

## **I. Introduction**

### **Background**

This research study attempts to deal with the protagonist's quest for self to find his meaningful identity. Search for self will be the central focus of the study. The protagonist of the novel, Asa Leventhal is basically a Jewish victim and because of this sense of victimization he is full of anxiety. Leventhal is in quest for self because he wants to know the meaning of his existence and it is only possible through the achievement of knowledge of self in the real sense. That's why he does not care for anything. So he passes through a lot of suffering. He does not surrender before any problems. Despite the bad condition the hero is hopeful that he will find a solution to his problem. Bellow's protagonist Asa Leventhal sets out in the quest of self and meaning of life. The following chapters of this study will attempt to go through this issue of self. The present study is directed towards establishing a quest for self which will be done on existential light and it will be defined in relation to the protagonist.

The protagonist of the novel, Asa Leventhal is a Jewish man living alone in a hot New York city for his wife is away to visit her relatives in the South. He is always troubled with the thought of his past from where he came and becomes anxious thinking that he may be thrown back into it. Kirby Allbee, a figure from past arrives in his life and blames him for the loss of his job three years earlier. But Leventhal time and again says he has been wronged and his hands are clean. Leventhal is so puzzled by the behaviour of his tormentor that he confuses about himself, and time and

again goes back to his past and tries to recall what had happened. From Allbee's blame Leventhal is thrown into turmoil of doubt, insecurity and guilt. The study is not concerned with 'why does a man exist?' kind of problems. This research is oriented towards revealing the modes of human existence as interpreted by existentialist thinkers. So the study will simply take as its base on Sartre and Camus's concept of personal existence and authenticity, and interpret *The Victim* from this angle.

The hero, here in the novel, feels himself alienated from the universe as nobody is there to care and guide him- not his wife, not his friends. He is fully responsible for himself. He is alone and the society is indifferent to him. This novel is about an individual's consciousness, his relation to the society he lives in, and the quest for his selfhood. So in such a background an existential approach for the search of self of the fiction will be an approach for the proper understanding of it.

### **The Author**

Saul Bellow is probably American's most famous novelist and great literary figure of his time. He was born in Lachine, Quebec, Canada on 10<sup>th</sup> June 1915. He grew up in the Jewish ghetto of Montreal and moved to Chicago when he was nine. He finished his schooling from Tuely High School Chicago and attended the University of Chicago, and then transferred to Northwestern University where he took a degree in anthropology and sociology in 1937. He taught English for a short time and later moved to writing field. He married Anita Goshkin in 1937. He supported himself by teaching and doing odd jobs and began his literary career.

Bellow taught at Pestalozzi-Froebel Teacher's College, Chicago from 1938 to 1942. He was the member of editorial department, "Great Books Project" Encyclopedia Britannica, Chicago from 1943 to 1944. During the World War II he tried in the Army but rejected because of a Hernia. He worked in the merchant Marrie during the war. During his job in the Merchant Marrie he wrote his first novel Dangling Man in 1944. He served as a freelance editor and reviewer in New York from 1945 to 1946. Then after, he worked at different universities of the country as instructor, Assistant professor of English, Visiting lecturer and so on. In 1962 he returned to Chicago and became a lecturer at the University of Chicago.

Bellow got numerous prestigious international prizes for his writing, including Nobel Prize in 1976. Bellow is the most distinguish novelist of the Post War period in America. In the literature and literary criticism he was at the top to discussion. In the introduction chapter Gloria L. Cronin and L. H. Goldman write:

Saul Bellow's Stature in Postwar American letters can only be compared to that of Hemingway or Faulkner earlier in this century. A Nobel Laureate and winner of numerous prestigious fiction awards, Bellow has commanded serious attention from a large range of reviewers and critics at home and abroad for the last forty years. (1)

Bellow's rank in the history of American novelists is equal to the famous novelists of his time Hemingway and Faulkner. He is a voluminous writer in modern American literature. He belongs to no movement or group,

following his own standard assimilating richly than any other American novelists, and remains essentially American in his choice of material and in his artistic point of view.

Although he most often writes about Jewish-American immigrants or their children, the scope of his fiction is universal. Bellow himself rejects the term "Jewish writer", it is because his art is not chauvinistic and narrow. After serving American literature more than half a century Bellow died on 5<sup>th</sup> April, 2005 at his name in Brookline Mass.

### **His Works**

Bellow's first novel, *Dangling Man* (1944), was not published until he was nearly thirty. It is a short series of elegantly morose meditations, told through the journal of a young man waiting to be inducted into the Army and with the freedom of having nothing to do but wait. This is a rambling series of journal entries in which Joseph, the protagonist, futilely attempts to withstand the regimentation of the modern world.

*Dangling Man* is followed by *The Victim* (1947). It concerns a week in the life of Asa Leventhal, an editor at a Manhattan Trade Magazine, who is suddenly confronted Kirby Allbee, a Gentile. He accuses Leventhal for loosing his job. He haunts Leventhal everywhere in parks, and restaurants, and also moves into his apartment. The novel focuses the conflict between a Jew and a Gentile and the protagonist's quest for selfhood. Bellow got respectful admiration from many critics for this book. In 1948 he was awarded a Guggenheim fellowship.

Since the publication of the *Adventures of Augie March* in 1953, his reputation skyrocketed. His career is now a matter of public acclaim. By the time he came to write *The Adventure of Augie March*, he had discovered rhetoric, he had gained confidence as a writer, and he had recognized the weakening of WASP hold on literature in the United States. This book won Bellow his first National Book Award for fiction in 1954.

*Seize the Day* (1956) is one of the great short novels of Bellow. It shows the Jewish wisdom and humor in an attractive way. Tommy Wilhelm, the main character in the novel suffers from such a great uncertainty about himself that he is forced into an ecstasy of self-recrimination. He finds himself a pitiful figure and weeps bitterly in a funeral parlour for the loss of himself.

Shortly after winning a Ford Foundation Grant in 1958, he published his another novel *Henderson the Rain King* (1959). This work marks the beginning of Bellow's maturity as a novelist. It is a fantasy of a trip to Africa. The protagonist, Henderson is a bullying, violent man who goes into the darkest Africa to find out about what he calls the "noumenal department" In America he found chaos and disorder everywhere, so he goes to Africa to see if he can encounter life without clutter and chaos. In 1962 Bellow won the Friends of Literature Award.

In *Herzog* (1964), Bellow created a character who caught the consciousness of the American intellectual establishment of the 1960s. This novel presents the clear descriptions of modern America's moral, social and intellectual depravity. The novel's action occurs mainly in

flashbacks and moves ahead with lengthy monologues and unsent letters of Herzog. The crisis comes to his life with the failure of his second marriage. Bellow won his second National Book Award and Formernter Award and the James L. Dew Award for this book.

*Mr. Sammler's Planet* (1970) won the author his third National Book Award. This novel is the conflict between past and present. The protagonist Arthur Sammler, is an octogenarian; and he is the survivor of two World Wars, and of the Holocaust. He analyzes and judges but cannot understand the young or blacks, or the mass of people gathered at Broadway and 36<sup>th</sup> street.

Bellow won Pulitzer Prize for literature for his novel *Humboldt's Gift* (1975). This book concentrates on memories of the protagonist, Charlie Citrine, a playwright. As a young man Charles worships the charismatic Humboldt. This bulky and funny novel centers on the young man's reflections on Humboldt and on his true value as an artist and mentor. Through flashbacks Charlie reveals the despair and paranoia that destroy his idol. The reflection of later years gradually reveals that Humboldt was indeed mad. He was a genius who was driven insane and finally killed by his own unwritten poems. After this realization Charlie is able to accept the memory of Humboldt.

In 1976 the Nobel Prize for literature was presented to Saul Bellow.

Bellow published his first non-fiction work, *To Jerusalem and Back* in 1976. It is a personal and literary record of his visit to Israel in 1975.

Albert Corde, The protagonist in *The Dean's December* (1982) is a dean of a Chicago college. Cord's Chicago is a tough place; he researches this world, writes articles and theories. The action of the novel happens in two places – Chicago and Bucharest. The dean is a journalist. He attacks the violence and degeneracy of urban life.

In *More Die of Heartbreak* (1987), Bellow presents a study of one of his primary concerns – family bonds. The novel shows the affectionate bond between Benn Carder, a botanist and his nephew and the novel's narrator, Kenneth Trachtenberg, a Russian literature scholar. The kinship between the uncle and the nephew helps both to get rid of the difficult problem that came in their life.

