CHAPTER VII

CONCLUSION

It has been the endeavour in the foregoing chapters to look at the tragic concept of Henry James and establish him as a writer of voiceless little tragedies of the soul. The first chapter, which is a general study of tragedy, chiefly brings out the various features of a tragedy like its faith in the dignity and greatness of man, its concern with man's authentic self, its preoccupation with timeless realities, the moral scheme it contains, the rhythm that tragedy has and how it becomes a grand celebration of life. The second chapter unravels the tragic world of Henry James. It traces the sense of tragedy in James's family and in James and the climate of tragedy in America and James's schemata for tragedy. It also brings out the various elements of Jamesian tragedy like plot, character, moral scheme, sense of evil, passion and optimism. This chapter also hints at the two unique stamps of his tragedy, namely its voiceless and little nature, which in fact differentiate him from the traditional line of tragedians.
Tragedy is an affair of the soul and it is a study of what happens to the soul of man as he journeys from a state of innocence to a state of experience. It is here every tragedy, in one way or another, becomes a re-enactment of the story of the Garden of Eden. Oedipus, Othello and a host of tragic protagonists merge themselves into the mythical personality of Adam in their innocence and encounter with evil, passion and perception. The tragedies of James which we have brought under a very careful scrutiny also conform to this general pattern. Uninitiated as they are, the tragic protagonists of James are all true Adamic characters. They display a lust for life and experience and love their freedom more than anything. Highly imaginative and reflective by nature they create an idyllic world of their own where everything of the finest quality exists. In their state of innocence, James's protagonists bring light and hope to where they are planted. Newman brings light to the gloomy world of Claire, Isabel to that of the Touchetts and Osmonds. Milly lights up the materialistic world of Lancaster Gate and Strether shines like a luminous star in the world of Paris, a place of rash infatuation, where people's moral scheme does break down.

In the dissertation a very serious effort has been made to project the selected novels of James as tragedies of the soul. Chapters Three, Four and Five are set apart for this purpose. Chapter Three titled *Innocence* presents Newman, Isabel, Milly and Strether conducting themselves in their state of innocence. James, in fact, presents them as Emersons on their way to social
and moral maturity. In their state of innocence the Jamesian protagonists, just like Emerson are totally deprived of a vision of evil. They are full of illusion and think that the whole world is before them to pick and choose. They are also proud and presumptuous like the traditional tragic protagonists. James feels that America which is raw of culture is quite unfit for the growth of his protagonists and so takes them to Europe to provide them with an experience of life. As a writer James believes in the fullest expansion of man's soul through an encounter with reality and in this respect aligns himself with Milton who hated cloistered innocence and said that no virtue is virtue unless it is tested. So, the Jamesian protagonists are tested in the sophisticated world of Europe.

The fourth chapter titled *Evil* presents the encounter of the Jamesian tragic protagonists with evil. James does not offer a religious or philosophical concept of evil though he displays a remarkable sense of evil. For James evil means the certain inherent tendencies in man which make him exploit and manipulate others for his own benefits and the greatest sin according to James is the violation of the sanctity of the human soul. The Jamesian innocents are Miranda-like in their wonder as they step on the sophisticated world of Europe and are easily deceived by its external glitter. They invariably fail to notice the serpent lying hidden in the garden of Europe. Newman comes to Europe with an ambitious design. He wants to improve his mind, see all the finest things in Europe and marry the most magnificent woman in the world.
He is a typical Adamic character who feels that he is the master of the world and can do anything he wishes. He courts Claire, a member of a Parisian noble family and wishes to marry her. But in the course of his affair with her, Newman is steeped in the worst form of betrayal and deceit by her mother and elder brother. The world of his dream shatters and Europe appears to him to be his inferno. Isabel, just like Newman, comes to Europe seeking the fulfilment of all her cherished dreams. She rejects the love of Caspar and Warburton for fear that they will drag her into their system and deprive her of her freedom. She marries Osmond whom she takes to be the best man in Europe who will open before her a world of limitless possibilities. But all her hopes are dashed when she finds Osmond to be a greedy predator who has married her only for her money. Milly, who is on the verge of death, tries to find in Europe a strong passionate tie that will strengthen her hold on life. She finds one such in Densher and at a time when she settles to make a final assault on life she is informed that Densher is a cheat who is engaged to another woman. Milly loses all her desire to live and turns her face to the wall. Strether steps on the soil of Europe with a rekindled dream to enjoy the fine vibrations of life. He realises how the puritan code of Woollett had sucked him dry and finds in Paris an ideal haven he has been longing for all his life. He sees in Chad and Marie de Vionnet his ideals and longs very much to be like them. But in the end he finds that they have been humbugs, adulterous in their relationship. Their fall from the pedestal of his mind deeply
pains him. Thus, the Jamesian protagonists, being innocent, which is their tragic flaw, are led to their doom by a world of appearances.

