

TRIBHUVAN UNIVERSITY

Diasporic Experience in Bernard Malamud's *The Assistant*

**A thesis submitted to the Central Department of English
in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of
Master of Arts in English**

By

Deepak Paudel

University Campus Kirtipur

December 2007

Tribhuvan University

Faculties of Humanities and Social Sciences

This thesis entitled "Diasporic Experience in Bernard Malamud's *The Assistant*" submitted to the Central Department of English, Tribhuvan University, by Mr. Deepak Paudel has been approved by the undersigned members of the Research Committee.

Members of the Research Committee

Internal Examiner

External Examiner

Head

Central Department of English

Date: _____

Acknowledgements

I would like to express my gratitude to my teacher and supervisor Hem Sharma Paudel, Lecturer at Central Department of English for his scholarly guidance and corrections that he made on the work. It would not have come into its present form without his help.

I feel very happy to express my sincerest gratitude to Dr. Krishna Chandra Sharma, Head of Central Department of English, Kirtipur and other members of the Research Committee for granting me an opportunity to carry out this research.. Similarly, I am highly indebted to Prof. Chandra Prakash Sharma, Mr. Puspa Raj Acharya and Bal Bahadur Thapa for their invaluable suggestions. Mr. Jitendra Nepali deserves my special thanks for his kind help in preparing this work

I would like to express my deep sense of gratitude to my parents, Keshav Paudel and Kamala Paudel, who made a lot of sacrifice for my higher studies. I would also like to express my gratitude to my brother, Dipesh, sister Sisham, uncle Rishi maternal uncle Purosattam Khanal and aunt Rukmina Khanal. Similarly, I am thankful to my friends, Madhav, Kamal, Basant, Tanka and Madhusudan. Lastly, I extend my thanks to my friends and M. M. Communication, Kirtipur for their help in bringing this research work into completion.

December, 2007

Deepak Paudel

Abstract

This research attempts to explore the sufferings of immigrant Jews during the post-war period in Bernard Malamud's novel *The Assistant*. So, this study is an exploration into Diasporic experience of the Jews who had great difficulty in getting themselves established culturally and economically. The protagonist, Morris Bober goes through hard times as he tries to run a grocery store. Thus, the study explores prejudice against immigrant Jews in American society, and shows how it makes Morris Bober's struggle for holding social position unsuccessful.

Contents

	Page No.
I. Diaspora and Bernard Malamud	1-10
II. Diaspora: A Historical Study	11-24
Concept of Diaspora	
Dispersion of the Jews	
The Diaspora in Jewish Life	
Diaspora as a Cultural Form of Jewish People	
Russian Jews	
Transition, Emigration and Jewish identities	
Russian Jews and Russian Culture	
III. Diasporic Experience in Malamud's <i>The Assistant</i>	25-41
IV. Conclusion	42-44
Works Cited	

I: Diaspora and Bernard Malamud

This is a study of Bernard Malamud's famous novel *The Assistant* published in 1957. It explores into the plight of immigrants who struggle to exist in culturally, socially and religiously different surroundings. The protagonist of the novel, a Jewish Russian émigré, Morris Bobber discovers with increasing frustration that life is very hard in America. He goes through hard times as he tries to run a grocery store. Thus, the study explores the prejudice against immigrant Jews in American society which makes Morris Bobber's struggle for holding position unsuccessful.

Bober's dream of getting himself established in America shatters when he fails economically. The Americans' prejudice against the Bober family, which they show indirectly on the basis of social, cultural and linguistic differences, is responsible for the family's economic failure. Though the American customers do not directly do anything against the family, their behavior shows discriminatory attitudes towards the Jewish family in the alien land.

After the World War II the dramatic political and economic changes leading to the collapse of the Soviet Union have had a considerable impact on the identities of the people inhabiting the once almighty and omnipotent Red Empire. Changes have especially been dramatic for the Jewish diasporas of the former Soviet Union. Gorbachev's policies of "glasnost" and "perestroika" and the subsequent breakdown of communism triggered a mass emigration among Jews since the end of 1988, and in the

intervening period more than 700,000 Jews have left the Former Soviet Union.

The exodus came as a surprise to most observers. Western Europe and the US, whose governments during the 1970s and 1980s had given economic and political concessions to Soviet leaders in order to ensure the Jews the right to emigrate, were deeply concerned by the thousands of Jews (and other Soviet minorities) now seeking entry to the West. Hence, by the end of 1989, new restrictions on Soviet immigration were introduced by the US government, and these were soon followed by most other major receiving countries in Western Europe. Due to the large number of Jews who sought to emigrate, they were no longer regarded as refugees, but merely as migrants. The mass movement was consequently redirected towards Israel, US and other European countries whose constitutional laws embraced Jews in the diaspora as an extraterritorial population and henceforth automatically secure them citizenship. However, in practice they have gone through a lot of hardships in an attempt to get themselves established socially, culturally and economically in the new surroundings.

Naturally, such large scale emigration must have an enormous impact on the diverse Jewish diaspora groups remaining in the former Soviet Union. Of the 1-1.5 million Jews remaining in ex-Soviet territories today, nearly all families have members who have left for Israel or other countries. As post-Soviet society changes, the remaining Jews are involved in a process of redefining their ethnic and cultural identities.

Emigration and the post-communist transition have led to the emergence of new diasporic forms and new ethno-religious identities, both amongst the "stay-behinds" and the emigrants.

As a son of immigrant parents who had immigrated to Brooklyn from Russia, Bernard Malamud records the migrant experiences. In this Malamud uses the *The Assistant* to address some of the motifs from his first novel *The Natural*, but sets the novel in an immigrant setting with strong Jewish main characters. The novel manages to evoke the tradition of Yiddish folklore while maintaining Malamud's training in classic literature and philosophy. The main character of the novel, Morris Bober, for example, can be interpreted from both traditions. Some critics have pointed to Morris Bober being a version of the 'schemiel,' a traditional archetype from Yiddish folklore who acts as an ironic hero, using light humor and irony to soften an otherwise harsh world. At the same time other critics have suggested Morris Bober as the embodiment of the existential "I-THOU" philosophy described by Bober's close namesake, Martin Buber. Both of these interpretations seem fitting and they demonstrate that Malamud's novel reflects his ethnic familial background, while also maintaining the intellectual tradition in which he was trained. Malamud always objected to being called a "Jewish writer," because he has found the term too limiting. Malamud's main premise as a writer, as he explains, was "to keep civilization from destroying itself." As such, he worked for "humanism – and against nihilism" (qtd. in Pinsker 28).

The Assistant tells a story of an immigrant grocer, Morris Bober, who lives and works in Brooklyn, New York. Bober emigrated from Russia in his teenage years and met his wife Ida in New York. Their grocery recently has fallen on hard times because a new store has been opened across the street and is taking their customers. To stay afloat, the Bobers also rely upon the wages of their daughter, Helen who works as a secretary.