In his literary career Bellow also wrote short stories, plays and translated from Yiddish to English. *The Last Analysis* and of other three short plays collectively entitled *Under the Weather* were produced on Broadway in 1966. In the play *The Last Analysis*, he attacked the naïve Freudianism. He has translated the words of his fellow Nobel Prize winner I. B. Singer. His criticism has appeared in *The New York Times Book Review*, *The New Republic*, *The Encounter* and so on.

His conservative tone of the 1970s and early 1980s changed with the short story collection, *Him with His Foot in His Mouth* (1984) into a more relaxed mode of his earlier works. It is a collection of five short stories. *The Bellarosa Connection* (1989) was based on an anecdote Bellow over heard at a dinner party.

*The Actual* (1997) is a story about two persons who by chance meet and become cordial. A billionaire Philanthropist Sigismund

Adletsky, in his nineties, is impressed by Harry Trellmaris power of observation and asks him to be a kind of intellectual companion for him. Harry is an importer of damaged antiquities from China. Siggy helps Harry to rejoin his lifelong love Amy Wustrin.

Ravelstein (2000) is a story of a University Professor Abe Ravelstein who is a homosexual and dies of AIDS – related illness. Ravelstein's character was based on Bellow's colleague at the University of Chicago, Allan Bloom, who died in 1992.

Bellow has enriched the American literature by giving it varieties of souvenirs as the form of novel. He is a careful writer and aims a plain and simple deeply felt and disciplined style. Chester E. Eisinger writes about Bellow:

Bellow's achievement is to have imposed upon the contending forces in his fiction – life and death optimism and despair, reason and feeling, self and brotherhood – and idea of order. He has always known that the novelist begins at a great depth of distraction and disorder. (99)

In his novels we can see the contemporary problems of war, the despair, hopeless, defeatism of the age and the like. Bellow's protagonists are often intellectual and through their consciousness Bellow gives voice to the dilemmas and contradictions of the 20<sup>th</sup> century life. In order to resolve their personal dilemmas Bellows characters are increasingly driven to ponder the human condition. If we deeply consider on bellow's novels we find his characters with inner zeal to be a good, perfect and independent human. Every protagonist of his novels struggles to be a

perfect human with wisdom and virtues with allained experiences of life. In most of his works directly or indirectly we find existential perspectives. Peter Conn says:

The contrast between “I” and “we” has occupied all of Bellow’s attention through more than forty of fiction; the contrast, that is to say between state and self force and spirit, between all the assorted bureaucratic filing systems, noises, redundant junk and quick fixes of 20<sup>th</sup> century existence and the vulnerable, shrinking domain of individual freedom. (163)

Bellow is a didactic writer, who writes to express and endorse a sense of human values and a judgement of the modern world. In his novels we can see the exploration of the dilemmas of the individual in the modern world.

### **Review of Literature**

Bellow has started writing career with the publication of *Dangling Man* (1944). *The Victim* was published in (1947) as his second novel. But *The Victim* could not popularize him as his other books did. So the book could not attract much attention of the critics for a long time but in the later years the genius of the book is identified and a number of reviews on *The Victim* have published. Critics have often considered Dostoyevsky’s *The Eternal Husband* (1870) as a primary source for Bellow’s *The Victim*. Allan Chavkin writes, “[. . .] and Bellow himself has acknowledged that when he was writing his novel he “was very much under the spell” of Dostoyevsky’s novella” (316). The plot of the novel seems to be based on a novel by Dostoyevsky, *The Eternal Husband*. The

theme of Dostoyevsky's novel is the dignity of man. The protagonist, Alexey Velchaniov, in *The Eternal Husband* is unwell physically whilst Leventhal is unwell mentally and both are burdened with guilt. Into the lives of each of these men come a double; someone they have hurt in the past and onto whom they can project their guilt. Malcolm Bradbury also compares this novel with Dostoevsky's story but he finds little difference between these two writers. He writes:

*The victim* is an enclosed book, like a long Dostoevsky story. But it is a work of moral vision, illuminated by one or Bellow's most important powers: a vividness of prose that brings alive suffering human characters and the moral life of humanity: for, as Schlossberg says, it is our task to seek and observe in life an understanding not of what is more or less than human, but what is human exactly. (85)

He compares this text with a long Dostoevsky story but he sees Bellow's concern for moral life and suffering of the characters in the text. The novel is rich in moral meaning. Frederick J Hoffman views: "*The Victim* (1947), despite an almost equally narrow conception and selling, is multifold in its suggestiveness and rich in moral meaning" (85). The note of morality can be seen throughout the novel. *The Victim* is superbly thorough examination of the complexities of moral guilt.

Asa Leventhal, the protagonist is a Jew and his rival Allbee is a Gentile who blames Leventhal for all that has gone wrong with his life. There is a personal conflict between these two characters. The Harper American Literature says: "The Victim, a story about the personal

conflicts between a Jew and a Gentile that tough mindedly express the meaning of “human”” (1655). Allbee accuses Leventhal that he has ruined his life. But Leventhal denies all responsibility, and promises himself that “if he follows me now I’ll punch him in the jaw. I’ll knock him down, he thought. ‘I swear I’ll throw him down and smash his ribs for him!’” (39). Sanford Pinsker also views the novel as exploring the idea of anti-Semitism. He says: “To begin at the beginning, the incident that triggers Allbee’s anti-Semitic outburst and forces Leventhal to confront both his Jewishness...”(122). Leventhal once made an unpleasant situation with his potential employer, named Rudiger. Years later Allbee comes to the life of Leventhal and accuses him of deliberately insulting Rudiger. But Leventhal time and again refuses this.

Bellow’s this novel, like most of his other novels is also about the vulnerability of the Jew in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Algis Valiunas views that this novel shows the conflict between Jew and Gentile. He writes: “Dominating the moral landscape of *The Victim* is the barrier between Jew and Gentile, so knife-edged in Bellow’s rendering circa 1947 as to be all but unthinkable today” (241). As a Leventhal, an editor of a trade magazine is always tormented by a former acquaintance Kirby Allbee who blames Leventhal for all that has gone wrong with his life.

Some critics view that this book is not totally about the subject matter of anti-Semitism. Frederick J. Hoffman says:

“That Asa Leventhal’s accuser (and Victim) happens to invoke anti-Semitism is a part of complex, but only a part; in other words, the novel is not “about” anti-Semitism but

rather examines Jewish insecurity and the Jewish attitude towards complicity in anti-Semitic behavior” (86)

He views that this novel deals with anti-Semitism only as a part. He does not find the novel only expressing the theme of anti-Semitism but also the theme of Jewish insecurity and Jewish attitude towards anti-Semitic.

Allan S Downer takes the novel in a different way. He says: “Leventhal is a Jew and Allbee is anti-Semitic; but the problem of prejudice is only incidental Levelthal searches for the truth about his tormentor and himself ...” (1). He finds the novel not dealing about the subject matter of anti-Semitism rather; he says it is only coincident that the two characters are a Jew and a Gentile. The protagonist searches for the truth about himself and his tormenter. So the search for truth is the central idea of the novel. Ihab Hassan writes, “. . . the quest is for self-knowledge rather than freedom” (99). The quest of the protagonist is for self knowledge. He wants to know why Kirby Allbee blames him. He continuously goes to past and remembers what he had done. In trying to find out the truth about Allbee he finds his self and gets the meaning of his life. This fiction is about an individual consciousness, his alienation, and his quest for self.

Divided into four chapters, the first chapter is a general introduction to the area of this study and the whole direction this study is going to take. In order to provide the search of self of the protagonist, the second chapter will outline, in brief the term self and its relation with existentialism. This study will be based on the protagonist’s search for the meaning of his life. My study will try to deal the quest for self in the

light of existentialism. In the third chapter, the close reading of the text will attempt to reveal the protagonist's struggle to find out his self. This chapter will explicate the protagonist's inner journey to find his self. The final chapter will present and illustrate the findings of this research in brief.

## **II. Self and Existentialism**

### **Self**

Self means struggle for defining oneself and one's value. It is one's overall personality that makes him/her different in the society as a separate individual. The self is the realization of an individual. This realization is a process-first an individual becomes aware about the phenomena of world and then realizes his identity in the human race. Self connotes to an individual's independent soul which is never commanded by or kept under any influence of other forces. Self is inside every human being and it is always trying to come to the fore and wants to command will power anytime.

