood of youthful optimism. It was the time for a literary declaration of independence. It was for the emergence of imaginative literature that no longer imitated European models but blazed its own trial.

Washington Irving, the first professional American writer, eventually gained the respect of the English, who were at first reluctant to recognize his literary genius. Although, he was never totally free from European influences, much of his writing was uniquely American in its theme. He also presented the good humor of American eccentricities and special feeling for setting and local custom. He wrote highly complimentary biographies of Christopher Columbus and George Washington. His greatest contributions were his fanciful creations of Rip Van Winkle (1819), Ichabod Crane (1820), and a host of other figures which became a part of American folklore.

James Fennimore Cooper wrote The Leatherstocking Tales (1954), which depicted his romanticized vision of the noble savage. It is also the heroic frontiersman and the unsurpassed beauty of the American wilderness. Though the authors delighted in making fun of him, he is still among the most popular of the American authors. James Russell
Lowell, a man of wit and imagination, championed in essays, speeches and poems, humanitarian causes and especially the abolition of slavery. His poetry like that of his predecessors was often moralistic. John Greenleaf Whittier was primarily a public rather than a poet. He was an orator for the people’s interest not a quiet voice speaking to the private self. Like Lowell, he wrote poems in support of the abolition movement. But his most enduring contribution to American letters in Snowbound, a reminiscence that captured the people and the rural New England setting of his youth.

In both prose and verse, Oliver Wendell Holmes was informal. He wrote numerous verses like *The Ballad of the Oysterman* (1861) in which he employed a mock-epic tone, ballad stanzas and heroic couplets. It was dramatically different from the Fireside poets. Edgar Allan Poe’s poems were noted for their other worldly atmosphere. It had a haunting musical effect. When it was read the readers could fasten themselves in the mind with the hypnotic rhythms and rhymes. Perhaps his greatest single contribution, aside from perfecting the story as a new literary form was the creation of the detective story.

American Literature began to flourish as never before during the years 1840-1870. For the first time, a genuinely distinctive form of a new generation of writers came into existence. Earlier authors like Irving, Cooper and Bryant had proved that United States artists could create works worthy of respect. But their writing often reflected strong European influences. Emerson’s call for independence was prophetic. A few years after he spoke, some of the greatest classics of American literature began to appear. In order to understand and appreciate the literature during 1840-1870 one must first examine the climate that produced the dominant philosophy of the time, Transcendentalism.
Since early years, there flourished a native America’s fever for intellectual combat. Out of political criticism there came some reforms. Religious debates had been carried on from the moment of the first settlement in the 1600s down to the nineteenth century.

During the eighteenth century, the argument over minor points of Puritan dogma had become an outright challenge to the dominance of Puritanism. The Quakers, unlike the Puritans held that individuals did not need a minister to mediate between themselves and God. But they could know the deity directly through an inner light. They affirmed that nature was the principal revelation of God than the Bible. Other beliefs lay behind to replace Puritanism by Unitarianism. It derived its name from its rejection of a belief in the Trinity. It was in favor of a belief in the basic goodness and innate free will of the individual. By the time Emerson went to Harvard Divine School, it was Unitarian, and the Boston church in which he became a minister, was Unitarian. It was too restrictive for Emerson, and he resigned his ministry in 1832. He was not convinced because he could not in good conscience administer the Christian last supper. Emerson began to search for his philosophy in which he could place faith. Transcendentalism was partly borrowed and partly his own invention.

Transcendentalism is a group of ideas in literature and philosophy that developed in the nineteenth century. It was a protest against the general state of culture and society. In particular, the state of intellectualism at Harvard University and the doctrine of the Unitarian church taught at Harvard Divinity School. The transcendentalists believed in an ideal spirituality that transcended the physical and empirical and could be realized only through the individual’s intuition, rather than through the doctrines of established religions. Transcendentalism is, as the name implies, a belief that the Transcendent
reality, rather than the material world is the ultimate reality. The transcendental reality

can be known not by the rational faculty or logic, but only by intuition or mystical insight. But all people are open to the higher knowledge and thus Transcendentalism is a philosophy of individualism and self-reliance, traits that had always been treasured in the American frontier society.