In the fifth chapter of the dissertation we see the passion experienced and perception gained by the Jamesian protagonists as a result of their encounter with evil. As is understood by every common reader tragedy tells a tale of great woe and loss. It portrays the agony of the human soul as it turns on the wheel of fire. The world of Oedipus collapses all around him as he realises the immensity of his crime and in great dismay he even pulls out his eyes. King Lear is shocked to find that his daughters to whom he has bequeathed his kingdoms are worse than Frankenstein and in the horror of that realisation he even loses his sanity. Thus, the tragic hero, as he finds his world razed to the ground by the machinations of the villainous character, experiences a great sense of loss and suffering. He finds himself trapped in a dark alley with no outlet. It is a great moment of isolation and reflection for the protagonist. Newman as he finds himself betrayed by the Bellegardes wanders alone through Europe with a shattered mind. Isabel shuts herself in her room at night and broods over her past with a shuddering mind. Milly, overwhelmed by the treachery practised on her by the Lancastrian folk, especially by her lover Merton Densher, turns her face to the wall and Strether, who finds himself abandoned by his boss and prospective wife Mrs. Newsome and deceived by Chad and Madame de Vionnet feels himself totally lost. The protagonists of James suffer for the same reason that the
heroes of the high tragedies suffer, the reason being they go too far out for something big like the Old Man of Hemingway. Newman wants the most magnificent woman of the world whatever be her religion, nationality or social position. Isabel wants the best man in Europe who would open before her a world of freedom. Milly thirsts for a fuller experience of life though she is doomed to live fast on account of a dreaded disease and Strether wishes to expand the horizon of his knowledge by a fuller experience of Paris. Thus, we find that the protagonists of James hitch their waggon to the stars and are punished for it.

A tragedy may present its protagonist as passing through a phase of passion. But it is only a passing phase, one of the remarkable periods in his growth. The tragic protagonist must overcome this period, realise his true self and finally come to the phase of perception or vision. Thus a tragedy is not a tale of passion though it portrays passion, it is rather a tale of perception, of greater understanding of life and its realities. In other words, tragedy, though it fills our heart with sorrow, does not hold us captive in a dark chamber but takes us to the luminous hall of understanding and perception. It is true that tragedy is not capable of answering all the questions about life, nevertheless it gives a better understanding of life and one's self. It is for this reason that the Elder Henry James opposed the transcendentalist view of Emerson and said that life flowers and fructifies only out of the profoundest tragic depths. Newman gains wisdom and acquires maturity after his period of trial and
testing in Paris. The tragic fate of Valentin and that of Claire gives him an insight into the rigidity and heartlessness of the French aristocratic tradition. The deception and betrayal of the Nioches and the Bellegardes reveal to him how the whole of Europe, irrespective of all its class distinction, shares in the common moral rottenness. After a tryst with his cruel destiny in Paris Newman returns home with a new insight into life. His education in Europe expands his mind and consciousness and makes him a better human being. Just like Adam, he comes out of his paradise with all his illusions gone and the stark realities of life staring at him. Isabel sees the ghost of Gardencourt as promised by Ralph only after she empties the cup of experience, which, initially, she is very much reluctant to do. Her life with Osmond shatters all her illusions about life. She realises how Merle had married her to Osmond for her selfish gains and how her best man in Europe is only a third rate cheat willing to do any thing to climb up in the social ladder. Isabel, who begins her European exploration with the thought that the whole world is lying before her, ends up with the stark realisation that it is too small and chooses the straight path to Rome and to her fiendish husband. What elevates Isabel to the stature of a tragic heroine is her willingness to be responsible for her life and her determination to make the best out of a worst situation. Isabel loses her immature illusions about life and gains maturity and wisdom as she is crushed in the mill of life. Milly also is a better person for her suffering. Her life would have been quite uneventful, had she not come to London to experience
life, though it is fast ebbing out of her. It is her eagerness for experience and love that binds her closer to Densher who passionately loves Kate. Milly is deceived both by Densher and by Kate and all her friends including Susan, and she is terribly broken and loses all her interest in life. But she dies only after having gained the much required perception about life. Milly's experience of betrayal and suffering leads to the expansion of her consciousness and the refinement of her sensibility. She also succeeds in winning the love of Densher after her death by her forgiveness and magnanimity. The eyes of Strether also open to reality after great loss and suffering. When the light of truth dawns upon him, his consciousness expands and he matures as a person socially and morally. He ceases passing judgement on any one and renounces himself totally for the sake of being right.

The sixth chapter of the dissertation describes the 'voiceless and little' nature of the Jamesian tragic fiction—the qualities which account for his difference from the traditional tragedians. Though James is a writer with an abundant sense of tragedy and portrays the soul of man as it goes through the different phases of innocence, experience, passion and perception as any traditional tragedian does, it has not been possible for him to write high tragedies like them. As a creative writer James had to take into account the various changes that had affected the fabric of the society. In other words, being a writer who lived in the final quarter of the 19th and the first quarter of
the 20th century, it was not possible for James to write like Sophocles or Shakespeare. There were no kings or kingdoms in his world and the people of his time had no faith in Destiny or the gods. The voice that mattered then was that of Emerson, the great individualist, who wanted Americans to be the new Adams, self-reliant and self-propelling with no regard for the past. Another great man of the time was Thoreau, the recluse, who also insisted on perfecting one's inner qualities. Naturally, James had to make his tragic protagonists great individualists, always looking within and thinking of their own personal development. The result was the birth of a new kind of tragedies called little and voiceless tragedies.