The self is the realization of whatever wholeness or perfection one may achieve. By realizing the self one asserts his humanity, that is, lays a claim to sharing in human suffering and joy in human destiny. The self is formed from social experience-the person sees him/herself reflected by others, in their reactions and these are interpreted through the lattice of self perception.

Self is associated with our individuality. It depends upon the person's nature, behavior and how he feels or looks. Individual self is irreducible endowed with the ability to use our rationality, according to our own disposition and desires. Every man has his own self and he tries to perceive his self in the situation and environment he lives in. Self perception is linked with the social and culture environment he lives in. It is society, culture and the environment that determines a person's self.

Because of the social construction, the self is different from person to person and culture to culture. Self perception is not fixed, it changes time and again. Changing self perception brings self realization. Self realization means the fact of using our skills and achieving as much as we can passively achieve. Self realization and self perception are directly related to each other.

In the process of self realization one becomes aware of his surrounding and begins to realize his own identity and position in the human race. Self is not same to person to person. It is one's own person which is totally different from other persons. The relations between an individual and other people or thing are defined by the effects of their action on each other.

But at the highest level we have the symbolic perception of self. Our self concept consists of everything that we know, believe and feel about our selves and about our surrounding. Self is the personal entity where lies the foundation of existence. Self is always in conflict with society and culture and sometimes falls lodged in psychological dilemma when it cannot find its explicit manifestation. Searching for self is going inside the soul and asking 'who am I?'

The idea of self pre-occupies in literature in one way or another, since the ancient times. The concept of self has not emerged in the modern time; it was there in the past. Lionel Trilling writes:

There have always been selves, or at least ever since the oracle of Delphi begins to advice everyman to know his

own. And whoever has read any European history at all knows that self emerges (as the history says) at pretty frequent intervals. (ix)

The idea of self was there in the ancient times and the oracle of Delphi suggested everyman to "know his own", to know the meaning of his existence. The concept of "know thyself" of Greek philosophy was there in the past even before the Greek philosophy. The origin of some current ideas about self are very ancient perhaps they were current before writing was common. In the ancient times there was not the word "self", but it was described as soul or spirit Diggory writes:

At any rate they are celerity discernible in the Homeric writing which express the distinction . . . the physical human body and some nonphysical entity or function, variously described and translated to English as "soul" "spirit" or "psyche". (1)

In the writing of Homer also there was some concept of self but not in the modern form of the self. Self was some non-physical entity and it was described as soul, spirit, or psyche. Richard McKeon writes:

The ancient poems and scriptures of the East and the west present unique insights into the thought, action, and problems of individual persons in a diversity of interpretations which are the beginning of philosophic analysis of self. (15)

The Literature and philosophy in ancient Greek have talked about men and their problems and have given some emphasis on individual problem and their existence though at that time there was not the concept of existentialism as it is now. But people have pondered a lot about the meaning of their existence. There was also the sense of alienation and frustration; and people continuously searched for the meaning of their life. McKeon further writes:

[. . .] as it came to mean in Socrates' dialectical recourse to the aphorism, the search for the virtues and values which any man shares in self-realization with all men. The individual in self knowledge and self realization is the self. (14)

In the preaching of Socrates we can see his emphasis on the search for virtue and search for knowledge, knowledge about his existence in the world. And the very search for self-knowledge about his existence is the self.

Rene Descartes in his *Principles of Philosophy* has developed the concept of "doubt of all things". Diggory quotes Descartes' view as: ". . . examine into the truth it is necessary once in one's life to doubt of all things, so far as this is possible" (2). Descartes views that we can doubt everything even to our senses and to the demonstrations of mathematics. He urges us that we ought to consider as false "anything" which we can successfully doubt. This concept of 'doubt every thing' leads people to ask question about their existence and the meaning of life. They started to think about the role of an individual in the universe.

Descartes' most famous line "I think therefore I am" emphasizes the personal pronoun "I". Since thinking occurs, I exists "I" is the self and identity and without self and identity the existence of an individual is useless and meaningless.

The 20<sup>th</sup> Century was finally to answer the ancient challenge of the Delphic oracle: "Know thyself". This challenge has become the chief occupation of the existentialist philosophers and existentialists have contributed much to the modernist vocabulary of self. After the mid 20<sup>th</sup> Century there appears a growing debate on selfhood and finally a tendency developed and selfhood comes at the fore if existentialism is to be considered as an accepted field of academic. The role played by self in existentialism has become a focal point in existentialism.

Our vocabulary of self and self- understanding has changed markedly in the existential philosophy. With the saturation of culture and society and thinking, traditional patterns of relationship turn strange. A new culture is in the making.

Existential philosophers emphasize on individual truth and rejection of established creed, system and culture. It tells that one should acquire one's self through the process of struggle and pain. One should take this responsibility however difficult it may be.

Existentialism says that humans actively determine their nature. It focuses on individual existence and its problems. Manuel Velasquez and Vincent Barry say on existentialism and self:

Existentialism obviously emphasizes the individual. The self in this view is not necessarily rational, divine, or mechanical. It is neither a creation of God nor a kind of empty organism. It is instead a project that possesses a subjective life; it is the sum total, not of everything that happens to it, but of everything it ever does. (58)

Self for the existential philosophers is not something rational or divine or neither is it a creation of God. It is only the thing which possesses a subjective life. We are our choices, and to be human means to be free we will discuss more about existentialism in the following chapter. Buddhism says that self is changeable and does not exist for a long time. Manuel Velasquez and Vincent Barry write on Buddhist view on self as:

What we can call the self, then, either considered as the body or considered as the mind, is utterly transient . . . . The self, then as a permanently abiding individual entity does not exist. According to Buddha the idea of self is an illusory belief that produces harmful thoughts of "me", "mine", "desire", vanity egoism and ill will. (60)

Buddhism says self is transient. It does not last long. For salvation one should leave self. Buddhist conception of the self conflicts with the traditional western idea that human are selves with a fixed nature. It conflicts even with the existential view that holds that human beings are enduring selves, even though they have no determined nature. The western conceptions of self assume that the self is an enduring entity with

its own individuality and that we should protect the interests of this individuality in its struggle against the world. Buddhism on the contrary suggests that salvation is achieved only by giving up the craving for self-identity. The being of the self and self-knowledge are interrelated. Both in turn depend on the acts of the self, for the person is what he does and is known by what he does.

### **Existentialism**

After the great world wars, esp. the Second World War, widespread feelings of despair prevailed in human beings. The orderliness, system, coherence of the previous centuries smashed into pieces. Pain, frustration, sickness, anxiety, absurdity, uncertainty and death ruled the fragmented world. The world was governed not by laws but by absurdity, uncertainty and the like. Society was in a despairing mood, perhaps not without hope of social reconstruction. There was the nausea of human existence and its frustration. These feelings led to the idea that people have to create their own values in the world in which traditional values no longer work. After the World War II the existentialism movement began to flourish. The individual faces the emptiness of the universe and modern man is facing a crisis of faith and identity. This is the central pre-occupation of existentialists. Existence itself has become a perplexing question for man. It may be said that rejection of the centrality of the problem of man, and of man's essential freedom is the most significant and hopeful feature of the existentialist trend in modern thought.

Existentialism draws attention to the void of human reality and admits that human being is thrown into the world where there is only pain

suffering, frustration, alienation and so on. It is a 20<sup>th</sup> century movement which embraces Heidegger, Sartre, Marcel, but its characteristic features occur earlier, esp. in the 19<sup>th</sup> century thinkers Nietzsche and Kierkegaard. The existentialists do not go with the traditional attempt to get the ultimate nature of the world in abstract system of thought. In stead, they search for what it is like to be an individual human being in the world.

Existentialism is a family of philosophies devoted to and interpretation of human existence in the world that stresses its concreteness and its problematic character. It is all related to human being and his existence in the world where there prevails pain and suffering everywhere. The term existentialism, philosophically, is applied to define and interpret the anxiety and the uncertainty of human existence. Sartre, in his book *Existentialism and Human Emotion* says, "Existentialism we mean a doctrine which makes human life possible and in addition, declares that every truth and every action implies a human setting and human subjectivity" (10). Ellmann and Feidelson say on existentialism, "very intense and philosophically specialized form of quest for selfhood" (803). In this way, the focus of existentialism is on subjectivity. It is based on individual experience rather than an obstruct thought and knowledge which is fore grounded in this philosophy. It really concerns to the problem of man and his concrete existence and his freedom.

