

**TRIBHUVAN UNIVERSITY**

**Jewishness in Bernard Malamud's Short Fiction**

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**By**

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## **Abstract**

Malamud's short fiction features the different aspects of Jewish experience of 20<sup>th</sup> century. They explore the theme of suffering and their tragic experience just being the minor ethnic group in America. Being himself from the Jewish immigrant society, Malamud presents his character as a sufferer Jew, taking the burden of whole Jewishness. His characters always try to preserve their Jewishness and establish harmonious relationship with other people but get disastrous result in return. So, use of these experience of the Jews and their suffering not only helps highlight the Jewishness in Malamud's short fiction but also helps capture the specificity of Jewishness by delineating the pain and trauma of Jews with remarkable degree of analytical stance. By depicting such experiences of the Jews and their consciousness of Jewish heritage, Malamud tries to establish the harmony and mutual relationship with other ethnic groups and sense of belonging to their own Jewishness.

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## **Introduction**

### **A Background to Jewish American Literature with Special Reference to Bernard Malamud**

Ethnic writers male or female, African or Jewish American, all of them pick up the experience of their community. The stories of Bernard Malamud also revolve on the central concern of Jewish experience of life in multi-ethnic urban setting of America in mid twentieth century. They are focused mostly on the Jewish immigrant's suffering, their experience of anti-Semitism and Holocaust and deepening ethical and traditional beliefs of Jews and even their relationship between African Americans and assimilated Jews who were slowly mingling with the Native American culture and society.

Jewish tradition in American fiction dates to the 1920s and 1930s remained strong in later decades. The emergence of Jews and major contemporary writers had to await the 1940s. In 1940s, the Great Depression gave way to the depression of the intellectuals. This is evident in the works of Bernard Malamud, Philip Roth, Saul Bellow and Norman Mailer. These American Jews novelists in their works include some of the most acclaimed fiction written in this country since World War II. The post war era has seen these writers taking their place among the most celebrated Jewish writers and to mention them together is to be conscious of both their place in Jewish literature and enormous by varied terrain they occupy collectively. "After the war Jewish ness became emblematic of the human predicament a sense of exile, helplessness, vulnerability and dislocation" (Blick Silver, 237) and the talented Jewish writers like Malamud come forward as the producers of an influential modern

literature that they represented at once subgroup within literature with consciousness of their Jewishness.

To prewar Jewish writers life was harsh but its meaning always clear: money. Jews despite their often crushing poverty, the immigrants brought with them a rich tradition of literacy and scholarship and the beginnings of a fiction that needed only translation into modern term to gain entry into American writing. English of course is a thrust upon the Jews but it is also a language of rich expressive resources and literacy possibility to release mute and long suppressed yearnings of the Jews into the world of articulate desire.

American Jewish writing from 1940s to the 1960s was the first serious outpouring of an American literature that contained many voices. The major Jewish writers of post war era have all been acutely attend to political history and to its characteristic modern themes: war, brutality, depression and unemployment, the implication of money, class and ideology and especially the individual sentiments and sensibility that grows out of such history. The horror of recent past stands behind all the post war Jewish American fiction. In this context, Mark Shechner puts forward his view:

The Jewish writers who have done their major creative work from the forties through the present either started out in the thirties and took their cues from the decade that was marked by Great Depression [...]. The fiction written by the Jewish in the next three decades shares a common patrimony of disaster, and the writers, different as they are, have all been obliged to make artistic capital out of a shared sense of loss and deracination. (196)

In the same way, write Richard Ruland and Malcolm Bradbury that " Post war Jewish writing in generally marked by its concern with the historical and moral and the human anxiety of modern self " (377). And one of the writers to proliferate such issues is Bernard Malamud. Malamud is a leading figure among the Jewish writers and being a post war Jewish writer, his stories are also considered as the relationship between the society and art. Ruland and Bradbury while talking about the whole Jewish writing, comments upon Malamud's fiction by saying, "Typically, though Bernard Malamud's fiction is notable in this respect the induring question of the relationship between social and artistic responsibility is kept alive (377). This makes the fiction of Malamud seem a social commentary presented with great artistic finesse.

Moreover, what is best about Malamud are his intuitions about the unfulfilled life and his epiphanies of disappointment and loss: his frozen moment of striking heart. For Shechner

He is par excellence the writer of the half-life, the shabby region of mediocre attainment between pure wish fulfillment and total disaster and he has perfect pitch for the language of poignancy and loss. He is also most spokesmen like when drawing that life is quite depression [...] and his stories are generally more moving than his novels, and the novels more convincing in their momentary touches than in their sustained architecture. (210)

Likewise, Sexual agony is Malamud's stock in trade. It is not however the stand off between the pleasure and reality principles that sets the moral curve of his fiction but the ambivalence of appetite itself.

Though Malamud is labeled as a Jewish writer, he explores themes in his fiction that belong not only of the Jews but also to the whole human beings. Malamud



often treats the theme of morality while dealing with the concept of suffering. Rachel Kadish in the article "Morality A living Breathing Struggle" supports this saying, Malamud in his stories "Challenges us to think hard about proper use of that most delicate organs, human conscience", which is true standard for judging the moral values (206). Malamud believes in purity of human nature and moral discipline. He keeps a hope that human beings can not be morally so deprived and crooked as they supposed to be. Writing of Malamud's preoccupation with the subject of morality Leonard Unger Observes, "of course, the tenacity of Malamud's moral imagination has driven him beyond hints of transcendence to full scale studies of successful or abortive initiations into a new spiritual life " (438). Since Malamud's fiction is ordered around the moral depositions of the characters, he can also be called a moralist.

Malamud' idea is based on a form of Jewish humanism. He has humour of Jewish immigrant culture creating a distinctly urban comic vision, which is paradoxically his view of suffering. For Sheldon J Hershinow, "Malamud sees that Jews can serve to an isolated individual's existential situation who have the potential for achieving moral transcendence through suffering. Suffering rather than universalized, it is seen as a positive moral teacher [...]" (99).

Apart from all these above-mentioned issues, Malamud too expresses the sheer terror of existence of the 20<sup>th</sup> century American Jews in his fiction. Supporting this Ann Charters says that Malamud "writes from the perspective of minority culture in United States" [1606], who are the part of American cultural scene but never at its centre and they are Jews.