Many of the writers were recognized as having a universal appeal that delved deep into their own ethnic, cultural, and religious backgrounds. Dante speaks of the human condition while speaking about his fellow citizens in Florence. Dostoevsky and Tolstoy address all people through the prism of Russian life. The richness of Joyce’s work is integral with his Irishness. Saul Bellow’s art is similarly universal, emanating from the core of Jewish experience and tradition.

Saul Bellow was born in Canada in 1915 as the son of Russian immigrants Abraham and Liza. The family’s heritage emphasized intellectual values and verbal expression and Bellow notes that his mother’s “sole ambition was for me to be a Talmudic scholar like everyone else in her family” (Miller 3) He also recalls his father’s habit of answering questions with characteristic East European Jewish stories in which laughter and trembling are so curiously intermingled that it is not easy to determine the relations of the two. Emphasizing the direct relationship between his background and his writing, he explains that he, like other children of Orthodox Jews, “was immersed in the Old Testament as soon as he could understand anything… You never got to distinguish between that and the outer world Later on there were
translations. I grew up with four languages, English, Hebrew, Yiddish and French… It was a verbal environment. Writing was really just a continuation of something I had always done". (Steers 36)

Bellow, when he was nine, moved from the Jewish slums of Montreal to Chicago, where he attended the public school and the University of Chicago. Transferring to Northwestern University, he graduated with honors in sociology and anthropology, fields of study which could only heighten his awareness of cultural patterns. After a few months of graduate study at the University of Wisconsin, Bellow quit school to begin his career as a writer and college teacher. His continuing involvement in Jewish interests is reflected not only in his novels, stories, and plays but also in his association with Partisan Review, in the anthology of Jewish stories he has edited, and in his Yiddish translations, such as Singer’s Gimpel the Fool(1953).

Bellow certainly does not allow this heritage to be obtrusive to his fiction. Never is the Jewish setting used for sentimental appeal as it is in such popular works as Herman Wouk Marjorie Morningstar (1955) and, with the possible exception of Herzog (1964). Neither does the Jewish milieu especially call attention to itself even for more serious purposes, as it often does in some writings of Philip Roth and Bernard Malamud. Instead, Bellow’s fiction emerges from a particularly Jewish vision of life, a vision which affirms a certain character of cosmic order and meaning. Bellow could, in fact, be speaking of his own fiction when he says in the introduction to his anthology of Jewish short stories that:

In the stories of the Jewish tradition the world, and even the Universe, have a human meaning. Indeed, the Jewish imagination has sometimes
been found guilty of over humanizing everything, of making too much of a case for us, for mankind, and of investing externals with too many meanings. (Bellow 43).

The major themes in the novels of Bellow emerge from just this attempt to find spiritual meaning in the externals of the world.

Bellow’s ease with Jewish identity is evidenced by his use of Jewish diction, proverbs, and anecdotes. Bellow’s growing articulation of Jewish life is evident in his essays, letters, and fiction. A three-fold contribution to the anthology *Great Jewish Short Stories* by editing, translating, and composing a perceptive critical introduction demonstrates Bellow’s enthusiasm for Yiddish literature. The word Yiddish stands for Jewish so it is technically correct to refer to the Yiddish language as Jewish. At the turn of the century American Jews routinely referred to the Yiddish language as Jewish. Yiddish was primarily a spoken language rather than a written language. The Yiddish language thrived for many centuries and grew farther away from German, developing its own unique rules and pronunciation. Yiddish also developed a rich vocabulary of terms for the human condition, expressing the strengths and frailties, the hopes and fears and longings of mankind.