Existentialism focuses on the lack of purpose and meaning in life. Existentialists say that existence of human being is the first and basic

fact for the existentialists. Existentialists say that existence proceeds essence. This means human being has no essence, no essential self, he is only what he is. Human being as a being is nothing. The concept of nothingness is the central source for freedom. Sartre writes:

We are like actors who suddenly find themselves on stage in the middle of a performance, but without having a script, without knowing the name of the play or what role they are playing, without knowing what to do or say-yes, without even knowing whether the play has an author at all-whether it is serious or a farce. We must personally make a decision to be something, or other-a villain or a hero, ridiculous or tragic or we can simply exit, immediately. (Skirbek and Gilje, 444)

We are free in the world and we must have to choose either willingly or forcibly. We decide for ourselves for there is no one to do anything for us. We choose ourselves as the kind of person we are going to be. Existentialists say that human beings are forced to choose for themselves, they have their freedom to choose and they are fully responsible for what they have chosen.

The human being is thrown into the world and condemned to be free. He himself is responsible for what he does; and his deeds are accountable without excuses. He must not move away from his responsibilities. He must take responsibilities and decisions. The world,

for human beings is not pre-determined; he is free to realize his aim and his dreams.

Among the existentialists Sartre and Camus are remarkable ones. They seem for having totally rejected Christianity and religion. For them existentialist man contemplates his "Freedom" than with suggesting a solution for his dilemma ("Existentialism" 161). According to Sartre existentialism is doctrine which makes human life possible. He declared himself as an existentialist in his essay *Existentialism and Human Emotions*. For him man is noting else but he makes of himself. He believes that the existential man is not alone, rather he works or acts for the whole humanity. For the existentialist, especially for the atheists, God is costly hypothesis. He believes that there is no universe other than a human universe, the universe of human subjectivity (51). He insists that even if God did exist, that would change nothing (51). He further writes:

It states that if God does not exist, there is at least one being in whom existence precedes essence, a being who exists before he can be defined by any concept, and that this being is man, or as Heidegger says, human reality. What is meant here by saying that existence precedes essence? It means that first of all, man exists, turns up, appears on the scene and only afterwards, defines himself. ("Existentialism" 15)

By the phrase "existence precedes essence" Sartre means if there is no cosmic designer, there is no design or essence of human nature. Human existence or being differs from the being of objects in that human being is self-conscious. The self-consciousness gives the human subject

the opportunity to define it and create his/her self by making self-directed choices.

Sartre, in *Existentialism and Human Emotion*, puts himself in the group of anti-religious existentialists and says, "Existentialism as a means of facing the consequences of a world that is devoid of any absolute power like God" (15). According to Sartre existence comes first. Each man, however, circumscribed by his historical and environmental situation, is the author of his own life. He says man is nothing else but that which he makes of himself. It is the first principle of existentialism (15). Like other atheistic existentialists God, for Sartre, also no longer exists. Since the world is empty and devoid of any ethical values, we must choose our own ethics, define ourselves and create ourselves. He writes, "You're free, choose, that is invent. No general ethics can show you what is to be done, there are no omens in the world" (15). Sartre favours the subjectivity of individual. Each individual has a connection with other beings and he has to make his own universe with a meaning of his own.

For Albert Camus the absurdity of life is the first concept. As Olafson remarks, "Camus believes in fraternity and humanism rather than in nihilism (Camus 12). For Camus the condition of modern man is like that of Sisyphus. He says that condition of man is absurd. When the absurd man becomes aware of his failure of his futile living, he is naturally filled with anxiety and hopelessness but he does not surrender himself in the mouth of death. Instead he revolts against it. He views that the human being must not set out to destroy the absurdity, for there is no

scope to 'leap' to Gods or optimism but face the absurd with courage. He writes in, *The Myth of Sisyphus*:

At the very end of his long effort measured by sky less space and time with out depth, the purpose is achieved. Then Sisyphus watches the stone rush down in a few moments toward that lower world whence he will have to push it up again toward the summit. He goes back down to the plain.  
(68)

We are not different from Sisyphus our condition is like that of him. Camus says that absurdity does not lead to death but brings light by consciousness and also leads to freedom. In *Absurd Freedom*, Camus writes:

The absurd man feels released from everything outside that passionate attention crystallizing in him. He enjoys a freedom with regard to common rules. It can be seen at this point that the initial theme of existential philosophy keeps their entire value. The return to consciousness, the escape from everyday sleeps represent the first steps of absurd freedom. (848)

Due to the estranged, alienated and absurd condition of himself and the world, man strives for his self-identity, self-existence and his self-hood. He presents the nihilistic and rebellious hero, who seeks freedom and tries to get rid of absurdity through rebellion. For him rebellion is the major action for the way to freedom.

The existential philosopher's main concern is for the individual and personal responsibility. The existentialists think that human choice is 'subjective' because individuals finally must make their own choices without any help from such external standards as laws, ethical rules, or traditions. Because individuals make their own choices, they are 'free', but because they freely choose they are completely 'responsible' for their choices.

### **III. Search for Self in *The Victim***

#### **The Protagonist's Struggle for Self**

The main plot of the novel takes place against the backdrop of a troublesome urban life. There is a pessimism and despair in the environment. From the very beginning of the novel, we can see the hostile environment and tense situation in the life of the protagonist. The beginning of the novel depicts a hard and troublesome physical environment which is very much suitable to show the inner psyche of the protagonist and the other characters of the novel. The novel begins with these lines, which show hot and barbaric environment of New York City:

On some nights New York is as hot as Bangkok, the whole continent seems to have moved from its place and slid nearer the equator, the bitter gray Atlantic to have become green and tropical and the people, thronging the streets, barbaric fellahin among the stupendous monuments of their mystery, the lights of which a dazing profusion, climb upward endlessly into the neat of the sky. (1)

The physically tense environment which continues till the end of the novel is similar with the life of the characters which is very tense and difficult to bear for them. Through out the novel we don't find any environmental relief except only through the protagonist's memory of a short period with the civil service in Baltimore prior to the action of the novel. Leventhal, alone at present remembers his first meeting with his wife, Mary:

The life he led in Baltimore were considerably different; it was not so solitary. It came to him slowly that in New York he had taken being alone so much for granted that he was scarcely aware how miserable it made him. (11)

Leventhal's time with Mary at Baltimore is the most romantic and memorable moment of his life. In such a relaxed atmosphere Leventhal "felt his spirits thawed out". But at the present he is in the city of confusion- New York. His wife is away towards South to visit her relatives. Leventhal is alone and misses her very much:

Leventhal hurried up with thumping steps, whipping his hat on the banister and entering his flat with a commotion. Dear Mary! If she were only here now to put his arms around and kiss. He flung away his hat and his jacket . . . . (58)

In the absence of Mary he desperately long for a visitor at his apartment, it does not matter whether in the form of Allbee. He becomes restless inside his room and sets out for the Park where, he for the first time encounters with Allbee. Then in astonishment he hears the stranger utter his name:

'What, do you know me?' he asked loudly. Do I? You're Leventhal, aren't you? Why shouldn't I know you? I thought you might not recognize me, though. We met only a few times, and I suppose I look a little different than I used to'.  
'Oh, Allbee, isn't it? Allbee?' Leventhal said slowly with gradual recognition. (22)

But his meeting with Allbee then after is not fruitful for Leventhal. Allbee is a Gentile and he continuously raises questions upon Leventhal's Jewishness. Allbee is presented as an inspired creation, comic, pathetic, repulsive, and menacing Leventhal is a first generation American Jew where as Allbee seems to be represent the old order traditionally bred to rule.

Leventhal thinks that he is a marginal creature in his surrounding where there is the crowd of people of other religions. He, of course, is not similar with his father. His father's view and his view differ Leventhal remembers his father's verse:

*Ruf mir Yoshke, ruf mir Moshke,*

*Aber gib mir die groschke*

Call me Ikey, call me moe, but give me the dough. What's to me if you despise me? What do you think equality with you means to me? What do you have that I care about except the groshen? (98)

It was his father's view on Jewish matter which Leventhal doesn't accept. He wants to become a part of mainstream American society. He wants to "become a lion" but in vain. While talking with Williston about Allbee, Leventhal brought the matter of Jewishness: Because I'm a Jew, Jews are touchy, and if you hurt them they won't forgive you. That's the pound of flesh" (103). He thinks that every one in his surrounding takes him negatively. He does not bother to think about others view about him. He generalizes every matter and derives his own meaning which makes

him a miserable character. He thinks himself a marginalized creature. The sense of marginalization hurts him and he cannot become open with his friends. He considers him as an outcaste and cannot enjoy any where. His Jewish ness comes between him and his friends. Williston says: "The Jewish part of it is your invention" (140).