No Jewish family and community live in an entirely Jewish area. They share their living with the vast complex of American society. And in such a situation they

find themselves alienated, displaced and insecure. They find themselves totally drawn into the deep ocean of suffering and cultivate self-hatred within themselves. Oscar Gassner, in the story "The German Refugee" has gone through the similar experience. He is one of the Holocaust survivors, a German refugee in American Land. Malamud here exposes and analyzes the traumatic experience of Holocaust through this peculiar protagonist. Gassner appears to be a scapegoat of the political puzzle of contemporary Germany, with the Nazi's Holocaust. Being exiled by his own homeland, he struggles to adjust himself in America by learning English language, and in between these two worlds he is torn and starts feeling despair and hopeless, and to quote Edith Blicksilver, "spiritually imprisoned by guilt, self hatred and helplessness" (237). He attempts to kill himself several times. Finally, after the news of the death of his wife in the Holocaust, he finds difficult to survive and commits suicide.

Axel and Eva in "Take Pity" have some sort of similar experience to that of Oscar. Moreover, they suffer and suffer till their death as "the progress of typical Malamud protagonist always involves identification with suffering and some strategy for taking on the burden of other" (Pinsker, 50). A Polish refugee, Axel becomes unsuccessful to tolerate suffering anymore and dies of starvation, though he worked like a horse in American land. Eva, after the death of her husband, keeps on struggling, even refusing to take anybody's pity, thinking that she is a Jew and a Jew should suffer. Here she takes the burden of her whole ethnicity by letting herself to suffer without any reason.

Apart from the above issues, twentieth century witnessed the tensed relation of Jews with other ethnic groups. Malamud in some of his stories has captured such relationship between Jews and blacks. Supporting this, Edmund Spevack says:

The tensed Black Jewish relationship treated in a vivid way in Malamud's fiction [...] has become much discussed in American society, culture as well as literature during the last forty years. These racial tensions in society are connected to the production of literature.

(45)

One of the examples of such stories is the most famous story "The Black is My Favorite Colour". He presents the Character Nat Lime, always willing to help black through out his life but black are always skeptical towards his kindness even hurt him physically and mentally.

Along with such relationship with black, Jews also have gone through the experience of anti-Semitism. It was at its peak just before the Second World War and Jews were treated like animals. Malamud's story "The Jewbird" depicts such situation. It is about the twentieth century dispute between assimilated and unassimilated Jews but digging beneath, we can find the shadow of conflict between newly arrived Jewish refugee and Gentiles as Schwartz and Cohen, as Eileen H. Watt too views, "Cohen whose name ironically invokes the High Priest tribe of Kohanes, is the mouthpiece of Gentile anti-Semitism" (160). This proves Cohen, an assimilated Jew, who hates the newly arrived refugee Schwartz, a Jewbird is the replica of the Gentiles.

Malamud, depicting the characters and situation from Jewish tradition and culture in some of his stories, lets his characters conscious about their tradition, though they are in modern generation. The issue of marriage is frequently found in his stories and through the story "The Magic Barrel", he has revived the traditional system of marriage finding a bride taking the help of matchmaker and how Leo Finkle goes through a suffering while searching for a perfect bride, also can be seen here.

The combination of anxiety, assimilation, and anti-Semitism always characterized the twentieth century American Jewish experience. Moreover, victimization and suffering being a Jew have become even more central to American Jewish Society. Jews are paradigmatic outsiders in America. They were even stigmatized for not being Christian. They are hated by the Christians for the same reason and equally there evolved the problem between Jews and black in the late 50s, for instance, in the area of economics and colour though both of them are the socially oppressed minority. In other words, the discrimination that Jews face is never comparable to those experienced at various times by blacks, and other non-white groups. Indeed their refusal to accept America, as it is, what distinguishes the Jewish experience from so many others.

Anti-Semitism peaked in America in inter war years and was practiced in different ways by highly respected individual and institution. Everywhere there were restriction and quota against Jews. Twentieth century witnesses even the dispute between the Jews and Jews and it took a form of anti-Semitism too. Millions of Jews primarily from Russia and Eastern Europe migrate to America. Embarrassed by the more recently arrived Russian Jewish immigrants long beard, the women's wigs and the orthodox rabbis side locks, the German Jews shun the Russian Jewish immigrants' and Russians, too, disparage European immigrants by inventing slur. Living so long in the surrounding of Gentile, assimilated Jews start hating unassimilated Jews.

After the World War II Hitler's armies reduced European Jewish communities to ashes, which is known as the Holocaust and remaining victim with a broken spirit were resumed by America

The Jews were not allowed to marry the non-Jews or Gentiles in Jewish society and Jew who married a Christian had to face ostracism from family and

community. But by the middle of twentieth century intermarriage become common. But some tradition conscious immigrants still follow the traditional way of marriage.

The late twentieth century is a time when Jews, in the United States arguably achieve more status and social acceptance than in previous era of their long diaspora. The massive populations of this time radically transform the character of American Jewish community. It also realigns American Jewry's politics and priorities, injecting new elements of tradition, nationalism and socialism into Jewish common life. The question now was whether as Americans, they would still remain Jews. They are conscious of all such experiences and these experiences of the Jews made them different from the other minority group and these themes constitute the core of American Jewish narratives including those written by Bernard Malamud.

Bernard Malamud, American novelist and short writer, focuses on the Jewish experience in America in most of his books, novels and short stories. Born in Brooklyn in 1914, he was educated at Bennington College and died in 1986. His first novel, *The Natural* (1952) reworks the legend of the Holy Grail as an allegorical fantasy about a star baseball player. His second novel, *The Assistant* (1957), is concerned with Jewish themes and reflects sad impoverished Brooklyn scene of his childhood. *The Fixer* (1966) for which Malamud received The Pulitzer Prize(1967) for fiction, is a poignant novel based on the true story of suffering of a Russian Jewish workman sentenced unjustly to prison, it demonstrates how human beings come through suffering to an affirmative view of life. *The Tenants* (1971), a novel about the relationship between a Jewish man and a Blackman, deals with inner city tensions. Malamud's later novels include *Dubin's Lives* (1979), about a writer of biographies and *God's Grace* (1982).

Malamud's short stories mix an abiding compassion of Jewish life with subtle touches of wry humour. Harry Hanson and Alfred Kazin commented on his stories saying that they are "radiant with personal vision, compassionate and profound in their wry humor, they capture the poetry of human relationships at the point where reality and imagination meet" [qtd. In Author's Preface]. They are collected in *The Magic Barrel* (1958), *Idiots First* (1963), *Pictures of Fidelman* (1969), *Rembrant's Hat* (1973) and a complete collection, *The Stories of Bernard Malamud* published in 1983. His most of the novels and stories depict the Jewish experience in the United States with the pungent truth that a Jew has no unrestrained freedom to cherish desires and hope.