At the beginning of the novel, two men rob Morris's grocery and knock him unconscious with a blow to the head. Following his injury, a man named Frank Alpine arrives in the neighborhood. Frank has come from a rough life in the West to start again. When Morris re-opens the store, Frank appears each morning to help him drag in the heavy milk crates. Eventually, Frank asks if Morris would let Frank work for free so that Frank could learn the trade. Morris denies and Frank disappears. Soon after, Morris observes that a quarter of milk and two rolls are stolen from his deliveries each morning. After a week, Morris alerts the police because he cannot find the culprit. On the next day, Morris finds Frank Alpine sleeping in his cellar. Frank admits to stealing the milk and bread out of hunger. Morris feeds Frank and lets him sleep in the grocery for the night. The next morning, Morris slips while dragging in the milk and passes out. Frank rescues him and then puts on the grocer's apron and starts working in the store.

During the two weeks that Morris recovers, Frank manages to bring in much more money than Morris had done. When Morris returns, Frank

moves upstairs to a small room off an apartment that an Italian couple, the Fusos, rent. Because business is so successful, Morris eventually wants to pay Frank. Frank feels guilty about being paid because unknown to the grocer, Frank has been stealing money. Furthermore, it was he and Ward Minogue, a boy whose father is a local detective, who had robbed the grocery.

Frank becomes interested in Helen Bober. Helen recently lost her virginity to Nat Pearl a local Jewish boy whose parents own a candy store and who is attending Law School, but she shunned him after learning that he only wanted sex. The other local Jewish boy on the street, Louis Karp, suggests that Helen marry him, but she is not interested. Frank courts Helen by meeting her at the library, which she visits twice a week. Eventually, they start spending a lot of time together and even kiss. When Frank suggests that they touch more, Helen tells him that she cannot have sex with someone unless she is sure that she loves him. Frank tries to control his urges.

Morris Bober enjoys working with Frank and the two men tell stories to each other during the day. One day, Morris starts to suspect Frank of stealing because revenues do not equal what Morris thinks that they should be. He starts watching Frank closely. Frank, at the same time, is overcome by his guilty conscience and decides to repay all the money he has stolen. He places six dollars back in the register one day, but when he realizes that he will need some money for that night, he steals a dollar

back. Morris catches him and is heartbroken. Still, he orders Frank to leave.

The same night, Helen goes to meet Frank late in the park. She has decided that she loves him and will have sex with him. When she gets to the park, a drunken Ward Minogue, whom she knows from primary school, tries to rape her. Frank appears and rescues her, but proceeds to rape her himself.

The following day, Morris Bober falls asleep in his apartment with the radiator unlit, flooding his rooms with gas and almost killing himself. Frank and Nick Fuso save him. Morris contracts pneumonia and has to go to the hospital. Frank keeps the store open for the weeks when Morris is sick. Business is terrible because two Norwegians have just reopened the competing grocery and all the customers have gone there. Frank gives all of his personal savings to the grocery and works all night long at a different job to keep it afloat. Still, when Morris returns to the shop he makes Frank leave. Morris himself then tries to save the business by finding another job, but he cannot. A mysterious man appears one night offering to burn the store down so that Morris can collect the insurance money, but Morris turns him down. Later Morris tries to light such a fire himself, but nearly burns himself to death before Frank appears and rescues him. Morris again orders Frank out.

One night, Ward Minogue, who has been diagnosed with diabetes and who is acting desperately, sneaks into the Karp's liquor store through a broken back window. After getting drunk, Ward accidentally sets the store

on fire. Karp's store and building are ruined. The next day, Karp, who has insurance, offers to buy Morris's store and grocery so that he can reopen. Morris feels happy and goes out to shovel snow for the pedestrians, although he fails to wear his coat. Later that night, he falls sick and dies three days later from pneumonia.

After Morris's death, Frank Alpine starts running the store. He works all night at a different job and tries everything to make the store work, but times are tough. Still, he decides that he wants to pay for Helen to attend college. At the end of the book, Helen has become friendlier to Frank and seems ready to accept his offer of tuition. Frank himself has changed utterly becoming completely honest and very much like Morris Bober, whose store and philosophies he now embraces. In his final act, Frank Alpine goes to the hospital, has himself circumcised and after Passover becomes a Jew.

Though he is labeled as a Jewish writer, Malamud explores themes in his novels that belong not only to Jews but also to the whole human beings. Malamud often treats the themes of morality while dealing with the concept of suffering. He links the theme of suffering to that of morality so that they run simultaneously. Malamud believes in purity of human nature and moral discipline. He keeps a hope that human beings cannot be morally so depraved and crooked as they are supposed to be. Leonard Linger in the book *American Writers: A Collection of Literary Biographies*, writes:

By creating in his best fiction a realm knowable within all of us, where however fleetingly – truth, beauty and goodness meet, Malamud has most successfully protested against all the temporary assertions of the collapse or disintegration of moral values. (428)

Malamud refutes the assertion of moral leprosy prevalent in the world, and he is hopeful of moral upliftment in the contemporary world. Sanford Pinsker in the book *Jewish American Fiction (1917-1987)* writes, "The progress of the typical Malamud protagonist nearly always involves identification with suffering and some influenced by the taking on the burdens of others" (28). Malamud seems to have been influenced by the religious ideal that suffering and taking burden of others are essential assets of a man who tries to be moral.

Writing of Malamud's preoccupation with the subject of morality Leonard Linger observes, "of course, the tenacity of Malamud's moral imagination has driven him beyond hits of transcendence to full scale studies of successful or abortive initiations into a new spiritual life" (438). Since Malamud's fiction is so frequently ordered around the moral depositions of the characters, he can be called a moralist. In this regard, Jonathan Baumbach in the book *Landscape of Nightmare: Studies in Contemporary American Novel* rightly observes, "A moral fabler and fantasist, Malamud writes of the conflicting demand of inner and outer world of his heroes" (102). The protagonists of Malamud's novels are shown, vacillating between the vision of absolute goodness and

compulsive evil. Their tortured consciences are often remorseful for bad deeds done in the past, and provoke the protagonist to strive for goodness.

Rachel Kadish in the article "Morality, A Living Breathing Struggle" says, "Malamud challenges us to think hard about the proper use of that most delicate of organs, human conscience" (206). Malamud seems to have held that the conscience inside a man is true standard for judging the moral values. In Malamud's world, taking a moral path is neither a simple decision nor an obvious one. Malamud often presents characters that in one way or another are entangled in ethical strain related to their actions. They often ask question to themselves about the right course to be followed. Peter Conn in the book *Literature in America: An Illustrated History* writes, "The People who inhabit Malamud's tales are defeated seekers, trapped in uneven contests between conscience and desire, rationality and violence" (503). To conclude, by dealing with issues, directly or indirectly related to morality, Malamud presents himself as a moral fabler.