Though Leventhal does not want to hear any thing about his religion, Allbee time and again talks about his Jewishness and makes Leventhal feel about his nature:

No, you never could and I'll tell you why. Because you people take care of yourselves before everything. You keep your spirit under lock and key. That's the many you're brought up. You make your business assistant, and its safe tame and never leads you toward anything risky. Nothing dangerous and nothing glorious. Nothing ever tempts you to dissolve yourself. (131)

Allbee who appears to be a counter part of Leventhal gives a lot of trouble to Leventhal only to realize Leventhal's self. Leventhal who does not know the meaning of his existence realizes his self only from the arrival of Allbee. Leventhal feels himself insecure and alienated in his life. He sees barrenness every where and feels the presence of the unhuman in the too human city.

Leventhal who is brought up from the background of tragedy often remembers his past which has great effect on his present life. His father was harsh towards his sons and his mother died in an insane asylum. His

loneliness of his young age does not leave him till in his middle age.

Leventhal is always haunted by the abstract look of his mother and becomes fearful whether his life would turn like that of his mother. He fears from her madness, which has also some effect in his present life. Once due to his fear of the past his wife had told him to believe anything and everything about himself: "That's because you are not sure of yourself. If you were little more sure you wouldn't let yourself be bothered" (46).

Throughout the novel we are made to feel the oppressive weight of the crowd, the environment, and the suffocating heat of the city in order to symbolize Asa Leventhal's inner psychic state. His New York City, where the most of the events of the novel happen is depicted as a jungle because he is trying to reduce raw existence to its very essentials.

All the major characters are lonely figure-alone, all alone, alone in the jungle of human crowd. Allbee's wife is dead and he doesn't have anyone to support him. He does not have any hope for the future. Similarly, Leventhal in his loneliness teeters on the roads of New York City. Though he has some friends but he does not seem to have any cordial relationship with them. On the other hand the minor characters Max and Elena are away with each other. They do not have any connection with Leventhal for a long time Max is away from his home for his job, and amidst, they lose their son due to some illness.

From Allbee's blame Leventhal is thrown into the turmoil of doubt, insecurity and guilt. Leventhal could not understand why that man is blaming him for no reason. He wonders if he had done any mistakes in the past for that man. He returns back to his past events and tries to find out

the truth about Allbee. Allbee destroys Leventhal's reserved world and makes him realize his true existence. In the presence of Allbee Leventhal feels himself more insecure. He even starts getting scared even with the feeling of Allbee: "As a matter of fact he was thinking of Allbee- he was not sure that he had stopped spying on him- and with the thought came a faint sick qualm" (84). His undisturbed and calm world is shaken by Allbee's entrance. Allbee becomes an unwelcome intruder into his life and shakes Leventhal's private world. Leventhal is so fearful with Allbee that he thinks Allbee all the time and every where- at office, at home or even while walking. He thinks that Allbee is spying him every were:

In the thronged zoo, Leventhal kept an eye out for Allbee.

Defiant and alert at first, he soon becomes depressed. For if Allbee wanted to trial him how could he prevent it? Among so many people, he could come close without being seen.

Frequently leventhal felt that he was watched and he endured it passively. (95)

Before meeting with Allbee also Leventhal was verymuch fearful about his surrounding and people. He used to think people negatively. He was not confident and sure about himself. He felt insecure every where. Once when he was out at park at night he saw Allbee approaching near to him without knowing the truth Leventhal thought: "I'll grab his right arm and pull him off balance . . . . And when he's going down I'll give him a rabbit punch" (22).

Leventhal has a bitter sense of society. The surrounding is hostile for him. He is irritated by his nature. He can not tolerate others speaking

against him. But Allbee appears into his life as a rival and starts to act in the way which Leventhal hates. Gradually, Leventhal realizes his mistakes and faults of his life. He who never thinks about others starts considering about others. Leventhal becomes a changed man in the company of Allbee but his time with Allbee is very hard. He never is able to take a sigh of relief in the presence of Allbee.

In such a tense situation his tensions grows higher. He tries to settle his matter with Allbee but another greater problem comes to his life in the form of Mickey's illness. Mickey, his nephew is sick for long time and doctors are unable to cure him. With the sense of responsibility he helps a lot to Elena, his sister-in-law in the absence of his brother but all his efforts go in vain. Alas! The poor little Mickey dies. He is saddened by the news: "He walked with angry energy to the toilet and began to bathe his head. He had a crushing headache. Over the sink, when his face was wet, he began to cry" (157). So deeply troubled with the child's death he even forgets his trouble with Allbee. He attends the funeral but he is not sure about the angry looks of Elena. He gets scared with the looks at the funeral: "The look she gave him was one of the bitter anger. Though the light was poor, there was no mistaking it. Her face was white and straining" (162). He is so scared from her look that he cannot return her look. He tries to ask about this with his brother but he does not get any clear answer.

Leventhal's search for truth is to maintain harmony between his personal and social relationship. Throughout the novel he seems wandering. He tries to make things normal but everything goes beyond his

reach. His loneliness brings self analysis. Guilt and insecurity are in fact composite emotions and they become inseparable in his life. Leventhal's sense of "being a Jew" is heightened by Allbee's Gentile nature. So they seem to be enemies, each capable of saying or doing the incriminating thing. The relationship of enemy to enemy and of accusation to guilt is confused; and in the confusion Allbee acts to upset all of Leventhal's hopes and promise.

Leventhal's reserved world is little bit affected by a journalist named Schlossberg. His speech on humanity has a great effect on Leventhal to change his mind about Allbee or towards the world. Schlossberg believes in "fullness", in realizing selfness:

"It's easy to understand. Here I'm sitting here and my mind can go around the world. Is there any limit to what I can think? But another minute I can be dead, on this spot. There's a limit to me. But I have to be myself full" (119).

There is something great in Schlossberg's speech that makes Leventhal seem pale. Nevertheless, Leventhal must fight his battle and must lay the ghost of his own insecurity and his imagined complicity in evil. Schlossberg's view on man has some great meaning to Leventhal that changes his feeling not only about Allbee but in every thing:

"A man is nothing, his life is nothing. Or it is even lousy and cheap . . . . If a human life is a great thing to me it is a great thing . . . . Have dignity, you understand me? Choose dignity. Nobody knows enough to turn it down" (120)

Leventhal feels his mistake and tries to regret by offering shelter to Allbee. But Allbee nearly end both of them up in his suicide attempt. Even though order is restored in Leventhal's life after Mary's arrival, the novel ends on an ironic note. The city is as hot as it was in the beginning but Leventhal experiences a lot of changes in his life. He becomes a ware about himself and to his surrounding and understands the ways of living. His life becomes easier and all his guilts, insecurity, troubles, sorrow gone. His world seems to be more secure and comfortable.

### **Self: A Journey Within**

The novel '*The Victim*' reflects a fascination with the enigma of man's selfhood. Who am I? this question recurs and is answered and yet requires always re-asking. The novel projects the protagonist's search for self against the background of fragmented and confusing world. Due to the confusion of his position and identity no clear-cut self-image can emerge in the life of the protagonist, Asa Leventhal. The search for self takes the form of a curious pursuit because the object is undefined and unvisualised.

Asa Leventhal is alienated from the world, from society, from families and even from his own self. Though he lives in the city of human crowd, he finds himself very much lonely, and for him all his friend and colleagues become strangers. He searches for some objective reality which can give the answer of his questions and makes him aware of his self. He time and again navigates into his past and little by little and bit by bit gets what he desires knowledge about himself. This unexpected revelation gives meaning to his life and unifies him.

Leventhal is a frightened and lonely man. When the novel begins he is an editor in a local trade magazine in lower Manhattan. He is presented as a dislocated middle aged man in his society, self-questioning, uncertain and estranged. He has suffered a lot in his life. The more he tries to solve the problem of his life the deeper he goes. He tries to confront himself but a problem intrude into his lonely world in the form of Allbee, his old acquaintance, who blames Leventhal responsible for what wrong has gone to his life. He tries to find out the truth about Allbee which leads him to involve in conflict with his friends. The truth which he is searching about Allbee leads him to the greater truth of his life- he gets the meaning of his life and understands his self which he has never known before. Saul Bellow has presented this novel as the reflection of the inner life or more accurately, the lack of inner life of the genetic hero as he tries to achieve the truth about him and his tormenter, Allbee.