From the earlier days, there were a few prayer books for women written in Yiddish. It was written for women, who generally did not read Hebrew and not well-versed in biblical commentary. At the same time, secular Jewish fiction began to emerge. The religious authorities of that time did not approve of the Yiddish writings dealing with modern secular and frivolous themes. Jewish people, throughout Europe, embraced wholeheartedly.
Saul Bellow is the most significant writer whose vision of life has a great relevance for mankind. A study of his fiction leads us to a vision of life which brings life on the earth in harmony. The present thesis attempts to substantiate Saul Bellow’s promise that art has something to do with the achievement of stillness in the midst of chaos. Bellow achieves chaos by depicting a world where anxiety, confusion and suffering are inevitable. When despair seems all consuming, Bellow’s art permits his heroes to achieve a transcendence and stillness where a mystic healing takes place. This study reveals Bellow’s uncanny talent for achieving chaos and then stillness, by relinquishing conventional conclusions, and by relying on the reader’s ability to stretch his/her imagination:

My books may not make sense to many readers… I’m talking to human beings who have certain attributes… I think of myself as speaking to an inviolate part of other people, around which there is a sort of nearly sacred perimeter, a significant space, if you like, a place where the human being really has removed to, with all his most important spiritual possessions (James 63).

In an interview with Garden Lloyd Harper, Bellow remarked:

I feel that Art has something to do with the achievement of stillness in the midst of chaos. A stillness which characterizes prayer, too, and the eye of the storm. I think that art has something to do with an arrest of attention in the midst of distraction (Harper 14).

Whether one views this stillness, arrest of attention or eye of the storm as the intangible, the inexplicable, the spiritual, the mystical, or the metaphysical, it is the essence of Bellows art.
The distillation of that which enables to accept the incomprehensible, transcend, the immutable, survival on otherwise absurd and fertile existence, leaving with dubious answers, but a quiescence replete with hope and possibility. The present study attempts to locate and elucidate the techniques of an art that is distinctly Saul Bellow.

His writings epitomize the moral vision that is an integral part of the Jewish outlook. He believes in the divinity of the individual, that although a person may be psychological and emotionally fragile, he/she is created in the image of God and is, therefore majestic. This colossal creative has the ability to overcome obstacles that challenge or impede human endeavor and to determine its own destiny. Bellow believes in the worthiness of life which is also God-given, and that one should partake and enjoy the kaleidoscope experiences one encounters. It is a literature that is generally optimistic and affirmative.

Bellow selectively utilized the materials of modernism and that which came before to produce his own art. The heritage of modernism, the concerns of post-modernism, the influence of European philosophical thought, a Jewish American background and a multi-disciplined education provided Saul Bellow a rich source from which to draw upon in his novels. Bellow in his fiction reflects the Jewishness that is the result of those early years and his adult life as an assimilated Jew in America. This dual allegiance appears to be difficult for Bellow to reconcile, judging from statements made by him in different interviews. Bellow has claimed to be an American writer who just happens to be Jewish. This ambivalence can be detected in his fiction as well. He seems to see with his foreigner’s eyes or the Jewishness he acknowledges, is a Jewishness that is occasionally nostalgic but seldom one of pride or fondness. Though, many of his
protagonists are Americans of Jewish descent, their only link to that past seems to be in the form of flashbacks that serve to remind them of (little more) than their origins. They are often underground characters who hide behind the safety of their American identity.