Malamud has since been labeled as a Jewish writer raising the universal problem of Jews. As Mc. Michael says; "he is a recorder of the Jewish experience with all its despair, possibility and hope for redemption" (208). Using his Jewish identity, and history as a background, Malamud asks how the sense of belonging to their own Jewishness could be established. If we go through his stories and novels it can be said that Malamud takes Jewishness as the cause of intense suffering of Jews and they are grounded in the Jewish life as he was himself born to Russian immigrants. So, it is obvious that Malamud captures the immigrant experience of the Jews and creates in novel and stories the unique world in which we have the peculiar Malamudian Protagonist, a Jew man or woman, suffering in the new world.

Most of the characters in Malamud's fiction are Jewish and he "writes about [their] typical Jewish experience" [Fuchs, 567], in very realistic terms, often delightfully capturing the flavour of translated Yiddish Speech. He makes his heroes suffer "for no better reason than that he was born a Jew" (Malamud, 266), a victim marked for suffering and endurance and a difficult survivor. He is an individual

carrying the whole burden of whole Jewishness. Moreover, Jewishness in his fiction has defined as a guilt, torture and affliction that his characters sometimes compelled to take their lives by themselves.

He has presented his characters and events directly related to Jewish rituals and history and whose Jewishness puts them in conflict and suspicion leading suffering and pain. Concerned with the essential pathos in human condition, he frequently found his most congenial subject to be bewildered and wandering Jew. He has handled the Jews as being the symbol of tragic experience of individual whose Jewishness offers them suffering and pain through a deeper or a new insight Yet, they are made to take their Jewish faith as their main duty and major responsibility though it becomes a curse for their individual lives. Unger seems to accept this idea as he states, "Malamud generally uses acceptance of one Jewishness for the responsibility of human condition" (144). They are strongly conscious of their Jewishness and being a Jew is as much important for Malamudian protagonists as their life because it identifies them with a kind of forbearance, which fills out their life.

Thus, Bernard Malamud writes about the modern American Jews anxieties, dilemmas and their experience of anti-Semitism and all these facts prove Malamud to be a Jewish writer, an author concerning with the plight of one particular ethnic group, the Jews and his short fiction reveals Jewish consciousnesses and explores the elements of Jewish experience in broad interaction with diverse segment of American life, which dramatize the struggle against oppression and discrimination.

## **Jewish Consciousness and Jewish Way of Life**

### **Jewishness**

Jews are the people who view themselves as the inventors of common history. Their origins are tied to an ethical and a religious identity that are fused together. Their memory, recorded in the Hebrew Bible tells of their descent from Abraham. Being a Jewish means being a particular race of God-fearing people. They believe they come from the promise of the God of Israel. Other recollections dwell on their exile in Babylon and their return to Jerusalem. Moreover, Jews are the people whose history and suffering are indissolubly bound to their sense of having been chosen by God for a special task. They believe Jewish suffering came just for their failure in fulfilling the task of God. Hence, Jewishness is born out of the dynamic tension arising among a common history, mutual suffering and a sense of being the chosen people of God.

Jewishness is also related to Judaism, which as a religion does not talk so much about the knowledge of the god as godly living. Judaism concerns with man's behaviour and helps transform the life of a man through changes in his conduct. While talking about the role of conduct in Judaism Cohon says, "Halachah or rule of conduct is pivotal in Judaism" (11). This concept of conduct must have the importance in Jewish sects because it purifies the mind and the will of a man. By serving as an extra dimension of his soul, inspiring, uplifting and disciplining him, good conduct as a religious effort in Judaism transforms the life of a man. The sacred in it strives toward irradiating the secular in man, purifying and ennobling him and endowing him with the transcendent values.



Rule of conduct is the key idea of the written and Oral Torah as well. Not only this but also all the Jewish religious saints and sages focus on conduct and right attitude of a man. Samuel, Cohen supports this view as he states, "Priests, Prophets and rabies alike demand not only that men sustain a right attitude to the Holy One but that above all they embody their attitude to him into conduct" (8). Thus, the paths, it seems, that have led the countless generations of Jews to the realization of the religious ideal have been concrete and practical as they put their emphasis on the man's conduct on everyday life. But sustaining a right attitude in every pace of his life is really a challenge for an ordinary man.

Judaism at its root has the concept that religion is an awareness of the sacred, an inner illumination and an enthusiastic espousal of the divine ideal. It comes as an inspiration, making one feel that he is standing on holy ground watching a ladder, like Jakob does in the Old Testament, which links the earth and the sky where one can behold God Himself. Thus, Judaism embraces the idea of Holy God who can be achieved by the way of goodness.

However, it can be said that emotions when not transmuted into action generally fade and vanish. Inspirations and emotions grow into power when transformed into discipline and habit. It is said that any idealism grows into reality when it guides and controls human behaviour. To keep the emotions alive is no less important than to envision them. Judaism, like this, puts its great emphasis on the disciplined manner and controlled action so that a practitioner gets into a new state. Jewish religious creations like Prophecy, Psalms, Wisdoms, Torah and Halachah emphasize not only the Jewish creedal affirmations and rational conception but also in the ethical and ceremonial law.

In Jewish ethical sense external commands and prohibitions are vitalized and sustained by the living faith in the Holy One. S.R. Driver says that Judaism as a whole "is an ideal of duty to observe, of laws to be obeyed and an ideal of principles to be maintained" (qtd. In Samuel, Cohen 11). In its actual and solid form it teaches its followers the lesson that human nature needs to be restrained remaining under a certain route of discipline. To conclude, restrained soul is a must in Judaism and this is possible only through a sufferance of intense suffering.

### **The Schlemiel**

Apart from Judaism, another marker of Jewishness is the figure of the schlemiel. As a comic figure, the fool in one or more of his many guises is a universal character of folklore, literature and theatre throughout the world. In many cultures, the fool is also a figure of playful reverence and a role player in sacred ritual. In describing Jewish comic figure known by the Yiddish term schlemiel, Ruth R. Wisse observes that he is "one version fool" and "he shares many of the fool's characteristic's (4). Leo Rosten's definition of the attributes of the schlemiel includes "a foolish person" "a simpleton" and "a consistently unlucky or unfortunate person" as well as one is "naïve trusting, and gullible" (344).