However, the present researcher studies the novel *The Assistant* from the point of view of diasporic experience of Malamud, which has not been yet explored because the protagonist's predicament is the predicament of the writer himself in new surroundings in America.

The thesis is divided into four chapters. The first chapter presents a short background of the novel, a short introduction to Malamud, a brief critical summary of *The Assistant*. Moreover, it gives a bird's eye view of the entire work.

The second chapter tries to briefly explain the theoretical modality that is applied in this research work. It discusses shortly Diaspora, dispersion of Jews, Jewish culture and Jewish history as a tool to interpret the text.

On the basis of the theoretical framework outlined in the second chapter, the third chapter will analyze the text at a considerable length. It will analyze the major character's struggle for existence in new surroundings in America. It will sort out some extracts from the text as evidence to prove the hypothesis of the study – that life is hard for immigrants.

The fourth chapter is the conclusion of this research work. On the basis of the textual analysis done in the third chapter, it will conclude the exploration and arguments put forward in the preceding.

II: Diaspora: A Historical Study

The Concept of Diaspora

The term "Diaspora" (Ancient Greek *διασπορά*, "a scattering or sowing of seeds") is used (without capitalization) to refer to any people or ethnic population forced or induced to leave their traditional ethnic homelands, being dispersed throughout other parts of the world, and the ensuing developments in their dispersal and culture.

In the beginning, the term "Diaspora" (capitalized) was used by the Ancient Greeks to refer to citizens of a grand city who migrated to a conquered and with the purpose of colonization to assimilate the territory into the empire. The original meaning was cut off from the present meaning when the Old Testament was translated to Greek, the word Diaspora was used to refer specifically to the populations of Jews exiled from Judea in 586 BC by the Babylonians, and Jerusalem in 136 AD by the Roman Empire. This term is used interchangeably to refer to the historical movements of the dispersed ethnic population of Israel, the cultural development of that population, or the population itself. The probable origin of the word is the Septuagint version of Deuteronomy 28: 25, "thou shalt be a Diaspora (Greek for dispersion) in all kingdoms of the earth" (*The Encyclopedia Britannica* 1350).

The academic field of Diaspora Studies was established in the late twentieth century, in regard to the expanded meaning of 'diaspora,' Jacob Riis, a renowned New York Journalist and photographer, says, "Diaspora was established in the mid twentieth century but it was a confirmed fact

that the expanded meaning of Diaspora was thoroughly researched in the late twentieth century" (73).

The Jewish diaspora (Hebrew: Tefutzah, "scattered," or Galut "exile") is the dispersion of the Jewish people throughout Babylonia and the Roman Empire. It later spread throughout the world by either migration or conversion. The Diaspora is commonly accepted to have begun with the eighth century BC conquest of the ancient Jewish kingdoms and expulsions of enslaved Jewish population. A number of Middle Eastern Jewish communities were established then as a result of tolerant policies of the government there and remained notable centers of Torah life and Judaism for centuries to come. The defeat of the Great Jewish Revolt in the year 1970s and of Bar Kokhba's revolt in 1975s against the Roman Empire notably contribute to the numbers and geography of the Diaspora, as many Jews were scattered after losing their state Judea or were sold to slavery throughout the empire. The term is also used – in a more spiritual sense – for Jews whose ancestors converted to the religion outside of Israel, even if those people strictly speaking could not be said to be exiles (*The Encyclopedia Americana* 1453).

Dispersion of the Jews

The destruction of Judea exerted a decisive influence upon the dispersion of the Jewish people throughout the world, as the center of worship shifted from the Temple to Rabbinic authority.

Some Jews were sold as slaves or transported as captives after the fall of Judea; others joined the existing Diaspora, while still others

remained in Judea and began work on the Palestinian Talmud. For those Jews in the Diaspora they were generally accepted into the Roman Empire, but with the rise of Christianity, restrictions grew. Forced expulsions and persecution resulted in substantial shifts in the international centers of Jewish life to which far flung communities often looked; although not always unified due to the Jewish people's dispersion itself moved from Judea to Babylonia to Spain to Poland to the United States and finally back to Israel.

During the middle Ages Jews divided themselves into distinct regional groups which today are generally addressed according to two groupings: the Ashkenazi (North Eastern European Jews). These groupings incorporate parallel histories sharing many series of persecution and forced expulsions, which finally culminated in events in the 20th century that led to the state of Israel.

Jewish Life and the Diaspora

Between the Roman destruction of Judea and the re-establishment of a Jewish state with the independence of Israel in 1948, all Jews were considered to be living in the Diaspora, currently, the term refers to Jews living outside of Israel.

Subsequent numerous exiles and persecution, as well as political and economic conditions and opportunities, affected the numbers and dynamics of Jews Diaspora. As of 2005, the largest number of Jews live in United States (5280, 000), and the United Kingdom (298,000). As of 2006, however, it is estimated that the country with the largest number of Jews

in the state of Israel, with the united states falling to 2 due to assimilation, a low birth rate, and emigration (over 3,000) North American Jews. (including Canada) immigrated in 2005 to Israel). Although Israel's Jewish population (5,235,000) is greater than any of these but that of the United States, it is usually not considered as Diaspora.

Jewish history is the history of the Jewish people, faith (Judaism) and culture. Since Jewish history encompasses nearly six thousand years and hundreds of different populations, any treatment can only be provided in broad strokes. Additional information can be found in the main articles listed below, and the specific country histories listed in the articles (Ancient Jewish History 175).

Diaspora as a Cultural Form of Jewish People

Diaspora refers to the Jews who scattered after Babylonian captivity and in the modern period to Jews leaving outside of Palestine and latterly Israel. For them the concept of Diaspora implies a traumatic exile from historical homelands and dispersal throughout many lands. They try to create cultural form of their own. The concept of forming their own culture in an alien land is a special feature of Diaspora.

In recent times the term is associated with colonial experience. When we examine Ashcroft, Griffith, and Tiffin, they believe Diaspora can't be separated from colonialism as it was this historical condition that led to the displacement of people across the world. Ashcroft et al. view that "colonialism itself is a Diasporic movement" (Ashcroft 69). Under colonialism the meaning of Diaspora has been extended to cover a range

of different cultural and ethnic groups held together by shared cultured or religious commitments and having sense of 'exile' from a place or state of origin belonging.

Within cultural studies the term is used to describe the dynamic network of communities without the stabilizing allusion to an original homeland or essential identity. Diaspora has been used in the studies of race and ethnicity to describe a range of cultural affiliation connecting the groups dispersed voluntarily or involuntarily across notional borders.

Russian Jews

The Russian Jews, like other groups of migrants, are involved in processes of identity-change when they arrive in their new countries of destination. Confronted with entirely new realities, they search for new identities. Here the cultural experiences of Russia play an essential role. New identities are constructed in which the imagination of life in Russia (FSU) is of crucial significance. In the case of Russians, Jewish emigration to Israel is the creation of a new Diaspora in the mythical homeland. Russian Jews do not simply come home; rather, they become Diasporic in relation to their erstwhile homeland, Russia. Diaspora does not cease to exist when Russian Jews come home to Israel. On the contrary a new-Jewish Diaspora emerges.