It is likely that Bellow’s distancing of the Jew in his stories is a contrived maneuver to emphasize the Jew as an alienated figure, for there is also the side of Bellow that cannot forget his roots. Bellow’s less cynical Jewishness emphasizes the need for family dedication and loyalty, the hunger to connect as a family, his concern for the conflict and breakdown of the family. His heroes are bound by Jewish ethics based on a system that dictates a human being’s behavior toward his God, toward himself, and his fellow man according to God’s commandments. They strive to abstain from evil and to find a world they can live in. Bellow’s ethical philosophy is a Jewish Humanism which focuses on man as an individual who has the dignity and power to discover for himself the sources of good life. Unlike many humanists who believe in the “God is dead” (Joseph 12) theory, most of Bellows’ heroes have a relationship with their God and find a way to transcend their existential suffering through thought and intelligence. Bellow’s humanism is Jewish in that his characters are laughable and lovable and pathetic at the same time. They are culled from earlier Jewish characters in the folk tales of Sholem Aleichem and Isaac Bashevis Singer. Bellow’s fiction itself is frequently ambiguous due to an intellectuality that must see things from different angles. Sholem Aleichem endows the character of Tevye and Milkman with this particular penchant for analyzing situations by the on the other hand method until there are no other hands. But Bellow has many other hands and they are always serving up contraries.
Bellow is an existentialist and a romantic. His heroes suffer from futility and angst yet strive for perfection and morality. He is pessimistic and optimistic, spiritual and skeptical. He finds heroes in the midst of despair, evil in the midst of virtue. Ambiguity bounds, continually liquefying the ground beneath us. His stories usually take place in cities such as Chicago or New York that provide his protagonist with a backdrop for dissent or despair by magnifying a separation between the self and society. Bellow innately knows the modern fertile city as an especially effective locale to utilize the naturalistic environment that connects and controls modern man in his struggles for survival. The city’s merciless climate, its impersonal masses, and the relentless dangers intrinsic to such a setting exacerbate the chaos and profoundly reinforcing his themes of alienation and displacement. And in these cities dwell Bellow’s misfit heroes yearning for meaningful lives and moral regeneration.

Like most contemporary artists, Bellow sees life as naturally chaotic. It is much like a kaleidoscope where vivid, fragmented objects tumble, produce amusing, but repetitious, meaningless patterns. As a philosophically oriented novelist, he exploits the chaos to show the futility of ordinary man’s struggle in his quest for truth, meaning and values. Plying his early protagonists with various forms of conflict that induce examination of their lives, his heroes seek relief from a world that seems to pursue them as much as it rejects them. How does one behave in an ethical, humane way in the face of the moral lassitude of contemporary America? Where does one find security when one’s identity is threatened by ever-present history? How can one resist the lure of others around him? Bellow offers no answers because he believes there can be none in an absurd world.
The existential theme, so palpable in Bellow’s work, allows that man is an inhabitant of a world where there is no truth, value or meaning and all the chaos he is beset by is equally meaningless. Such a view should logically be considered nihilistic, yet, Bellow rejects this. His heroes do not languish in their mess and succumb to a tragic destiny as does Bartley in Melville’s *Bartleby the Scriveners* (1853). Instead, Bellow shares Camus’s belief described in *The Myth of Sisyphus* as stated by A.J. Seltzer, that “Once he [L’homme absurd] has accepted his prison walls … he is passionately wedded to his life; he is an enemy of death” (Seltzer 17). By embracing chaos, Bellow’s heroes embrace life. As Seltzer explains “Irrationality is no longer feared, but treasured as our sole relief in a universe that yields no meaning beyond what we create for ourselves” (Seltzer 15).

Something quite subtle and perceivable to the naked eye happens at this point in Bellow’s stories. Bellow sets out to produce his art--the achievement of stillness in the midst of chaos – while he reads, anticipating closure, synthesis, or resolution, finds that he comes up empty-handed. As Seltzer states in his description of the novelist as absurd creator, “He [Bellow] feels no need to work toward clarity, cohesiveness, and conclusiveness, for he is not to be held accountable for the world he depicts, his sole responsibility is to act” (Robert 15). Bellow does not seek to illuminate. He presents the images and leaves us to grapple with our own conclusion. Ultimately we come to see that all the reactants that beset Bellow’s heroes are merely the skeleton of his stories. The muscle and sinew that support and fortify the true significance of his act are the philosophical and metaphysical destinations his heroes arrive at – not to a place, but a state of mind.