The tragedies of James are little chiefly on account of the stature of his protagonists. The protagonists of James are not kings or princes or any such men of traditional glory. They have no links with gods; nor do they engage in a battle with them or question their wisdom. The protagonists of James are only ordinary individuals with certain extraordinary gifts. They are all liberated from any kind of pecuniary worries. They are sensitive and imaginative, and endowed with a greater inner life. They value their personal independence more than anything else and are ever guided by a scrupulous conscience. The traditional tragedian had a wide canvas to portray including even the divine world and the activities of gods. But James was forced to shift the scene of action from the cosmic world to the inner world of his character. The novels selected for the study, namely The American. The
Portrait of a Lady, The Wings of the Dove and The Ambassadors form a true cross-section of James's remarkable literary output and reveal his fondness for the depiction of the inner life of his protagonists. Though Newman, Isabel, Milly and Strether begin as explorers of Europe they end up as the explorers of their own soul. Their exploration of Europe is, in fact, only a means of their spiritual exploration. In the course of discovering the true nature of Europe they also discover the true nature of their self.

James's high sense of morality and his innate thirst for refinement are chiefly responsible for the voiceless nature of his tragedies. The protagonists of James are all highly upright persons who would rather sacrifice themselves than victimize others for a cause. They are persons who prefer a spiritual victory to a physical triumph. Being spiritually strong, the protagonists of James do not lament their fate and create a sordid scene. They take up the whole responsibility for their failure on their own shoulders and conduct themselves in a noble manner. They do not wish the heavens to strike their enemies with a lightning nor do they themselves harbour any sentiments of revenge against them. In short, the Jamesian protagonists accept their fate with malice towards none. Newman, the protagonist of the first international novel of James, may be something of an exception to this. Initially outraged by the villainy of the Bellegardes he thinks of wreaking his vengeance upon them. But in the end, sitting in the calm atmosphere of the Notre Dame Cathedral, he changes his mind and lets his enemies go. Isabel, Milly and
Strether are all persons with great inner beauty who achieve tragic height by the willing acceptance of their fate. Isabel, as she is crushed in the mill of the conventional, comes to achieve a terrible beauty. Her determination to return to her husband, though appears strange to the readers, is only the culmination point of her illumination about her life. Just like Newman her revenge is to forego revenge and to remain faithful to her husband who has deceived her in several ways. Her silent acceptance of her fate, her renunciation of revenge and her high sense of morality and refinement make Isabel a typical Jamesian voiceless tragic protagonist. Milly is the only tragic heroine in our study who dies at the end of the story. Her protest against her cruel fate is very characteristic. She turns her face to the wall and refuses to see any one. But, those days of isolation were for Milly days of great growth. She forgives Densher, Kate and all others and gains a superb spiritual victory over them. After her death Densher even falls in love with the memory of Milly and refuses to have Kate in her terms. Thus Milly achieves her goal though she remains absolutely voiceless in whatever she does. Strether also emerges out of his ordeals in Paris with the dignity and stature of a tragic hero. He loses his prospect of a happy and prosperous life with Mrs. Newsome and he even declines the offer of Maria Gostrey for a comfortable life with her. He wants for himself only the satisfaction of having done the right thing and does not want to gain anything for himself. As any other tragic protagonist of James,
Strether is also voiceless in the face of deception. He also forgives all his deceivers like Chad and Marie de Vionnet.

Thus we find on the basis of our study of select novels belonging to different periods of his career that James has been immensely blessed with a sense of tragedy and his works can truly be described as the voiceless little tragedies of the soul. James, along with Hawthorne and Melville may be given the credit of having brought the muse of tragedy to America which has been thought to be dead or dormant after the great Shakespeare. They not only brought it to America but gave it an American look. Hawthorne and Melville were symbolists and allegorists and they presented the journey of the human soul through the various vicissitudes of life in their own unique way. It was left to James to give American tragedy a realistic look and he presented his tragic protagonists as authentic human beings coming to the realisation of their self through an encounter with evil and experience.

James has his devotees all over the world. And it is possible that the number of his devotees will only increase in future as our world is becoming a hopeless place to live in with terrorism raising its ugly head everywhere threatening to wipe out humanity from the face of the earth. Every man dreams of a new world where man is respected and his spirit is given the right atmosphere for infinite expansion. James offers such a wonderful world of highly refined and extremely sensitive human beings who are ready to suffer
and die for the high ideals they cherish. T. S. Eliot in his *Waste Land* pleads for "Datta" (Give), "Dayadhavan" (Be merciful), and "Damyata" (Be self-controlled) and James offers a world where such heroic virtues are practised. The practice of such virtues may fill the lives of the Jamesian protagonists with suffering, but it elevates them to the dignity of tragic heroes. They are crushed, smothered by darkness, but ultimately they are filled with light. "Thamasoma Jyothirgamaya"—Lead me from darkness to light. The novels of James, which are the voiceless, little tragedies of the soul, do that exactly—they lead one from darkness to light.