After the 1917s Russian Revolution, the Jews, who until then had resided in shuttles in the Pale of Settlement in the Western part of the Russian Empire, were permitted to move to the metropolises (Jews History 12). The following decades saw the urban migration of hundreds of

thousand of Jewish families. The new city-dwellers soon found work largely within the fields of administration, education and the liberal profession. Hence, the Jews were rapidly brought into the modern lives of soviet citizens. Simultaneously, the Jews lost contact with the traditional Jewish communities in the Pale of Settlement. Specific Jewish cultural features such as Yiddish language, religious practices and Jewish household gradually vanished due to lack of convergence with modern soviet lifestyle or simple secularization (Levin 1988). It is this group of metropolitan, secular Jews that has become known as Heartland Jews.

By the end of the 1970s, the Heartland Jews made up more than half of the total Jewish population of the Soviet Union. For soviet Jews secularization was not simply a mechanical process, however. Traditional Jewish life was severely suppressed by the Soviet authorities. Jews were deprived of their cultural institutions and synagogues, their schools were closed, and Jewish cultural organizations prohibited during the 1920s. The creation of the state of Israel in 1948 was soon followed by a major anti-Jewish purge in the Soviet Union. After the death of Joseph Stalin, in 1953, the repression receded, yet in most respects the official policy towards the Jews remained unchanged until the era of Gorbachev.

In this general climate of assimilation, the soviet internal passport system played a major role in the maintenance of distinct Jewish identities. From the age of 16, all urban dwellers had to declare their nationality in an affidavit. Children of mixed marriages were allowed to choose between the nationalities of their parents. In any contact with the authorities, Jews

could not expel their nationalities of their parents. In any contact with the authorities, Jews could not expel their nationality (Korey 1973) and in this way they were excluded from a number of sensitive fields: diplomacy, the security apparatus, higher levels of the party etc. Moreover, Jews were discriminated against in spheres of education and qualified work. In reality, the system of ethnic quotas limited the possibilities of particular national groups, especially the Jews, as their national quota allotments rapidly filled up (Korey 1973, Levin 1988). Nevertheless, in 1989, the Jews constituted the Soviet Union's best educated nationality group.

Transition, Emigration and Jewish identities

The transition of Soviet Union is usually said to have been initiated by the coming into power of Gorbachev in early 1985. From 1987 came the policy of 'glasnost' and subsequently 'perestroika' From then on, the isolated and dispersed Jewish underground networks gradually stepped out into the limelight and semi-legal organizations were founded. This occurred at a time when the possibilities for Jews to emigrate were extremely limited. Many 'refuseniks' were at this time still prosecuted just for having applied for exit visas (Althuler 1988). By the end of 1988 those Jews who had already applied for exit visas were being allowed to leave, and gradually exit restrictions were lifted if not *de jure* then *de facto*. In 1989 a number of former political prisoners, including Andrei Sakharov and other prominent dissidents, were elected to the peoples' congress, and the semi-legal Jewish organizations could officially register along with other civil organizations. During the following years the state-imposed

'anti-Zionist' agitation gradually disappeared from television and the printed press, and there appeared programs and articles positively disposed towards Israel and Jewish life. With the democratization of public life, it became possible for the Jews to abstain from literature about Judaism and traditional Jewish life. The officially implemented discriminatory barriers, such as the national quota system, which limited the number of Jews 'Glasnost' and "perestroika' also opened the way for populist Russian radical nationalist and fascist organizations, who took advantage of the new freedom of speech to express their anti-Jewish sentiment. According to the ideologies of these organizations, the Jews were to blame for the creation of the Soviet Union and the era of communism in Russia. During the summer of 1990 wide spread rumors were circulating in Moscow and Saint Petersburg that a pogrom would break out on certain days. That has come to be called 'anti-Semitism' in a more overt form.

In the sphere of economy, the market-reforms led to a serious decline in living standards, with the changes it became increasingly hard for Soviet citizens to fulfill basic daily needs. An architect among Jewish informants described the situation around 1990:

There was a general climate of instability. Nobody knew what political and economical developments the morrow would bring. Many Jews were convinced that a total collapse of the state was impending, an impression that was supported by the

anti-Semitic activities of fascist –and national – patriotic organizations. (qtd. in Pinkus130)

Russian Jews and Russian Culture

With the opening of the Soviet borders, emigration had become one of the most important elements of Russian Jewish identities that were connecting Russian Jews to Israel. Emigrants actually had a choice of destination from late 1988, when the fourth wave emigration began, to the end of 1989, where the US and most West European countries stopped granting political asylum to Jews from the Soviet Union. During this short period, more than 15,000 went to Israel. Since then, the greater parts of Jews have been deprived of the possibility to freely choose their destination. To emigrate today now means primarily to go Israel. Simultaneously, the socio-political pressure on the remaining Russian Jews has been relieved. There is no more any state-imposed anti-Semitism in Russia. True, the general economic situation has deteriorated, and the standard of living – including those of intellectuals – has been severely reduced. Nevertheless, in the opinion of many Jews, the perspectives for the future in Russia seem rather insecure. Most educated Russian Jews are involved in continuous rethinking of whether to stay or leave. In these negotiations, a crucial factor in favor of staying in their 'rootedness' is in Russia. A woman, musician, at the age of 54, explains:

My family is connected very strongly in Russia, and it is something which comes from within. I don't know why. May be it is connected to the fact that in my idea of a homeland,

the culture is something secondary. What comes first is the destiny I share with people around me. Not my family or my friends, but all the people who share a destiny. Including the war, the Stalin terror, including the victory in connection with the democratization. My son took part in the events of 1991. Sharing this is a natural thing for my family. I want to stay is with this country, and this country shall better with me. (qtd. in Pinkus 325)

A professor of fine arts aged 50 expressed his root dress thus:

I know that there is a Jewish culture, and I regard myself as a Jew. But as far as Jewish culture is concerned I feel somewhat handicapped. I can't emphasize Jewish culture with the same warm feelings as the Russian culture. But I can't stop being a Jew though I am a Jew as well by blood as by other difficult to explain reasons, I nevertheless fell so much at home here, so natural, that I would feel myself a strange r any where else. (qtd. in Pinkus 175)

Another intellectual, a 65-years old female teacher of music, elaborates on her feelings of Russian rootedness:

For me one of the most important things in life is the privilege of conversation. The Russian language is unique language, so rich and colorful. The language and the nature are the main reason that I would never feel at home anywhere else than in Russian. I would never feel at home any where

else than in Russia. I could never no matter how brilliantly I might adapt to another language be able to express myself as I can in Russian. (qtd. in Korey123)

Most heartland Jews today refer to Jewish language and culture as having been lost during the process of assimilation to Soviet life. On the contrary many Jews, particularly intellectuals, have a strong sense of connection to Russian cultural life. Jewish intellectuals tended to emphasize their organics links with Russia. Some of the more characteristic statements from this Jewish information were:

"My soul is connected to the Russian land".