The novel revolves around two characters- Asa Leventhal, the protagonist and Kirby Allbee, an antagonist who turns out to be alter egos in the same bitter farce. All the events of the story are described in third person narrative, and the setting is New York city which is described as hot as Bangkok. Asa Leventhal, the Jew is a lonely figure sprung from a background of tragedy. His wife is away towards South to visit her family. Allbee, a former acquaintance to Leventhal appears from nowhere and blames Leventhal responsible for his condition. Kirby Allbee, a Gentile accuses Leventhal for all his ills, from his inability to find any employment to the death of his wife. He charges Leventhal that he

deliberately insulted Rudiger, his boss only to throw him out from his job.

He says:

Then you went in and deliberately insulted Rudiger, put on some act with him, called him filthy names, deliberately insulted him to get me in bad. Rudiger is hot blooded and he turned on me for it. You know he would. It was calculated. It worked out just as you thought it would. (28)

Though they had met each other only a few times before the novel begins, Allbee now embarks on a tedious story from the past and charges Leventhal responsible for his misfortune. Leventhal dimly recalls the events but rejects that he had done anything against Albee. Leventhal, alone in his room remembers his meeting with Rudiger fixed by Allbee. Of course, Leventhal had a dispute with the bad tempered Rudiger, but Leventhal is sure that he had done nothing against Albee and his job. In his view, the dispute with Rudiger was a good lesson for him. For he was tough and nasty; "There's something wrong with that man. Hot blood isn't the word for it. He's vicious. I didn't exactly keep my temper down. I admit that" (28). But Leventhal is not ready to accept the charge against him. His dispute was neither related to Allbee nor to his job. Leventhal concludes that Allbee's drunkenness was responsible for throwing him out from the job.

Leventhal doesn't want to take the responsibility for Allbee's joblessness. But Allbee also doesn't step back accusing him for his suffering. He spies Leventhal and even reaches to his apartment. He time and again points Leventhal out for his ruin:

But you know its true that you're to blame. You and you only. For everything. You ruined me. Ruined! Because that's what I am, ruined! You're the one that's responsible. You did it to me deliberately, out of hate. Out of pure hate. (34)

But Leventhal is sure that he had long ago forgotten Allbee's misbehavior with the lady at the party. Though he was sad at beginning, He doesn't have any bad feelings for Allbee as he is charging him now. His acting up with Rudiger was also not intentional. He did not want to bring Allbee in trouble. Leventhal is not sure why does this man follows, blames hates him and seeks redress from him. He thinks and rethinks about himself and Allbee. But he doesn't get the answer. He is not sure why Allbee is back after many years and blames him for what he is not responsible for. To get the answer he visits some of his friends and talks about Allbee. He says that his hands are clean but his friends are not sure. They ask him why he has mixed up with an unsavory character like Allbee. He sets out to find out the truth.

His eagerness to unveil the truth about Albee leads him to the knowlege about himself which he had not known throughout his life. The deeper he goes into his relation with Allbee the more knowledge comes out about himself. He insists his friend Harkavy to tell the truth which he has heard about Allbee: "I want you to tell me", Leventhal persisted. I'll stick to you till you do. Considering what I'm being blamed for, its natural that I should want to find out" (78). Harkavy tells him the truth:

If you don't mind Asa, there's one thing I have to point out that you haven't learned. We are not children. We're men of

the world. It's almost a sin to be so innocent. Get next to yourself, boy will you? You want the whole world to like you. (78)

Leventhal thinks that he has never hurt anybody in his life and wants to be treated in the same way. But Harkavy tells him opposite to his thinking and tries to make him realize about human faults. Nobody is perfect in the world. “. . . We all have our faults and are what we are” (78). He shows Leventhal his weakness and asks him to grow up and accept the reality: "But you are so upset when somebody doesn't like you, or says this or that about you. A little independence, boy, or its weakness, positively"(78). Harkavy's suggestion to Leventhal is the first step for Leventhal to know about himself He tries to make Leventhal realise that he should not care about such type of filthy matter but he does not give the matter up easily so he goes to visit another acquaintance of him and a friend of Allbee, Williston. Williston also believes that somewhere Levehthal is responsible for Allbee's condition. Truth is always bitter. Leventhal cannot tolerate the truth easily. A certain queer feeling runs onto him: "A hard stroke of disappointment and anger went through Leventhal and drove the breath from his body. His limbs were empty . . .” (102). Williston says some of the mistakes of his past:

Don't let yourself so easily. You were fighting everybody those days. You were worst with Rudiger, but, I heard of others. You came to ask him for a job and he wouldn't give you one. He didn't have to, did he? You should have had better judgement than to blow up. (105)

Williston points out his mistake which he did with Rudiger at his office: “You go to see a man about work. It isn't only the job but your right to live. Say it isn't his lookout; he's got his own interests. But you think you've got something he can use. You're there to sell yourself to him” (105).

He thinks over his mistakes of his life for the first time. Truth bites him and he becomes restless. Some of the events of the past which he had already forgotten makes him wince and others catch at his heart too heavy for wincing. He remembers his tussle with Rudiger, and for the first time he accepts his mistake: “. . . he recognized one of those deeper issues that he had failed to reach before. He was ready to accept the blame for loosing his head at Dilli's” (107). He thinks why he behaved rudely with Rudier there. Now, only after a long years he realizes what made him get angry upon Rudiger. He comes closer to the truth that how fearful was he about himself. He was scared with himself and with his living standard those days: ““He made me believe what I was afraid of,” Leventhal thought” (107). Now, he agrees with Williston and on his views about him. He realizes how Rudiger might have felt after that incident. He also looks the event from Allbee's point of view and finds Allbee somewhere true to blame him.

The minor, but important character of the novel Schlossberg has a great effect on Leventhal to realize his mistake and change his mind. It is he who gives new views about life and humanism. Schlossberg claims that man's most pressing obligation is to find out what kinds of behaviour- and

by implication what aspirations- are appropriate human beings. His view on human being and humanism is quote worthy here:

It's bad to be less than human and it's bad to be more than human. What's more than human? Our friend'- he ment Leventhal, 'was talking about it before . . .' we only know what it is to die because some people die and, if we make ourselves different from them, maybe we don't have to? Less than human is the other side of it . . . Good acting is what is exactly human . . . more than human, can you have any use for life? Less than human, you don't either. (119)

The long speech by the Yiddish Journalist Schlossberg, which has no function in the plot of the novel can be taken as a most powerful part of it. Here Bellow stresses, through Schlossberg his humanistic rejection of supernatural. Anything beyond the human allows man to detach himself from humanity and ignore camouflage, or minimize man's suffering. According to Schlossberg it is our task to seek and observe in live an understanding not of what is more or less than human, but what is human exactly (120). By presenting the character of Schlossberg Saul Bellow seems to write to express and endorse a sense of human values and a judgement of the modern world. Here we can easily see the suffering human characters and the moral life of humanity.

Through Leventhal acts up with Shifcart and does not seem much interasted in Schlossberg's view at the Cafeteria, his behaviors towards Allbee is little bit softened. He seems to be highly affected by the speech of Schlossberg about humanism. The fragmented and lonely figure,

Leventhal finds himself somewhere responsible for the ruined life of Allbee and with the sense of responsibility he wants to help Allbee. He is no more harsh to Allbee. He even becomes ready to find a job for him. Leventhal talks on phone with Williston:

Probably the thing to do is to get him a job. Whether he'll take it or not is another story. Maybe he doesn't want to work. I cannot tell you. He wants everything and I don't think he wants to do anything. (155)

Leventhal, now thinks that he is somewhere responsible for Allbee's condition. His acting up with Rudiger was somewhere cause for Allbee's joblessness. He realizes this and wants to help him at least once. But his friend, Harkavy is amused to see Leventhal's changed attitude towards Allbee whom Leventhal used to hate:

When you came to talk to me about him, you were mad enough to hang him. He was accusing you some crime and blaming you for what happened to his wife and what not.