While the precise origins of this figure are unclear, most accounts recognize a connection between the schlemiel and the annual observances of Jewish festival of Purim. Celebrating the ancient victory of the Jews of Persia against a political leader seeking their destruction, Purim has always been granted a unique license for frivolity. And it is one time of the year when the rabbis formally sanctioned a complete break in public piety. A town wag was appointed as a Purim Rabbi whose function was to deliver parodies of sermons based on Talmudic religious law. A typical feature of

these Purim plays was the figure of a schlemiel looking like fool to help garble the story in order to provoke laughter and general merriment.

In considering the figure of schlemiel, there are two particular and interrelated manifestations of the schlemiel as he has appeared in Jewish folklore and literature: his mundane guise as the simpleton and his sacred guise as the holy fool. Often these two images of the fool have been linked and observations about one of them often applies equally well to the others. The foolishness of the holy fool recommends ambiguity over certainty, innocence over cunning, honesty over deception, humility over pride, simplicity over complexity, living from day to day, instead of planning, plotting and hoarding. But commenting on the character of the schlemiel, both as a simpleton and holy fool, we can say that while the ordinary son of mortals manufactures a false logic on faith.

The schlemiel is the inversion of Jewish culture's traditional reverence for the scholarly man of wisdom. Wisse observes that the schlemiel seemed to evoke a kind of ridicule at Talmudic "Sophistry or sterility of thought, which is dissociated from practical experience" (11). We may be unwilling to suffer fools in real life, yet in our encounter among the pages of books we may learn from them a wisdom more profound than our own. That wisdom offers the character a kind of "freedom from despair" permitting him "to live in harmony with his conscience, to practice goodness and hope for justice" (64), which offers us an opportunity to appreciate the challenge of the unheroic as a means of seeking one's own redemption. The schlemiel features prominently in the Jewish literature written about the Holocaust.

Malamud shortly after the end of World War II and the full disclosure of the events of the Holocaust wrote most of his stories. So those fictions reflect the theme of the continuing role of schlemiel in the post holocaust world. In this regard writes

Wisse, “the destruction of European Jewry during World War II, the systematic slaughter of millions of people and the annihilation of thousands of communities has necessarily influenced our attitude towards the Schlemiel as a victor in defeat”. She goes on to add “After entire populations [...] were reduced to the ash of crematoria, does it not become cruel sentimentality to indulge in Schlemiel humor and sustain a faith in the ironic mode?” (60). The Schlemiel has indeed managed to survive even the horror of Holocaust.

Since the belated rise of secular imaginative literature among the Jews, fiction has become a marshaling point for the currents of myth that flow through the Jewish community and represent Jews to themselves. Long after the eminent Jewish entrepreneur and power broker and other personalities have become American commonplaces and they have ascended from men into symbols and their failure and victimization as a schlemiel continues to carry the day in American Jewish fiction. And it is noteworthy that in such a fiction the inevitable conflict between success and innocence is normally still settled on the side of innocence if not in Jackpots for the meet then in spiritual bankruptcies for the ambitious.

The popularity of the schlemiel is the Yiddish contribution to an age, which canonizes its victims. It is the figure who has most consistently represent the Jew to himself in modern times, from Yiddish story to the modern novel. In Mark Shechner's view, the schlemiel is "found everywhere in Jewish literature with his heart warming antics and his bitter revenants his will to virtue and nose for disaster, his frustrated liberal humanism and his secular canonization as saint of missed opportunities" (206) .

The schlemiel is the object of sympathy for the reason that he is the representative of the Jew. He is not always seen as an object of affection but also a

ridiculous representative of a dismal metaphysical status quo and also the object of satire and fated affection. In some fiction Schlemiel is seen as a man emotionally intense, hyperconscious, affluent not certainly concerned with God or Jewish peoplehood and also a man who is not superior but equal. Ruth K Wisse gives the image of schlemiel as a famous comic type, as one who

embodies the outstanding folly on this culture: its weakness.

Touchstone was harmless charming, the Schlemiel is harmless and disliked. Fester is vulnerable but wily; the Schlemiel is vulnerable and inept. The Schlemiel is neither saintly nor pure but only weak. He is a funny caricature of manhood, harridan wife and all. He was a Jewish Joke, a powerless decency affirming itself in the face of inhuman power (qtd. in Daniel Fuchs 572)

The schlemiel is the stock in trade of the entire Jewish writer and it is authentically present in the stories and novels of Bernard Malamud. His schlemiel though drawing on traditional sources is a unique figure who has little about him of the comic, the warm-hearted that reflects a communal life. His defeats do not become victories through irony or resilience or insight into his predicaments and he is part of no community that can observe or justify his failure by participating in his impotence.

Some critics comments on Malamud's Jew that they "have been quietly copied not from any models on earth but from an idea in the mind of Bernard Malamud" (Qtd. in Daniel Fuchs 575). The central thrust of this strategy is to write about the simplest and most basic emotions the moral obligation to give for instance avoiding the hardness of deepening insight. Mark Shechner comments upon Malamud's use of the schlemiel as

an isolated American type: a drifter, an orphan, a writer or a clearacinated intellectual in flight from the past and in search of a new life which turns out, when found to be a physical constraints and moral double binds. Persuing his dream, he encounters his nightmares as the past he thought he had left behind reappears as his future, the unexpectedly returned. (206)

Thus so many Schlemiel figures in his fiction are orphans or characters whose part have been suppressed beyond recall. He is caught in the tension resulting from conflicts between his society and his tradition, his status and his desires, he suffers as a man, intellectual and Jew.

He is the subject of foul tricks. He seems to have no choice as every excuse he makes for his welfare only gives him ruin.

Malamud models most of his characters on the schlemiel that for Malamud, to be a Jew is virtually to be a schlemiel, to be moral, therefore a blunderer. And this works better in his short stories where comic victimhood invites the suddenness and externality of slapstick. The tropic victimization of his characters extends and ultimately, transforms the Schlemiel type, where pathos and irony, fantasy and humor are so exquisitely fused. His representative Jew is humanity seen as suffering and aspiration nothing that barely transplanted Pale of Settlement characters preserve the extremities of deprivation, irony and idealism in virtually pure and congruous form.