"I have grown up with Russian culture."

"Russian is my destiny."

"I cannot live without Russian literature."

"Russian culture is unique."

"I am deeply devoted to Russian nature."

"My roots are here in Russia."

"I belong to the Russian intelligentsia." (qtd. in Korey 124)

The term with the transformation of time has also been extended now to include the descendents of Diaspora movements generated by colonialism, which have developed their own distinctive cultures, which both preserve and often extend and develop their original cultures. Observing Diaspora from this standpoint critic Thomas Bloom Hansen views Diaspora as:

The term 'Diaspora' not only transmits a certain sense of shared destiny and predicament, but also an inherent will to preservation and celebration of the ancestral culture and equally inherent impulse toward forging and maintaining link with the 'old country'. (Hansen 12)

To live in Diaspora is to experience the trauma of exile, migration, displacement rootlessness and the life in a minority group haunted by some sense of loss, some urge to reclaim, to look back. As Rushdie in this regard says:

I have been in a minority group all my life-a member of an Indian Muslim family in Bombay then Mohajirmigrant-family in Pakistan and now as a British Asian [. . .] creating an 'Imaginary Homeland' and willing to admit, though imaginatively, that s/he belongs to it.(4)

According to Radhakrishnan, in the Diaspora, immigrants suppress their ethnicity in the name of pragmatism and opportunism, initially, then assimilate actively hiding their distinct ethnicity to be successful in the New world and lastly seeks the hyphenated integration of ethnic identity with national identity- such as Asian American- under conditions that do not privilege the 'national at the expense of the 'ethnic'. However, the question is raised about the efficacy of the politically correct term like 'Asian-American/ 'African-American' to cover the identification of person -- south Asian of Hindu heritage. Born in Trinidad, raised in Trinidad and living in England like Naipaul. So, invention of such identity through

language is never meant to be a culmination, rather only a movement toward transformative change.

People in the Diaspora have been forced by cultural displacement to accept the provisional nature of all truths. Their identities are at once plural and partial. According to Radhakrishnan, "The Diaspora has created rich possibilities of understanding different histories. And these histories have taught us that identities, selves, traditions and natures do change with travels" (210). So, the proposition can be drawn that identities, perspectives and definitions change when people move. Diaspora is not infertile space to occupy in spite of that Diasporas people feel to be torn a part between root culture and the ground to be shifting and ambiguous. As Hall argues:

The Diaspora experience [. . .] is defined, not by essence or purity, but by the recognition of a necessary heterogeneity and diversity by a conception of 'identity' which lives with and through, not despite, difference; by hybridity. Diaspora identities are those which are constantly producing and reproducing themselves a new, through transformation and difference. (119-20)

Thus, the notion of a 'Diasporic identity' has been adopted by many writers as a positive affirmation of their hybridity.

Identity is much debated when it is in crisis. The home county and the country of residence adopted could become merely 'ghostly locations, and the result can only be a double depoliticization. Whatever being

argued about Diaspora the concept of Diaspora is aptly used to describe dispersed intellectuals, expatriates or exiles in postcoloniality.

Although the meaning of Diaspora has been extended to the postcolonial context, in which people from different ethnic community immigrate to alien land and experience a sense of loss of their roots.

However, the present study focuses on the original meaning of Diaspora because the protagonist, Bobber, in *The Assistant*, is a Russian Jew living in America. He gets Diasporic experience as an immigrant in the new surroundings.

III: Morris Bober's Diasporic Experience in Malamud's *The Assistant*

As the term "Diaspora" historically refers to the sufferings of Jews who were forced to abandon their ancestral home, it has a sense of exile and feeling of displacement in the alien land. These Jews lived in the space between the old world from where they had come from and the new world where they were trying to create their own identity and hold position in completely different environment. However hard they tried to establish themselves in the foreign land, the native's prejudice against them made it impossible to adjust themselves into the new surroundings. The concept of holding their social and economical position in the unfamiliar place is a special feature of Diaspora. As forced immigrants, the Jews went through very hard times due to different discriminatory behaviors which made them experience a sense of Diaspora.

The present research is a historical study of Jewish displacement in America. The tragedy of an exile becomes prominent in the novel *The Assistant*. The protagonist, Morris Bober represents the tragedy of Russian immigrant who has to live in exile with his wife and daughter in America. For a living, Morris takes up the grocery business, but he goes through very hard times as the customers do not go to buy goods at his store due to religious prejudice against the Jews in America. His situation continues to worsen till his last struggle in the alien land. In the meantime, he suffers failure after failure to keep his store afloat. Many times he is robbed and he becomes frustrated and on the verge of committing suicide. Thus, Morris

becomes unsuccessful for holding social position due to his Jewish background.

The American customer's prejudice against the grocer affects Morris' life adversely. The customers hardly come to buy goods at his store though he patiently waits for them. This makes him alienated and frustrated. However, he keeps waiting:

Now the store looked like a long dark tunnel. The grocer sighed and waited. Waiting he did poorly. When times were bad time was bad. It died as he waited, stinking in his nose. Sometimes when he looked up from his newspaper, he was startled to see a customer standing silently at the counter.

(474)

Though Morris is living in American City, he makes it a point to read the Jewish newspaper daily. Morris' reading "Jewish Paper" reveals his effort to keep up her identity as a Jewish in the alien land. (474). But his grocery business is doing so poorly that he cannot even afford the 'paper' Malamud writes:

In the store, rang up "no sale" and took a nickel out of the drawer. Morris lifted the lid of cash register, struck a match on the underside of the counter, Morris reads Jewish paper will time and frustrate at the store and holding the flame cupped in his palm, peered at the figure of his earnings. Ida had taken in three dollars. Who could afford a paper?

Nevertheless he goes for one, considering the small pleasure
he would get from it. (486)

Sitting alone at the store makes him nostalgic of his past life as he wished fleetingly that he could once more be out in the open as when he was a boy- never in the house, but the sound of the blustery wind frightened him" (475). This feeling highlights the nostalgic feeling of a Diaspora. But the 'blustery wind' reflects very difficult situation in America.