Now you want to send him to Shiftcart with a reference. (235)

But Leventhal wants to forget all these and wants to help Allbee. Leventhal becomes anxious about knowing his condition and nature. He does not find any meaning of his life. His friends have different views with him and his wife is away. Sense of alienation bites him and finds himself a solitary figure. Moreover he feels some kind of responsibility towards Allbee. He requests Harkavy to send Allbee to Shiftcart with a reference. Not only this Leventhal feels pity on Allbee's condition, he has been

staying out, and he lets him stay in his apartment. But his stay with Allbee is not so good for him. He may be tolerating Allbee only to regret for what he had done to him. When he sees his room searched and scattered papers, he flings on Allbee: "I let you in here and you get your dirty hands all over my things, my private business, my letters" (197). But Allbee's reply is very normal in comparison to Leventhal's. "Why not keep your desk locked, as long as you don't trust me? . . . You should have locked it 'sooner'" (199).

Leventhal tolerates Allbee anyhow in his apartment though he is a real trouble for him. Allbee is rude towards Leventhal and he does not care about anything. He seems to be giving trouble by staying in his apartment, eating in his kitchen, and wearing his robes. He jokes on Leventhal on his religion and makes fun of him. Leventhal simply listens to him and does not dare to kick him out from his apartment although he thinks he should do it very soon before the arrival of his wife. Once he jokes on Leventhal's hair by fingering it: "It's astonishing. It's like an animal's hair you must have a terrific constitution" (201). But his patience goes off when he finds Allbee with a prostitute in his bed. He loses his temper: "Go get your stuff in the dining room and clear out. I don't want any more of you" (245). But Allbee is cool:

But what's there to be so upset about? Where else, if not in bed . . .? He looks amused again and linked his bloodshot eyes. 'What do you do'? May be you have some other way, more refined, different? Don't you people claim that you're

the same as everybody else? That's your way of saying that you're above everybody else. I Knew. (245)

At this point he comes to the realization of his self. Leventhal always claims that he is like everybody but his thinking and behaviour are quite different. He sees people of different clan with indifferent eyes. He cannot become happy, and share feelings with others than the people of his religion. He thinks that they don't like him simply because he is a Jew. He marginalizes himself. Even with Williston, who had helped him in his life selflessly, he treats badly. No one other than he himself has made him out casted. He even does not like the wife of his brother, who is an Italian by origin. He tries to persuade Max to end his relation up with Elena, though Max says that he is happy with her:

‘Does she give you a lot of trouble,Max?’

Trouble? You've got to consider. It's a rough deal.

‘She cries. That's pretty natural.’

You might as well be open with me Max's surprise grew.

‘What's there not to be open about?’ (213)

Leventhal insists Max to tell whether he has happy relation with her though Max has already said there is not any misunderstanding between them as such. Now Leventhal flies on towards Max's mother in law who is a catholic. Leventhal does not like the lady from his first look though they did not talk with each other. His hatred comes out when he sees the lady. "Ugly Old Witch!" (53).

Leventhal has the nature of jumping on others relation and generalizing their relation. He does the same thing with the lady. He thinks that the lady does not have any feeling for the sick child who is also her grandchild and is fighting against death. His ill feelings can be seen clearly in the words of his own:

And the grandmother? If anything happened to the boy she would consider it in the nature of a judgement on the marriage. The marriage was impure to her. Yes, he understood how she felt about it. A Jew a man of a wrong blood, of bad blood had given her daughter two children and that was why this was happening. (54)

It is clear from the above sentences that Leventhal himself makes him a marginalized group. Without knowing what other people think about him, he himself uses bad words for his own clan: "a man of wrong blood". He is confused about his own blood. No one is there in his life to give trouble but he himself. He does not have a confidence to face the reality. He is a self centered man. He is so afraid with the people around him that he has not met his brother and his family for a long time. So, whoever he sees, he suspects. He is always confused and cannot believe others. About the old lady he openly says to Max:

'For God's sake throw her out!' His vehemence astonishes Max. 'She does not have anything to do with it'.

'Don't let her get a hold. Protect yourself against her.' Max for the first time began to smile. 'She won't hurt me'. (215)

But Max's words do not seem him having much weight. He tries to persuade Max to go away from the old lady. He out pours his ill feelings towards the old lady: "But I have watched her. It's as clear as day to me that she thinks the baby's death was God's punishment because Elena married you" (215).

By the end of Chapter twenty-three, he is a changed man. He knows his position and gets his self through Allbee, and recognizes himself. He starts considering on others feelings. He starts thinking a thing from different angles. He now realizes his mistakes about Elena and the old lady. ". . . Well, you caught me in a bad mood the other night, Max. I'm not always like that. I hope I did not hurt your feelings" (250).

What he did with Allbee and the woman that night tortures him. He becomes restless. He thinks the event from Allbee and the woman's perspective and finds himself guilty for the incident. Allbee's words startles him: "You certainly are not the same as everybody else" (245). He agrees with Allbee's view about him. He is certainly not like everybody. He becomes restless, picks up the broom bends on his trembling legs to brush up the ashes and thinks: "May I did not do the right thing, I did not know what it was. I did not yet" (249). He who never found himself wrong thinks and realizes his mistakes. He knows his draw backs and regrets for it: "I suppose I handled it badly" (249).

Allbee, whom Leventhal hates so much makes him realize his self. Allbee, though very much different with Leventhal, is shown having similar characteristics with him. Sometimes we feel confusion as if they

are the same person. Leventhal who was a lonely, serious, insecure in his job and financial position is changed in the final chapter:

Things went well for him in the next few years. The consciousness of an unremitting daily fight, though still present, was fainter and less troubling. His health was better, and there were changes in his appearance. Something recalcitrant seemed to have left him, he was not exactly affable, but his obstinately, unrevealing expression had softened. (256)

In Leventhal's changed life everything goes fine. His wife comes back and she is pregnant. Which is the symbol of Leventhal's hope for the better future and his happiness. He is now less worried about the things around him, but still he is in search of the answer of the philosophic question: "Who runs the things?" Years after, he meets Allbee at a theatre with a faded but still beautiful actress for his company. Allbee looks more prosperous in his 'dinner jacket and the silk seamed formed trousers'. In a philosophic way Allbee says Letventhal that he has gotten off the pony and now is on the train as a mere passenger. Though he looks a frustrated creature he has some hope for the future. He seems to have meaning of life. He is not a conductor who runs things but he is happy. He views that the world is not made for him. But he is no longer angry at the world. But, before Leventhal gets the answer Allbee disappears in the crowd. Still at the last of the novel also, Leventhal does not get the answer.

In the chapter twenty four it is clear that Leventhal is improved physically, psychologically and financially. With improved health and a

new job he realized that things have gone well for him, yet he feels some deep rooted sense of inadequacy. To him, the world and mans position in it seemed completely 'haphazard'. Allbee has provided him with the means of justifying his guilty feelings so, he now does not fell that he is being blamed for everything, and is not so ready to blame others for his misfortune. In Allbee's company, at stray moment, he feels himself on the point of escaping the confines of his old identity and seeing the world through fresh eyes.

### **The Theme of Anxiety, Despair, and Fear**

The novel written just after the World War II presents the effect of war. We can see the effect of war in the lives of the characters. The characters suffer from the problem of anxiety, death, homelessness, loneliness, depression, hopelessness, despair, fear of the past and insecure future, irrationality, sorrow and the like. The very beginning of the novel shows the tense and antagonistic environment which is very similar to the events and lives of the characters. Each characters of the novel suffers from the problem of depression and frustration. No one seems to have any hope for the future. They have the feeling of fear and rootlessness in their heart and they always seek for security which seems to be beyond their reach.

The protagonist, Asa Leventhal receives a strange phone call from Elena, his sister-in-law. The call is about his sick nephew who has been suffering from a disease of a rare kind. From beginning of the novel readers are introduced a tense and anxious environment. The irritation and restlessness of the protagonist is the common feature of the modern man.

The disease with which the child is suffering from is the effect of the war. Doctors' failure to cure the child is the failure of science, and the symbol of man's hopelessness. The situation becomes more tense and moves towards the climax.