Gimpel the fool is another ranking schlemiel in contemporary Jewish fiction with multitude comic failures or secular saint whose irony or wishdom or hidden sanctity elevates them above the press of circumstances or the disaster of their own contrivance. Gimpel turns out to be special events in Isaac Bashevic Singer's fiction.

The failure and weakness abound in the works of many Jewish writers: victims, neurotics, self made failure, of whom the Schlemiel is a special incarnation, turn up everywhere, but they created according to different moral rules. Those characters are not primarily instructional types emblems of racial durability but revelation of the providential in human desire. All Jewish writers including Malamud are drenched in considerations of conscience responsibility and love, and moral sympathies. The prominence of Schlemiel may be credited to all the Jewish writers whose feature after all is to be a perfect fool. This is not to say that defeat disaster and righteousness are not on these writers mind but for they have embroidered the edge of the schlemiel tradition. These failures are seen in the main sentimental. Sometimes perverseness and shame attach to the behaviour of the heroes -- things which destroy them.

### **The Talmud**

The Talmud is a vast collection of Jewish laws and written record of Jewish oral traditions. It is cryptic and difficult to understand as its language contains many Greek and Persian words. Despite the dry subject matter, the Talmud makes interesting reading because of its fusion with vigorous intellectual debate, humor and deep wisdom. The Talmud with a record of rabbinic discussions pertaining to Jewish law, ethics, customs and history, contains the first written compendium of Judaism's Oral Law, which is the basis for many legal codes and customs of rabbinic law and is much quoted in rabbinic literature. It is also studied in colleges of Palestine, Egypt and wherever Jews live.

Originally, Jewish scholarship was oral. Rabbis expounded and debated the law and discussed the Bible without the benefit of written works. This situation changed drastically, however, mainly as the result of the destruction of temples and

Jewish commonwealth and consequent upheaval of Jewish social and legal norms and the Talmud started flourishing as the rabbinic discourse began to be recorded in writing.

Talmud has also been influenced by Islam. The Islamic influence is seen in the emphasis on a spirit of war for the growth of Judaism. More than emphasis on violent war for the growth of Judaism, the emphasis is on morality about sex and money. The Talmud is very strict about sexual morality, the deviation from which is considered to be a sin. Similarly, hankering after money and trying to achieve it by hook and crook is disapproved of. Such an attitude is seen as moral deprivation.

Talmud contains vast amount of material and touches on a great many subjects. Traditionally, Talmudic statements can be classified into two broad categories: those which directly relate to question of Jewish law and practice and those which are not legally related, but rather are exegetical, homological, ethical or historical in nature. But much of Talmud consists legal analysis.

The Talmud is the Jewish code of conduct which is religiously ordained and which helps forge the Jewish identity. The importance of the Talmud is obvious from the fact that it still dominates the minds of Jewish people, who venerate its content as divine truth. And this great wealth of Jewish knowledge from the time of its completion became an essential and authoritative addition to all the Jewish Literature.



## **Malamud Hero**

Ethnic writers interpret the wide range and spectrum of the experience of their own community into their works without being stymied and stereotyped by preconceived conclusions even as most of their work emphasizes shared themes and common ground of Jewishness reflecting their Jewish heritage and moral relevance of Judaism.

The contention that assimilation in America seemed a natural development and caused no particular concern until the destruction of European Jewish life in World War II. And this cut the present generation of American Jewish writers off from their past and it seeks to link them with their European contemporaries, with men and woman who actually experienced the Holocaust. Eventually they started giving more space in their writing for the painful experiences of the Jews. Jewish writers introduce the muddy, dangling heroes in the postwar decades when words like, alienation, victimization and discrimination become popular definitions of Jewish sensibility and the Jews became a stand in for something known as the universal estrangement of man.

Likewise, Malamud's heroes are mostly the Jews from their village and ghettos in Poland to New York to the eve of the Holocaust and with the bedraggled lives of the postwar émigré in New York City. They are the Jews from disaster to disaster, from American Anti-Semites to Hitler, a intent upon survival but ultimately waiting for the end with the shadow of melancholy. These depressing characters are hopeless and innocent, caught in a wicked world facing a moral crisis. Certainly a writer, who sees the death of six million Jew as the tragedy and their experiences of being a minor ethnic group, can't fail to have his work touched by such facts.

Malamud of course is also the moralist, who is capable of stepping out of his immediate role as moralist by objectifying his characters into an experience lifted out of the world of allegory. "Malamud fluctuates between realism and allegory" (Bluefarb, 326). And insofar as Malamud's characters exist in a realistic milieu, they are as real as anyone can be but mostly the Jews. In some of his work, he uses myth, depicts suffering and liberates his characters for or to self transcendence. They do not give up the myth of Jewishness and Jewish suffering. They are the egoistic and frustrated men, suffer and learn from their suffering. Malamud combines myth and realism in thus dealing with man's progress.

Malamud moves his hero, a man aware of and sustained by mythology, yet capable, indeed willing to confront reality in such a fashion as to continually justify and defend the Jewishness on the changing grounds and imposed by ever changing conditions. They struggle in a real world filled with unpleasant agonizing complications.

Malamud's heroes live and find meaning only in suffering and this is tragic weakness. They meet the challenge to their mythology and it is one of the central ironies of his fiction. These characters retain their primary features as children of the ghetto, the self deprecating irony, the inverted joke, the capacity for suffering, the presence of schlemiel who is both butt and victim of them all. They have the disease of poverty and vulnerability both of body and soul to the vicissitudes of foul fortune. Malamud's characters however never seem to be endowed with the strength and resilience of their east European forebears that strength that could counter the pogromist's fist with a wink and a tear stained laugh, the resilience that catapulted them back into stream of life after assorted encounters with angel of death. Nothing short of Hitler's more scientific and efficient method could extinguish both the wink

and laugh. On the other hand the Gentiles in his stories are hostile forces, beyond the perimeter of the ghetto, object of fear rather than placation. They are dangerous that they may kill the Jews, as often as to curse him. And also sometimes they are even portrayed as vulnerable as his Jews. But his Jews have plight rage and suffering as their common humanity in the centuries old trail of blood, guilt and discrimination.