Many a time Morris has thought of selling his store, but he is sure that no one would be ready to buy it from him. He relishes the thought the Jews proves fatal for Morris' family. His wife Ida hopes for the better times, but in reality nothing works for them. "He thought again of selling the store but who would buy? Ida still hoped to sell. Every day she hoped. The thought caused him grimly to smile, although he did not feel like smiling. It was an impossible idea so he tried to put it out of his mind" (475). But Morris is in such a situation in the new surrounding that he suffers from a sense of insecurity and instability. Even after selling his store, he has nowhere to go and nothing to do. So, he is forced to remain in his tomb like store:

Yet if he miraculously sold the store, where would he go,
where? He had a moment of uneasiness as he pictured himself
without a roof over his head. There he stood in all kinds of
weather, drenched in rain, and the snow froze on his head.
No, no for an age had he lived a whole day in the open. As a
boy always running in the muddy, rutted streets of the

village, or across the fields, or bathing with the other boys in the river; but as a man, in America he rarely saw the sky. In the early days when he drove a horse and wagon, yes, but not since his first store. In a store you were entombed. (475)

His wife, Ida's desperate efforts to keep the store afloat highlights their plight. When she asks him to tidy up the floor for the customers, Morris feels disgusted and shouts: "what customers? He shouted, "Who customers? Who comes in here?" (479). This shows American's biased attitude towards the Jews who are trying to struggle there for a social position. Morris recalls the bad times he had lived through but now times are worse than in the past now they are impossible:

His store was always a marginal are, up today, down tomorrow as the wind blew: Overnight business could go down enough to hurt [. . .]. When he had first bought the grocery it was all right for the neighborhood; it had got worse as the neighbors had. Yet even a year ago, staying open seven days a week, sixteen hours a day, he could still ale out a living. What kind of living? – a living; you lived. Now, though he toiled the same hard hours, he was close to bankruptcy, his patience torn. (480)

Julius Karp, who is a Yiddish- speaking immigrant to Brooklyn like Morris, attributes Morris' poor business to the poor neighborhood in Brooklyn, New York. However, the reality is different:

Morris groaned; he knew his fate. Yet as the days went by, the store still sitting empty- emptier, he found himself thinking may be the new business would never materialize. May be the man had changed his mind. It is possible he had seen how poor the neighborhood was and would not attempt open the new place. Morris wanted to ask Karp if he had guessed the right but could not bear to humiliate himself further. (481)

Morris' frustration doubles when he imagines a new shop with grand decoration being opened nearby. This foreshadows the real event when it really happens. He dreams of the rich and new items at this store:

Every day the place flowered with new fixtures- streamlined counters, the latest refrigerator, fluorescent lights, a fruit stall, a chromium cash register; then from the wholesalers arrived a mountain of cartoons and wooden boxes of all sizes, and one night there appeared in the white light . . . packing out symmetrical rows of brightly labeled cans Jars, gleaming bottles. (481)

This imagination troubles him a lot as he cannot afford to keep these flings. He tries hard to sleep but cannot and grows restless in bed. This shows Morris' predicament in the alien land. However hard he works, he cannot keep his store afloat because the customers go to other places to buy their goods. His dream of establishing himself in American society shatters due to his Jewish association:

He labored long hours, was the soul of honesty – he could not escape his honesty, it was bedrock; to cheat would cause an explosion in him, yet he trusted cheaters – coveted nobody's noting and always got poorer. The harder he worked his toil was a form of time devouring time – the less he seemed to have. He was Morris Bobber and could be nobody more fortunate. With that name you had no sure sense of property, as if it were in your blood and history not to possess, or if by some miracle. (485)

Morris' suffering is not only economic though it is so in many respects. The other causes of his suffering are the loss of his only son and separation from his close relatives in Russia. The neighborhood in Brooklyn, New York has only three Jewish families. It is an immigrant location where all of the characters are referred in terms of their ethnicities. There is Carl, the Swedish painter, Schmitz the German grocer, the polish woman, and Nick Fusco, the Italian mechanic. These ethnic references suggest that these people are true immigrants who left Europe to struggle in America for better life. Their situation is better than Morris Bobber's who has become the victim of prejudice.

Morris' struggle to get good social position yields no fruit when Frank Alpine, an Italian gangster along with his accomplice robs his store, injuring him on the head. Even when manhandling the grocer one of the robbers shows his prejudice against Jews. He says to Morris, "You're a Jew liar" (493), when Morris tells the truth that his business is getting

worse. The robbers come to rob a poor immigrant's store instead of other American's stores. This shows how insecure and unsafe the immigrants are in the new country. They find Mr. Morris in the whole of Brooklyn in New York. His pitiable state is described: "He had hoped state in America and got little. And because of him Helen and Ida had less. He defrauded them, he and the bloodsucking store. [. . .]. He fell without a cry. The end fitted the day. It was his luck, others had better" (494).

The other customers who come to buy goods at Morris' store have prejudice against the Jews. They take a liking to Frank who works for Morris. When Frank starts working at the grocery, there occurs "sudden unlooked-for flurries of customers, mostly women, whom he waited on attentively, taking to them about all kinds of things" (523). They find him friendly than Morris. They warn Frank against working for Morris. Malamud describes one of the customers as saying, "Don't work for a rid, Kiddo. They will steal your ass while you are sitting on it" (523). This shows how people in the new country are unsympathetic towards immigrants who try to establish themselves socially, and economically.

Detective Minogue's son Ward who has become a criminal has also prejudice towards the Jews. Malamud writes about his prejudice: "He remembered thinking as they went into the store, a Jew is a Jew, and what difference does it make? Now he thought, I held him up because he was a Jew, what the hell are they to me so that I gave them credit for it?" (533).

Frank Alpine then comes to help Morris Bobber at his store though his ulterior motive for his offer of help is mysterious. In reality, Frank is

attracted by Morris's simplicity, poetry and his young daughter. Before Frank comes to stay at Morris', he helps him carry the boxes of milk and bread up to the store. And he starts stealing money and rolls of bread every day until the grocer catches him. This disturbs Morris, yet he does not entertain the idea of reporting it to the police:

On the third day, when a quart of milk and two rolls had again been taken, the grocer, much disturbed, considered calling the police. It wasn't the first time he had lost milk and rolls in this neighborhood. That had happened more than once- usually some poor person stealing a breakfast. For this reason Morris preferred not to call the police but to get rid of the thief by himself. (512)

This shows the helplessness of Jews in the so-called big democratic country like America. Perhaps Morris does not dare to take a dangerous step in the new land. This reveals the pitiable state of immigrant Jews in America. He would have acted differently back in his homeland.

American's biasness towards other ethnic groups who have come to settle down in America thinking it to a free and safe country is evident through Morris' statements.

Frank's work as a clerk at Morris's store makes the business better. But before when Morris worked hard, no customers came to buy goods there. This is a good example of prejudice against the Jews, which makes Morris' dream of holding social position difficult. Morris's wife, Ida becomes pleased to see the improvements in the business:

Though Ida was still concerned at having the young Italian around place, she observed with pleased surprise how practically from the day of his appearance, the store had improved. During the first week there were days when they had taken in from five to seven dollars more than they were averaging doily in the months since summer. And the same held for the second week. She could at first not understand why more people were in, why more goods were being sold. (529)

The reason behind the improvement of business at his grocery is the presence of Frank who is not a Jew. When he serves the customer, American people feel good and come to buy goods. Malamud writes:

The store had improved not because not because this cellar dweller was a magician, but because he was not Jewish. The goyim in the neighborhood were happier with one of their own. A Jew stuck in their throats. Yes, they had, on and off, patronized his store, called him by his first name and asked for credit as if he were obliged to give it; but in their hearts they hated him. (539)

This makes Morris alienated and depressed in Brooklyn. Although he does not say so his wife, Ida, the grocer, after his long day off, is depressed at the prospect of having to take up his "dreary existence" in the store (539). He dreads the deadweight of hours, mostly the memories of

his lost years of youth. That the business is better gives him some comfort but he knows well that business is better only because of their assistant.