Kirby Allbee, who appears in the scene and charges Leventhal for his joblessness and homelessness, is the most depressed and frustrated character in the novel. He is one of the major victims of the depression of that time in American. He does not want to take credit for his ruin, rather he blames others for his misfortune. He even charges Leventhal for the death of his wife and all the ill going of his life. But poor Leventhal does not understand why this man is accusing him for he has done nothing to this man. They had met only a few times before the novel starts but Allbee spins a story from past and points Leventhal out for his collapsed life. Along with this main plot the novel moves ahead and shows the confused, depressed, and anxious story of the main characters. Each main character of the novel suffers from the separation with their dearest one. In the novel, sense of loss is more prevalent than gain. Neither of the characters sees any hope in their life, they struggle in the present and long for better world, but in vain. They all seem to be searching their true meaning of life. They all try to create their existence in the earth and struggle for that but the more they struggle to get the meaning of their life, the deeper they sink into doubt and despair of their existence. All the characters seem struggling to create their identity in the novel.

Max Leventhal, a minor character of the novel is away from his house and family for job. He is unable to come back to look after his sick

child. He is away from his family only to get rid of his existing problems. He comes only when his child dies. He does not seem to have enough courage to deal with the problems. He represents the modern man's lack of courage to handle the situation. Though he gets message of his sick child, he cannot collect enough courage to appear in the scene and only comes when every thing is over. He is fearful of his past - the time of depression. He does not want to lose his job this time. He views that life is not as easy as it is depicted in the Bible. A man himself has to struggle for his life No one would come to help from anywhere: "It's not like with God, you know, in the Bible, where he blows his breath into Adam, or whoever" (217). Humans have to create their life themselves. No God will come to see or do anything for the human.

Max's wife Elena, a minor character of the novel can not comes out from her tense world. Though she knows that he child is suffering from a disease which does not have any cure, she continuously hires specialists for the child. She does not seem to take any hope for the child and never becomes ready to admit the child at the hospital. The sickness of the child is the effect of the war which has greatly affected the life of the new generation. Finally the child dies. It is the death of hope and optimism. The war is over but still the new generation is paying the price of the war.

Kirby Allbee, one of the main characters of the novel is anxious and frustrated from his life. When the novel starts, he has already lost his lovely and valuable things. He was kicked out from his job in the time of depression and is left by his wife forever. He does not see any optimism in his life. He tries to find some relief in drinking but in vain. He does not

find any one and any where to go so he appears in front of Leventhal and blames him responsible for his ruin. He gives mental torture to Leventhal in his frustrated condition. He tries to forget his condition by drinking from the insurance money of his wife whom, he says loved very much. So, at last, when he does not find any relief and hope from any where, he tries to commit suicide and tries to end his suffering.

If we observe the character of Allbee we can easily see the hopelessness, despair, frustration and boredom which is common in the modern man. Modern man is the victim of all these elements. In his frustration he starts drinking as a result he becomes more frustrated and suffers a lot. His drinking is the symbol of modern man's frustration He even can not appear in front of his of his acquaintances: " Allbee was ashamed to show himself to his old friends" (106). Allbee's situation is quite disappointing. He does not find any hope from anywhere. He struggles and tries to get a job through the help of Leventhal but fails. His land lord throws him out from the apartment for not paying rent. He sleeps out: "But I have nowhere to go. Not for the last few nights. I was put out" (144). He slept in the open. He suffers from the problem of homelessness There is no one for him to share his feeling and suffering. He seems totally hopeless. He loses the courage to live and tries to find relief in death.

The protagonist of the novel suffers throughout the novel-from the beginning to end. He is insecure financially and is a solitary figure though he lives in the city of New York. In the absence of Mary, his wife he encounters with an old acquaintance and is tortured. He is so tortured by Allbee that he gets scared even from the sight of him. Symbolically,

Allbee is a great problem for him and he wants to run away from his problem. His problem does not leave him. Finally, he accepts the problem and realizes his guilt and tries to become happy. When he accepts the problem he gains courage to deal with it and finds life little bit easier to live.

The theme of death and separation is dominant in the novel. Mickey, Leviathan's nephew and Allbee's wife's death is presented as an untimely death. Mickey dies from a disease whereas Allbee's wife dies from an accident. Mickey's death symbolizes the failure of science and technology whereas Allbee's wife's death symbolizes the insecure future and uncertainty of human life. There is another type of symbolical death in the novel the death of Allbee's and Leventhal's relationship after the suicide attempt of Allbee:

The air was foul and hard to breathe. Gas was pouring from the oven. 'I have to kill him', he thought as they grappled. He caught the cloth of his coat in his teeth while he swiftly changed his grip, clutching at Allbee's face. He tore away convulsively, but Leventhal crushed him with his weight in the corner. Allbee's fist came down heavily on his neck, beside the shoulder. You want to murder me? Murder! Leventhal gasped. The sibilance of the pouring gas was almost detening. 'Me, myself! Allbee whispered despairingly, as if with his last breath.' Me . . . ! (254)

When Allbee's suicide attempt is caught out he flees from Leventhal's apartment and never returns back in Leventhal's life.

All the major characters of the novel suffer from the problem of separation. Elena a minor character at first suffers from separation with her husband and later on separates with her child, Mickey. In the same way Allbee separates with his wife. His wife is killed in an accident. Allbee's heart breaks with the death of his wife and he lives the life of frustration. After his separation he doesnot seem to have any hope for the future. On the other hand, Asa Leventhal separates with his wife Mary in the beginning of the novel. Though he meets his wife at the last chapter of the novel, his life in her absence is very tough. In her absence he spends a solitary life though amidst of the human crowd. He realizes his mistakes of his life and tries to correct them in the coming years.

So, all the characters of the novel in one way or the other suffer from anxiety, despair and their insecure future. They are afraid of themselves and don't have courage to fight with the existing problem. Only Leventhal seems to have some knowledge of the existing problem of human being and sets out to find the truth about him and Allbee. There is indeed a Solomn exploration of the dilemmas of the individual in the modern world.

#### **IV. Conclusion**

Search for self is the central issue in this novel. The protagonist Asa Leventhal struggles to find his self in the environment where pain, suffering, failure, and frustration prevail. The hero feels himself insecure physically and psychologically because of his meaningless existence. His life becomes problematic and the problematic self has to face identity crisis. Though he is happily married, his wife is not with him to share his troubles and to comfort him. He is even alienated from his friends. He constantly seeks his self in the barren and frustrated life.

Leventhal is frustrated from all aspects of life. His alienation and frustration make him irritated, impassive and aggressive. His fear of the past also makes him a miserable creature in the present. The arrival of Allbee in his life makes him much more miserable creature. The psychological harassment of the contemporary world is personified in the character of Allbee. Allbee and Leventhal have been living a kind of cat-and-dog life. Their life has become the battle of identity, with each character trying to humiliate and torture each other. Leventhal's loneliness increases when his friends point out his mistakes instead of seeing Allbee's guilt. Loneliness brings self analysis and he starts analyzing himself in his loneliness.

The continuous blaming of Allbee for his ruined life makes Leventhal think and rethink about his past and his mistakes. Then after he never becomes free of Allbee's accusation and rarely of his presence. Leventhal feels himself somewhere responsible for Allbee's misfortune; and with a sense of responsibility he offers him shelter in his apartment. In Leventhal's case the sense of "being a Jew" is heightened by Allbee's New

England gentile nature; so they are easily and naturally enemies and have totally different views. Their opposite nature gives Leventhal ground to know himself. Their struggle continuous and Allbee's views affects and dominates Leventhal's.

Leventhal feels Allbee's presence anytime and anywhere he goes. He thinks something would have to happen, something that he could not foresee. In the company of Allbee he knows about his own self which he never has become aware of. Most of all, he is nagged by the growing realization that he is the sort of person who allows anger and outrage, and spoils his chances. His true self is unknown to him until he is tortured by Allbee. With the sense of responsibility and growing sense of humanism Leventhal lets Allbee stay with him. During his stay with Allbee he realizes lots of changes in his life; and his ways of living is changed.

Leventhal who used to see Allbee as a total contrast with him starts seeing him as an identical figure. He finds Allbee a similar creature, and we also see the same confused situation between them. At this point Leventhal seems teetering on the point of revelation. In Allbee's company, he feels himself on the point of escaping the confines of his old identity and seeing the world through fresh eyes. He recognizes his self and meaning of his life and the ways of living. He understands that there is something in all of us that fights against the sleep of quotidian. By coming to the term with his guilt, Leventhal discovers his identity; and the insecure hero, at the end of the novel turns to feel relaxed, secure in his life both financially and psychologically. The entire novel is basically a struggle for search for self amidst frustrations, alienation and meaninglessness.

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