Malamud's idea is based essentially on a norm of Jewish humanism. He has fused his moral concerns with the special ethnic humor of Jewish immigrant culture, and their suffering. He sees the Jews can serve to represent the whole ethnic existential situation as an isolated displaced loner who has the potential for achieving moral transcendence through suffering. Suffering sometimes can be seen as a dangerous and destructive symbiotic victimization as seen clearly in some of his protagonists. "Malamud studies the moral evolution of person who grows in ethical depth through various kinds of suffering" (qtd. in Rondon 100). Psychologically and sometimes physically abused, Jew facing a hostile Anglo-power society emerged as rebels, striking out at exploitation and injustice or as victims internalizing their frustrated anguish. These Malamud's characters primarily found in American or European city or town environment are all yearn for security and status. They seek love and frustration upon others while attempting to free themselves. They agonizes over every action and search for meaning in their lives as they burdened by historical anti-Semitism, ostracism and suffering.

His character eventually desires that very fate for himself and should even at the cost of freedom and foreskin; turn himself into a ghetto Jew. Whenever Malamud's alienated hero finds himself in Kiev, Rome, Brooklyn or Canada, he is still in the ghetto, psychologically bound to whatever he has sought to free and learning to settle for a modified imprisonment and a course in the requirements of civilized life:

conscience, responsibility, mercy, love and delayed gratification. He learns in other word to be a liberal and these characters who pass muster by these lights are grim heroes of conscience while those who failure object lesson in calamitous egotism. His heroes endowed with conscience are equally self centered and frustrated and sometimes death is the only alternative for Malamud's men who prefer to die without shame if they can not live with pride though they have self respect. Malamud's reluctance to serve happy endings could be taken for moral realism of a sort, the sober assessment that life is tough especially for a Jew and moral compromise, the essence of maturity. His characters are disappointed because they desire and when they fail, their desire sabogates itself or is undercut by Malamud's own distaste for achievement.

Malamud's Jewish hero learns to live between two worlds, may be the price of surviving in any one of them. As immigrant, émigré, displaced person or holder of duel citizenship, he finds the correct interpretation of foreign signs a vital part of his daily routine, and has been obliged historically to turn the hyphen in his identity into the cutting edge of the sharp sensibility. In Malamud's world, people always seen out of breath from carrying too many burden, both physical and psychological and we tend to believe in their long soulful sighs and to feel that the suffering is both earned and appropriate: "They are the true Jew because they lived in the Jewish experience, which he remembered and with the Jewish heart" (qtd.in Pinsker, 59). Malamud apparently wants us to conclude that his heroes get what they richly deserve.

Malamud's Jewish hero is a someone who fairly young but never youthful, well educated but not especially successful, Jewish but nervously assimilated, full of choked up feelings and this figure is brought up short by his encounter with some ghetto strickster, a wonder working rabbi, an ethnic con man who represents the suppressed part of his own tightly controlled ethnic personality.

## **Afro-Americans and Jewish Relationship**

One of the main problems of the 20<sup>th</sup> century America was the discrimination on the basis of colour; indeed the burning issues of economic, social and cultural inequality among racial groups in America were not solved, but instead became more complex and urgent. Today at the start of twenty first century, American society remains shaped impart by the melting pot and vision of ethnic harmony but it is just as well or perhaps even predominantly characterized by ethnic difference and racial conflict. And one of those racial tensions is the conflict between Jewish Americans and Afro American people.

Jews and Blacks, both are considered as the socially oppressed minorities in America. Before 1960s, the Jewish and African Americans both on the whole enjoyed positive collaborative relationship that have enabled them to work together particularly on issue of mutual concern. Whether it was joint efforts to see the enactment of civil right legislation, the enforcement of policies protecting the rights and liberties of all people, or efforts to fight racism, anti-Semitism and bigotry, or even the struggle for improved economic conditions, equal opportunity and access for all people, these two communities have been at the foundation of coalitional endeavors on behalf of these issues. In this context, Edmund Spevack writes

Many points of contact between Jews and black have evolved in American society of twentieth century, for instance in the area of economics (Jewish shopkeepers in black urban neighborhoods), or in the civil rights movements (Jews were among the most important supporters of black Rights). (45)

Jews and Black were both minorities and looked upon their own status as being that of social outcasts. The relationship between these Jewish and African American communities is complex one containing elements of tension, cooperation, indifference, contradictory strong and weak ties and great expectations. It is a relationship that can best be appreciated in the context of the respective historical journey of each community in the United States, as these experiences have essentially directed our collective behaviour and shaped the attitudes and expectations of one another. This relationship has been intertwined for decades, each having been at some point discriminated against by the larger society, though not to the same content, in the United States. Oppression of Jews occurred more outside the borders of the U.S., whereas for most African Americans entry into the U.S. marked their enslavement.

The Jewish experience in America includes such occasions when Jews felt excluded from the mainstream American society. However, it also has been a history of having overcome those obstacles and having integrated successfully into the large society. This accomplished, in part, through a vigorous efforts by the Jewish community to see the enactment of anti-discrimination legislation that assured the right of all Americans to participate fully and equally in all aspects of society. Such efforts provided the opportunity to join in the common cause with African Americans and others who were targets of discrimination.

However, the Jews prospered in the post-war years. Those in commerce and the professions profited particularly from an expanding economy, with its rising demand for consumer good and services. All the Jews benefited from the decline in racial and religious discriminations and the resulting expansion of educational and occupational opportunities.

From the outset the black experience in America included slavery, oppression, segregation and institutional racism. When blacks migrated north and west between 1910 to 1950, discrimination often prevented them from getting jobs. In the 1930s American blacks were hit hard by the depression, emerging from it to find themselves in competition with Latin and Asian immigrants for unskilled jobs, which continued as waves of new immigrants entered U.S. at a time when the economy was in recession, job dried up and money was tight.

Tensions increased among various ethnic groups as resentment grew over jobs, resources and perceptions that one group was more favorably treated than another. These tensions also included the African American and Jewish communities. Moreover, these two communities no longer had the same priority concerns and did not share the same opportunities and successes in United States. They also held different views on a range of issues, including some affirmative action policies. Edmund Speveck explains about the tensed relationship of these two groups

But in late 1950s the social class affiliations of the two groups diverged ever more radically. Jews were increasing by successful in social and financial terms while blacks themselves could not reach this social acceptance and position of power, as a result the close alliance between the two groups began to disintegrate almost beyond repair.