When Morris tells his assistant about his struggle of his life, he becomes excited. He lit a cigarette and smokes without coughing. But when he finishes, a sadness settles on him. Sitting in his chair, he seems a small, "lonely man" (544). He stays upstairs all the time because he thinks that he has had no luck at all in the alien land. A liquor businessman, Karp pictures the grocer "yielding his aloof silence while he enjoyed the sings of its dissolution, meanwhile pitying the poor Jew his hard luck in capital letters" (604). The situation of the migrant Jews is such that whatever they touch, that becomes a failure. Malamud writes, "If Morris Bobber found a rotten egg in the street, it was already cracked and looking" (604).

Morris becomes devastated when he learns from Karp that some Norwegians are buying the old store and reopening with fancy grocery and delicatessen. This information works for him like "a rock dropped on his skull" (610). This shows how hard it is to hold social position in the foreign land. Observing the poor business activity of Morris, the Norwegians reopen the grocery beside Morris's. This makes Morris more tormented:

There followed, in large print, a list of specials they were offering during their first week, bargains. Morris could never hope to match, because he could not afford the loss the Norwegians were planning to take. The grocer felt he was standing in an icy draft blowing from some hidden hole in the

store. In the kitchen, though he stood with his legs and buttocks pressed against the gas radiator, it took an age to diminish the chill that has penetrated his bones. (622)

Frank Alpine, who has come to help Morris out of compassion, is prejudiced against the Jews. His only intention seems to make a living and to rape Morris' daughter, Helen. When he first sees her, he becomes attracted to her and thinks of different ways to talk and trap her; "he tried to think of schemes of getting her inside the store, even planning to ask her something like did she know where her old man kept his saw" (527). Next day, Frank follows her to the bathroom and tries to enjoy watching her taking bath naked, "leaning forward, though not too far, he could see through the uncontained crossed sash window into the old-fashioned bathroom. Helen was there looking with sad eyes" (53).

Helen's mother is aware of Frank's desire for Helen. She is readily concerned about her because she does not want her daughter to be married with Frank. She wants a Jew for her daughter. So, she wants him out of her house. She says, "But the most important is I don't want him here on account of Helen. I don't like the way he looks on her" (540). This shows that she wants to keep Jewish identity even when she is living in America. Later when Ida discovers that Frank and Helen are seeing each other, she asks Frank to leave their house. She says, "Yes, she is a Jewish girl. You should look for somebody else" (633). Morris also orders Frank out of his house when he learns from Ida that he is after Helen. Frank admits, "Sure, he didn't want me to hang around Helen any more" (663). Helen herself is

aware of her Jewish identity walking with Frank to the Movie Theater, she mentions to him, "Don't forget I'm Jewish" (579).

When her parents discover the affair with Frank, they insist on her meeting Nat who is a Jewish boy, her mother, Ida is really concerned about her daughter:

"Helen, darling, do me one favor."

"What is it? I am very tired."

"Please call up Nat tomorrow. Just to speak to him. Say hello, and if he asks you to go out with him, tell him yes. Give him a chance."

"I gave him one."

"Last summer you enjoyed so much with him. You went to the beach, to concerts. What happened?"

"Our tastes are different," Helen said wearily.

"He is a Jewish boy, Helen, a college graduate. Give him another chance." (602)

This conversation reflects the Jewish family's adherence to the Jewish identity even in the American society. But the American's prejudice against the Jewish family makes everything hard for them.

Although American society is considered to be free and fair terms of gaining higher education, Morris' daughter, Helen has not been able to further her studies due to their low social and economic position. Instead, it is Helen who supports the family as the grocery business of her father

does not do well. The following conversation between the father and the daughter is really touching:

"Take," he said, rising and embarrassedly handing her the money. "You will need dollars for shoes."

"You just gave me five dollars downstairs."

"Here is five more."

Wednesday was the first month, pa."

"I can't take away from you all your pay."

"You're not taking, I'm giving."

"What did I give you? Even your college education I took away." (489)

Times have changed for the worse for Morris who now lies depressed in bed, dreaming of his childhood and his world. The even compares the quietness of his grocery downstairs to that of cemetery, highlighting again his preoccupation with the possibility of death. He has survived the ordeals with pneumonia, but psychologically still seems unprepared to once again embrace the possibilities of life:

The years had passed without profit or pity. Who could he blame? What fate didn't do to him he had done to himself.

The right thing was to make the right choice but he made the wrong. A few of his old friends had it, well- to-do men with grandchildren already, while his poor daughter, made in his image, faced- if not actively sought-old maid hood. Life was meager the world changed for the worse. America was too

complicated. One man counted for nothing. There were too many stores, depressions, anxieties. What had he escaped to here? (655)

Although he finds it quite difficult to establish himself in the new country, he never gives up his struggle. When his business completely collapses, as a last resort, Morris decides to go out to get a new job. Unfortunately, this quest does not succeed, and he returns home cowed by the toughness of the world once again. When looking for a job, Morris finds himself outdated and too slow. When he asks the owner of an agency for some job, he replies laughing, "You're the champ but they want a hid they can pay twenty a week" (657). Similarly, at another place, the manger makes fun of him saying, "I should live so long till you see fifty five again" (659) when Morris says that he is fifty five years old. The other stores that Morris visits in Manhattam also rely on speed and formality that Morris cannot master at his age. Then he returns home with melancholy. On the way, he stops to see two of his oldest friends, Breitbart, and Al Marcus. This procession to these houses seems almost funereal, as if Morris is paying homage to other old men who have failed and will soon die. This reminds him of his son's death in the strange land. Malamud writes:

When Helen and her brother wee kids, at least on Jewish holiday Morris would close the store and venture forth to Second Avenue to see a Yiddish play, or take the family visiting; but after Ephraim died he rarely went out beyond the corner. (488)

Late into the night he feels tired both physically and mentally. He all of a sudden longs for "some heavy sweet cream" to quench his thirst. This makes him nostalgic of his past life in Russia:

He remembered the delicious taste of bread dipped in rich milk when he was a boy. He found a half-pint bottle of whipping cream in the refrigerator and took it, guiltily, with a loaf of state white bread, into the back. Pouring some cream into a saucer, he soaked it up with bread, greedily wolfing the cream- laden bread. (659)

Morris's last hope also shatters as he cannot get any work in the Brooklyn city. His disappointment increases when one day a merchant suggests to him that he should burn his house and claim for the insurance. This suggestion is a shock for Morris as it leaves him with no where to go. At least, the house has given a shelter for the family, thereby giving them something of their own. Another day he feels lonely and deserted when all the people leave the house at a time" When he realizes that the house is "deserted," he feels agitated. (661). Ultimately, when Morris realizes that it is not possible to hold position in the alien land in America, he tries to commit suicide by setting fire to his room. Frank saves him but later he dies.