The beauty of Bellow’s art is that his heroes do emerge victorious, choosing being instead of nothingness. Bellow uses absurdity as a stepping stone to a new level of
consciousness and new standards of responsibility. He harnesses the incomprehensible, blankets it with a mystical quiescence, leaving us with a palliative instead of a resolution. A subtle cessation overtakes us and we can only sense that something has changed. It is the eye of the storm and like Bellow’s protagonists the readers surrender to a metaphysical understanding that is as unique to them. Bellow’s art will take readers to many places but never down the straight and narrow – they must travel the tortuous paths that the multi-faceted intellect of Bellow’s myriad awes of concern turn to. His works reflect sociological, psychological, historical, political, humanistic and aesthetic speculation. Rather than adherence to a conventional form of plot, synthesis, and resolution, Bellow’s fiction often takes the second place to his ideas and they are as prolific and diverse as his intellectual capacity honed by an impressive background. He earned a Bachelor of Sciences degree from North Western University and graduated with honors. He has studied Marx, Freud, Adler and the Gestalt psychologists. He has considerable knowledge of American and European literature, philosophy and psychology. Jung, Rich, Sartre, Dostoevsky, Dickens, Melville, Whitman, Twain, Emerson and Thoreau have all been prominent influences on Bellow. From time to time and often within the limits of a single book, he is apt to make brilliant use of any novelistic mode or technique in which his ideas emerge.

After Bellow determined to become a writer, he first compiled statistics about newspaper publishing. When he was employed in the editorial department of Encyclopedia he worked on some projects. He also started working on his own writing. At first he published a short story entitled Two Morning Monologues (1941). It appeared in Partisan Review (1941). His first novel Dangling Man was published in 1944 followed by The Victim (1947). These two novels are brief. He expressed a dark mood
attributable perhaps to the grim time of their conception the post depression and wartime years in the case of Dangling Man and immediate post war years in the case of The Victim (1947). The Adventures of Augie March (1953) was written when he was traveling extensively in Europe. The novel was published in 1953 and won the National Book Award. He also published two more novels in the same decade. Seize the Day (1956) and Henderson the Rain King (1959). Seize the Day was the only one of his novels to be filmed. The film was directed by Fielder Cooj and starred Robin Williams.

His personal life was not easy and successful. He divorced three times. His bitter experience of the aftermath of divorce, and his experience with lawyers provided comic material for some of his later novels like Herzog (1964). Thematically, Chicago provides the battleground on which Bellow’s protagonists struggle to find or hold on to their identity. They wanted to identify some spiritual value within the vast metropolitan cluster of objects and people that constantly threaten to crush them. Herzog was published in 1964 and Bellow was surprised to look at its immense popular success. He won numerous awards, apart from the prestigious National Book Award and the International Literature Prize.

In the mid-sixties, Bellow digressed briefly from fiction towards theatre. His play, The Wrecker, was televised in 1964. In the same year his only full length play The Last Analysis (1964) opened at the Belasco Theatre, New York City and closed after twenty eight days. It was an interesting piece of work. In the following year, he made a further attempt to move into the theatre. Three short plays like Out from under (1966),
*Otange Soufflé* (1966) and *A Wen* (1966) were staged privately off Broadway. They did not generate much interest and their lack of success discouraged Bellow from further attempts at writing for the theatre.

Bellow was always an incisive commentator on the America’s social, cultural and political scene. He saw the suffering of the Jewish people in Israel, and he was surprised at the evil of the Holocaust. *Mr. Sammler’s Planet* (1970) deals with that. In the following year, he traveled and published *Humboldt’s Gift* (1975), for which he received the Pulitzer Prize. In this novel, the panorama of Chicago life, both high and low, creates a melting pot in which writers, criminals, lawyers and business man are brought together in all brilliantly leveling manner. Many fundamental ideas are seen in Bellow’s novels.

Bellow remained a writer of fiction and, in the eighties, he was more productive than ever before. He produced five volumes of fiction. In *The Dean’s December* (1982) he was more concerned than in earlier novels. Bellow was a significant figure in the landscape of twentieth century American literature. The range and seriousness of the body of work. He has produced will ensure. The accumulation of scholarly analysis of his writing is immense. There is even a journal dedicated solely to his work.