(45)

With in the Jewish community, there were some who believed that black community had turn its back on the Jewish community by drawing inward, failing to recognize Jewish involvement in the civil rights movement and making erroneous assertion about Jewish position on affirmative action and other issues. Harvard Encyclopedia of American Ethnic groups writes about the same issue very clearly in the following way:

With the passage of Civil Rights Acts of 1964 and 1965, American Jews acclaimed what appeared to be the attainment of equal rights for all. The dramatic change in black goals in the mid sixties however generated hostility between the blacks and Jewish liberals, as black demanded compensatory measures to close the social and economic gap between themselves and whites. Their aggressive tactics [...] Jewish civil servants and social workers and teachers felt threatened by black demand for community control and portional representation in government service. (594)

About the relevant reasons for the break down of black Jewish relation Speveck quotes Leslie Fielders argument:

It is no secret; surely that in America the Jewish community has largely committed itself to a life of logos, a cultivation of the ego and the whole Gutenberg bit [...] while the Negro community in large part continues to live (even to make its living) in the world of subliteracy, irrationalized impulse and free fantasy. (48)

So, this conflict between these two minor groups still continues to prevail even after more than four decades. The political and social reality of this multi-faceted conflict is reflected in many areas of American literature of 1940s. But especially since the 1960s, there has been flood of depictions of racial and ethnic conflicts in American ethnic works. The patronizing attitude of these communities towards each other had never tasted harshly before the 1960s.



## **Jewishness in Malamud's Short Fiction**

### **Anti-Semitism: Jewish Self hatred**

"The Jewbird" is seen as a Malamud's Jewish Everyman, a displaced loner and as an exemplary image of the Malamudian victim, constantly persecuted by anti-Semites and fate, opportunists who test the humanity and compassion of others. This story is taken as the correspondence of Jews' status in America throughout the long diaspora.

"The Jewbird" is a fable in which a blackbird named Schwartz flies through an open window of Cohen's New York City penthouse apartment. Schwartz explains that he is running from "anti-Semites". Harry Cohen, a frozen food salesman, persecutes and torments the Jewbird, who befriends Maurie, the family's young son. In the dead winter, Cohen physically throws out the bird, whose mangled carcass Maurie finds in the spring. In tears, Maurie asks who could have killed Schwartz. His mother answers, "Anti-Semites".

Living so long by others' standards of behaviour, dress and especially language has contributed to the self-hatred that many assimilated American Jews project onto unassimilated Jews. The more assimilated one is the more anti-Semitic, the more American and in this case it takes the form of self-hatred and we can find Malamud's treatment of Jewish immigrants as a bird and tenant in a Semitic Jewish community that is prospering in an anti-Semitic Gentile environment.

The story's opening paragraph is a fable of diaspora in general and immigration quotas in particular. The story begins, "The window was open so the skinny bird flew in flapping-flap with its frazzled black wings. That's how it goes. It's open, you're in, closed you're out and that's your fate" (144). If the borders of a

politically sympathetic country are open, you enter; if they are closed you go someplace else. It seems that the fate of Jews is to be scattered in countries, to be tenants in other people's countries. The paragraph continues, "The bird wearily flapped through the open kitchen windows of Harry Cohen's top floor apartment on first Avenue near the lower East River on the rod on the wall hung an escaped canary cage, its door wide open [...]" (144).

Cohen, who is eating lamb chops, is an established frozen food salesman. But he is still a tenant, living in an apartment, and he owns an empty canary cage. He is the landlord of an escaped tenant, a Jewbird. These details set the stage for the socially and psychologically anti-Semitic aspect of the story. Cohen is more or less assimilated immigrant living in a penthouse apartment, but an apartment nonetheless a modern ghetto-receiving a newly arrived immigrant (Schwartz, Jewbird) as shabbily as his immigrant parents were no doubt received by this country.

Cohen's dealing with frozen foods resonates with icy humanity and cold compassion -his frozen Jewish identity but he has not only frozen his own Jewish heart, he metaphorically sells it to others, Jews and Gentiles. The implication here is that Cohen is still a Jew, whose frozen heart needs only be thawed. Schwartz tries to warm it but can not. Perhaps, Cohen has been in frozen foods too long or it has paid too well.

To return to Cohen's apartment, the cage within cage images sociologically double layered anti-Semitism; Gentile over Jew in the form of rented penthouse, assimilated Jews over unassimilated Jew in the form of empty bird cage.

When Schwartz wants some food but Cohen who has food in abundance, grudgingly offers him only scraps on the balcony. He brings some bird feeder filled with corn when Schwartz demands the real food-good hearing, rye bread, Schnapps.

Here we see Cohen refusing to treat his new tenant, refugee like a human being. He says:

What's the matter cross eyes, is your life getting too good for you? Are you forgetting what it meant to be migratory? I'll bet a Helluva lot of crows you happen to be acquainted with Jews or otherwise, would give their eyeteeth to eat this corn (148).

Here Cohen articulates an unexpressed feeling in this country about immigrants; "you're lucky to be here; be happy with what little you have" (148). We are led to assume that Cohen was born in America, so his anti-Semitism is really an internalized American strain. When this story was written restricted neighborhoods and country clubs and quotas in higher education were even more wide spread and blatant. And there was High Priest tribe of Kohanes, whose name sounds similar to Cohen who was the mouthpiece for Gentile anti-Semitism. This brings us to the psychology of self-hatred.

Cohen's seemingly bitter hatred for Schwarz, the black bird is an allegory of Jewish anti-Semitism as a projection of self hatred and perhaps failure. For example like traditional Jewish father, Schwarz educates Cohen's ten year old son, Maurie. The bird takes on the role of father, reads to him, and helps him with his homework and violin lessons. Cohen sees Maurie's improvement in school and exclaims "If he keeps up like this, I'll get him in an Ivy League College for sure" (149). Having one's child accepted by an Ivy League College is tantamount to being accepted by WASP society in America. But Cohen is still a tenant

Despite Schwartz's success with Maurie, Cohen's treatment of the bird degenerates. Schwartz sleeps outside in the cage, even in winter and smells like fish because Cohen feeds him nothing but herring. When Cohen complains about the birds

smell, Schwartz replies to Cohen's wife, Edie, "Everybody smells. Some people smell because of their thoughts or because of who they are. My bad smell comes from the food I eat. What does his come from?" (151).

Cohen stinks of the arrogance and self hatred engendered by living in a subtly anti-Semitic society. He has absorbed the Gentile's airs of superiority. He is probably ashamed of and looks down on the behaviour and speech of low class Jews. In other words, we presume the behaviour of Cohen's own parents. When Schwartz begs of Cohen, "Why do you hate me so much? [...] What did I do to you?" Cohen gives the Gentile reply, "because you're an -A number one troublemaker that's why" (152). Cohen's justification for anti-Semitism is exactly the same as the Gentiles – Jews are trouble makers. Cohen then tries to make life miserable as possible for Schwartz, hoping to drive him away.