This shows that the Jews immigrants suffered a lot in the new surrounding in the post war period however hard they worked for establishing themselves socially, economically and culturally. Malamud describes Morris at the end as a hard working and a strong willed man:

He was also a very hard worker, a man that never stopped working. How many mornings he got up in long hours. Six o'clock every morning he opened and he closed after ten every night, sometimes later. Fifteen sixteen hours a day he was in the store, seven days a week, to make a living for his family. (675)

In this way, Moriss Bober suffered heavily from the prejudice, yet he never gave up hope to hold social position in the new surroundings in America.

The Jewish family in the new surroundings has not only been displaced economically but also culturally and linguistically. So, one of the reasons why the family has become unsuccessful in holding position in America is it comes from a different cultural and linguistic background. The American customers find it uncomfortable in going to the Jewish family's store.

The speech patterns of the characters also highlight their ethnic identity backgrounds, which the Jewish family has not been able to get rid of. This causes them downfall in the alien land. Morris and Ida Bobber along with the other older Jews, the Karp and the Pearls, all speak Yiddish. Malamud shows their language by placing Yiddish words directly in the text such as: "landsleit" (countrymen), "parusseh" (livelihood), and "gesheft" (business), (465, 471, 473). The use of Anglicized Yiddish terms also demonstrates their native language, such as the Polish women being a "Poilishen," the Italian tenant being an "Italyner," and the possible robber

being "holdupnicks" (507, 513, and 517). Finally, the way that Ida and Morris speak English reflects the uses of Yiddish grammar translated, with the verbs and adjectives not in the normal American locations. For example, Ida's statement, "You should long ago sell the store" suggests her Yiddish speech patterns since it is not expressed in the normal American manner, which would be something like, "You should have sold the store long ago." This shows that even in the different culture and society, Morris and his family members stick to their Jewish background which has brought the family a lot of problems in the culturally different place.

IV: Conclusion

Bernard Malamud's *The Assistant* is an exploration into the pangs and suffering of the Russian Jews immigrants in Diasporic community. The family of Morris Bobber is shattered due to the prejudice against the Jews. They live in materially prosperous land but they go through very hard time as their grocery business cannot attract any customers, which makes impossible for them to get established socially, culturally and economically. They can neither live happily in America nor return to Russia because of their exiled state. All the three members, Morris, his wife, Ida and their daughter, Helen always look dejected and hardly go out.

During the postwar period a large number of Jews were displaced and they emigrated to America and other European countries. For those immigrants, Diasporic experience was a common form of experience of expatriates or exiles generating fissured identities alongside problems of belongingness and economic prosperity for survival. The Jews were indiscriminately discriminated against all over America and Europe. It was very difficult for them to hold social, cultural and economical position. This makes them nostalgic of the past memories and connections. These Jews explored the pleasant and unpleasant aspect of living in two society and culture.

In the novel *The Assistant*, Malamud brings to light the tensions, sufferings, the dilemma, the difficulty and often their inability to communicate emotional pain and affliction to others. The novel highlights

the characters' ceaseless efforts to lead a meaningful, prosperous and dignified life in the American city, Brooklyn. In the novel, Morris Bobber is helpless as an individual. Although he tries his level best to keep his grocery store afloat, the customers do not come to buy goods at his store. Due to their prejudice against the Jews, he remains as a caged bird which cannot move anywhere. He represents the tragedy of Jews who have to live in exile. His daily reading of Jewish paper and his wife's pressure on her daughter to find a Jewish husband reveals their efforts to keep up their identity as Jewish in the alien land. Morris is perhaps the best example of the solitary life of an alienated immigrant Jews living in America.

Frank Alpine, who later becomes Morris' assistant, becomes the catalyst behind his business failure. Moreover, he rapes the daughter and sticks to them to see them suffer to the last minute. When his business fails, Morris tries to find other jobs but cannot get any due to his Jewish background. He is ridiculed wherever he goes for help. So much so that people in America even suggest a fire to his house and store to get some insurance. Finally he dies in the course of struggle to hold position in the alien land, but completely fails due to American's prejudice against the Jews.

Morris' family adheres to the Jewish lifestyle in the American city, which shows their search for their ethnic identity. They use the Yiddish words and speech patterns in their conversations. They are never influenced by American way of living even though they are living in

culturally new place. In this way, this study examines the Jewish family's Diasporic experience in America.

Works Cited

- Agnew, Vijay. *Diaspora, Memory, and Identity*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005.
- Altsuler, Mordechai. "Who are the Refuseniks? A Statistical and Demographic Analysis." *Soviet Jews Affairs* 18 (1985): 3-28.
- Ashcroft, Bill, Gareth Griffiths and Helen Tiffin. *Key Concepts in Post-Colonial Studies*. London: Routledge, 1998.
- Baumbach, Jonathan. *Landscape of Nightmare: Studies in Contemporary Novel*. New York: New York University Press, 1965.
- Bradbury, Malcolm. *The Modern American Novel*. New York: Penguin Books, 1994.
- Conn, Peter. *Literature in America: An Illustrated History*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1989.
- Hall, Stuart. "Cultural Identity and Diaspora." *Colonial Discourse & Postcolonial Theory: A Reader*. London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1990. 112-25.
- Hansen, Thomas Blom. "Community, Empire and Migration: South Asians in Diaspora." *South Asian Journal* 12 (1994): 1-25.
- Kadish, Rachel. *The Jewish Agency and Aliyah: An Update: The Jewish Agency for Israel*. Jerusalem: Jewish Press Division, 1997.
- Korey, William. *The Soviet Cage: Anti-Semitism in Russia*. New York: The Viking Press, 1973.
- Levin, Nora. *The Jews in the Soviet Union since 1917: Paradox of Survival*. New York: New York University Press, 1988.

Linger, Leonard, ed. *American Writers: A Collection of Literary Biographies*. New York: Scribner's Sons, 1979.

Malamud, Bernard. *The Fixer, The Natural, The Assistant*. New York: MJF Books, 1929.

Pinkus, Benjamin. *The Jews of Soviet Union. The History of a National Minority*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988.

Pinsker, Sanford. *Jewish American Fiction (1917-1987)*. New York: Twayne Publishers, 1992.

Radhakrishnan, S., trans. *The Bhagavad Gita*. London: Allen & Unwin, 1965.

Riis, Jacob. "Criss-Crossing Identities: The Russian Jewish Diaspora and The Jewish Diaspora in Russia." *Diaspora* 4.1 (1995): 20-210.