The fact that he is a Jewish American writer cannot be denied. It has its importance both for the material of his fiction and for his stance as a writer. Bellow’s heroes shares the author’s sense of obligation to maintain a constant critical scrutiny of the values of the society he inhabits. Bellow himself finds his values in a broad and deep spiritual and intellectual culture and upon this some of his characters are born to draw comfort. This apparent recoil inward from material chaos as if to seek some essential human or spiritual truth to set in opposition to it, has led to a general scholarly perception of Bellow as a
neo – transcendentalist or humanist writer. After World War II, his constant engagement with the present moment is considered as an important factor in his fiction. He looks closely at the cracks and fissures in contemporary society and at the workings of history that have led to them.

From the perspective of the post–modernists, Bellow is an unfashionable writer. He remains stubbornly within his earliest view of fiction, holding on to the past and to civilization. Bellow sees that the decline of literacy is a decline of culture. There is no monolithic culture but a plurality of cultures exist. The need is to analyze and to understand it. Bellow in his *Forward to Blooms* wrote that the artists should give new eyes to human beings. The writer’s duty tries to make them view that unifies all of Saul Bellow’s fiction. Bellow’s hero searches for meaning and purpose in life. In a Book Review written by Jeanne Braham who linked Bellow firmly to the Mainstream of American literary tradition. She wanted to prove that Bellow’s fiction was more firmly within the non–Jewish mainstream American tradition. Braham contends that Bellow’s fiction is a part of the American traditions of moral allegory. The central idea is that the existential meaning in the American literary tradition is constantly being renamed and redefined with the full recognition that reality extends beyond the confines of environment, selfhood and foolish romantic despair.

In the process of examining each of the novels in chronological order, Braham identifies two main polarities in the American literary imagination. The first is that set up by Melville. He viewed the world as an enigma and paradox. There is no importance given to the logical structures in either social structures or nature. The second is that set up by Emerson with his belief in an divine plan inherent in the universe and partly
visible to man. Into this mainstream paradigm Braham rightly places the novels of Saul Bellow. His heroes struggle with the subsequent issues of a knowable order, the adequacy of reason and faith, self-reliance, the need for a feasible past the need for freedom from the present and past, the meaning of complicity and withdrawal and so on.

A constant critical secreting of the values of the society is inhabited. Bellow himself finds his values in a broad and deep spiritual and intellectual culture, and upon this some at least of his characters are able to draw comfort. This apparent recoil inward from material chaos as if to seek opposition to it, has led to a general scholarly perception of Bellow as a neo-transcendent alert or humanist writer. Bellow’s works are highly subjective and is based upon the tradition of personal relationship between man and his creator. His novels focus on the individual options available to him, his preferences and judgments and his capabilities in dealing with his present predicament. Bellow views the contemporary society as a threat. Society is filled with attractive things but they can be destructive. From his first novel to his last fiction, Saul Bellow has created a virtually unbroken series of protagonists doing mental battle with the world around them.

The loss of self and the quest for it has been the pervasive theme in contemporary American fiction. This theme has been explored by several contemporary American novelists such as John Updike, J.D. Salinger, Ralph Ellison and Bernard Malamud. Saul Bellow differs from these writers in his basic cultural mites. They assumed that the contemporary cultural mites is some sort of a waste land in which an individual has to salvage his own self. Bellow’s quest from the beginning seems to be for viable conditions in the community which makes the emergence of a meaningful self possible. It is true that Bellow’s heroes feel the impact of alienation from the community which hardly gives
him a valid framework of values. As in the existential view, the hero of Bellow also believe’s that a man’s personality is determined by his innate intrinsic qualities. If these qualities are in conflict which the roles which society expects the individual to play, the inevitable result will be suffering.

The focus is shifted within and the process of suffering is both simultaneously transitional and revelatory. It would further imply that Bellow’s interest articulated through his protagonists is within the meaning of identity while suffering is inevitable, Bellow’s heroes convert it into a mode of knowledge. The theme of quest for identity leads to chaos in their life. The protagonists are placed amidst chaos. But they believed that something will happen to quench the thirst. Like Messiah, who came and redeemed the Jews, something will change their lives.

The present thesis analyses Saul Bellow’s six novels *Dangling Man* (1984), *The Victim* (1947), *Mr. Sammler’s Planet* (1970), *Herzog* (1964), *Henderson the Rain King* (1959) and *The Dean’s December* (1982). In all these novels, the protagonists are victims of circumstances, political agenda infidelity, ideology, selfishness, spiritual poverty etc. The protagonists suffer a lot and wherever they go they are in the midst of chaos. They are aware that they are victims of “a random fall into the outcast state” (Bradbury 43), they are sensitive and reactive to their plight. Very often they have a “suppressed racial angel and ‘a sense of general injustice rages’ in them” (Bradbury 41). Even the non-Jewish heroes show similar reactions, reflecting the feeling of injustice. Many times the heroes are over reactive to their problems. They are conscious of their ethnic identity and they become cautious about their relationship with people around them. Even at the
slightest suggestion of a prejudice they become defensive. They feel that they are
“Chosen by God. Rejected by their society” (Malin 45).

The protagonists show strong indications towards Humanism, as they are
victims of human aggressiveness. They blame materialism as the cause of all crimes, disorder and chaos in the society. They claim the lives of several human beings but surprisingly all the protagonists have little interest in money. They have an aversion for materialism. The aversion of materialism finds no counter balance in the spiritualism. Very often, the protagonist tosses upon the loss of spiritual values in the modern world, particularly in America, none of them are religious.

The lack of religious thoughts are understandable in the character because they belongs to the “Wartime and post war period when an agonized existentialism and sense of human absurdity prevailed and when feeling of historical and social victimization were stony” (Bradbury 35). The land of freedom and opportunity the propagated promised land of the twentieth century America, is too scary for the protagonists because “Bellow views contemporary society as a threat” (Malin 9). The very ideals on which the nation was found, according, to the protagonists, are the cause of all the evils the society is facing. The excessive freedom unchecked crimes, unlimited freedom of expression, obsession with sex and, unquestioned opportunity to make money are the outcome of American materialism.

Some of the dissertations also have dealt with the study of Saul Bellow’s novels with the same themes, Stumbling toward Consciousness: the Essential Quest of Soul in Saul Bellow’s Herzog, Mr. Sammler’s Planet and Humboldt’s Gift by Duckett Craig in 2007, Chaos and Stillness: The Art of Saul Bellow by Gerber Doris in 2001, and Bellow
and the inherited Tradition: A Study of Judaic Influence on Form and Content in Saul Bellow’s Fiction by Kremer S. Lillian. But it is noted that in all the research works there is no attempt to connect fact and fiction. So far, the scholars have selected three novels. No study has been attempted to find any solution for the problems that arise in the novel. Thus, a different analysis and approach has been undertaken in the present thesis.

Throughout the present study, the scholar has been guided by the following aims and objectives and they are analyzed in different ways. They are: to analyze how the real world has its effect upon the fictional world, to show how the Jews suffered by analyzing the history of Jews, to bring out the search for identity and self, how the characters bring out the void after achieving success in (materialistic world). To bring out the techniques employed by Bellow in his novels: to show how the characters achieve stillness in the midst of chaos: to point out the autobiographical elements present in Bellows’ novels.

The present study has been divided into five chapters: Introduction deals with the background of the twentieth century American Literature and biographical details about the author. Chapter –II entitled, Chaos in the Real Life and in the Fictional World, focuses on the confusion and complexity related to history and sufferings of Jews. It brings out the sufferings of the twentieth century Jews through the characters of the novels selected for study. Chapter-III entitled Stillness in the Midst of Chaos, deals with how the Jews revive hope through their sufferings. Chapter-IV entitled, Techniques, focuses on the various techniques handled by Bellow to strengthen the hope and affirmation. The fifth chapter sums up the findings of the study.