Cohen begins a program (Pogrom) of harassment as that of Germany:

The frozen foods salesman began his campaign against the bird by mixing watery cat food with the herring slices in Schwartz's dish. He also blew up and popped numerous paper bags outside the birdhouse as the bird slept, and when he had got Schwartz good and nervous, though not enough to leave, he brought a full grown cat into the house, supposedly a gift for Little Maurie. ... (152)

When they are alone, Cohen finally, physically attacks the bird, whirling it around his neck twice. The frozen hearted Cohen, then flings the bird out of window, the narrator comments, "Nobody says no" though Cohen's wife begins to weep and their son cries when told of Schwartz's departure (154).

For a long time, no one says no to Hitler and no one said no to "No Dogs or Jews" signs or restricted neighborhoods and country clubs. When in the spring,

Maurie wanders around looking for Schwartz, he finds “a dead black bird, his two wings broken, neck twisted and both bird eyes pricked clean.” “Who did this to you, Mr. Schwartz?” Maurie wept. “Anti-Semeets,” Edie said later (154). So ends the story.

Here anti-Semites are the Jewish one who evidently do not even know who they are. But there is nothing like anti-Semitism to bring out Jew in one, even if the anti-Seemeet is another Jew. This is after all American life in twentieth century Jewish experience but in reality, needed to coexist. Gentiles and even Jews had to give up their extreme practices.

### **Jewish Consciousness of Marriage**

Marriage, according to Judaism is the fulfillment of one of God's purpose for human beings. Consequently, all Jews are intended to experience both the joy and hardship of matrimony, including rabbi. To facilitate the finding of a mate, the matchmaker plays a role in a Jewish society of bringing together suitable individuals as in "The Magic Barrel".

"The Magic Barrel" is the story where the same issue of marriage and tradition of such matchmaker have come into alive. The whole story is about the practical discussion between matchmaker, Pinsky Salzman and his client, a lonely rabbinical student, Leo Finkle and the tradition business of marriage, between them.

This story demonstrates Malamud's subtle and delicate craftsmanship and his interest and great gift for precision in characterization and proper issue, which help us to see the Jew's suffering hovering in a Jew's desperate search for a bride by the help of a matchmaker in Jewish society.

The story moves forward by the introduction of the rabbinical student Leo Finkle, who "ha[s] for six years devoted himself to almost entirely to his studies [...],

[finds] himself without time for social life and the company of young women" and he has been advised by an acquaintance that it may be easier to win himself if he were married. And this makes him conscious of the marriage and contacts a marriage broker as the narrator says: "an experienced person to advice him on these matter as the function of marriage broker was ancient and honorable and highly approved in the Jewish community because it made practical the necessary without hindering the joy". (125)

Malamud here makes the Jewish tradition alive and through the character Leo, he tries to approve how Jews preserve their tradition in such a modern assimilated world too. Leo being an educated Jew could get any woman by himself and even from non Jewish community, but he becomes conscious that traditionally intermarriage between Jews and non Jews has been forbidden in Jewish society and follows the tradition of his parents who too were "brought together by a matchmaker and [...] had a profitable marriage" . He too realises such marriage will be fruitful and hopeful to be the at least successful one "in the sense of their everlasting devotion to each other" (125).

In the characterization of Salzman too, Malamud portrays the typical Jewish matchmaker. His language, in contrast to the rhetorical elegance of the narrator, is colorful and robustly in the Yiddish influenced traditional dialect of immigrants of New York City. By his profession too, he repeatedly distressed Leo by the blunt and seemingly dishonest and insensitive matrimonial salesmanship and even by the "failure to produce a suitable bride for him" (129). He just furnishes the rabbi with seemingly hundreds of likely and unlikely candidates' photographs, description, specification, and glowing verbal pictures. But no matter how attractive they seem to be, either in personal qualities or in their ability to fit into the niche of a *rebitzen*, a

rabbi's wife and these are the common characteristics of most of the "commercial cupid" (130) like Salzman, who himself without repentance experiences a glow of pride in his work as he says " when I have two fine people that they would be wonderful to be married, I am so happy that I talk too much" (137).

The first candidate he brought for Leo, is five years older than the twenty seven years old seminary graduate Finkle. Another one, though young, intelligent and even beautiful, she turns out to be in Salzman's word, "a little lame on her right foot from an auto accident that it happened to her when she was twelve years [...] but perfect of course [...] nobody notices on account she is brilliant and also beautiful" (129). He tries to convince Leo by giving skillful proof: why she is suitable for him. Another candidate who is again two years older than Leo, turns out to be the almost likely one. But she has, herself been completely ensnared by the broker's rapturous, though totally false picture of rabbi. Salzman has pictured Leo as a jealous servant of God, a prophet, even a saint. But in reality "he had never loved anyone [...] He did not love God so well as he might, because he had not loved man" (135)

During the quest for a proper bride, Leo suffers a lot but consoles himself "that he [is] a Jew and that a Jew suffere[s]" (136), as the suffering is the common issue of Malamud which prevails in his every story, as the shadow along with other major issues. And this story, too, is no the exception. But finally, in this process, Leo finds a next candidate, his oxymoronic dream girl: the perpetually virginal painted woman with an extra ordinary beauty, who embodies "Spring flowers" and "impression of youth" to him and she turns out to be Salzman's own fallen daughter Stella, whom he tells Leo is "not a suitable bride for a rabbi" (142). But Leo insists and Salzman, the matchmaker finally brings them together.

This is the story, which totally follows the Jewish law, and according to this law the matchmaker only helps the process along by showing the different candidate but the partners themselves must make the final choice freely. And finally, Leo's passionless and lonely life is transformed by the manipulation of matchmaker, Salzman like that of other ancient Jews.

### **Jewish Suffering**

Suffering lies at the core of Malamud's stories. It is more highlighted in the story "Take Pity". The action centers around initially on Axel and after his death to Eva, "a good looking a woman of thirty eight" struggling alone with her two little daughters, avoiding even the help of a kind man, Rosen (7).

Axel Kalish as Rosen says, "a Polish refugee worked like a blind horse when he got to America and saved maybe two, three thousand dollars that he bought with the money this Pisher, a grocery in a dead neighborhood where he didn't have a chance" (5) to uplift his life in a poor area.

Rosen an ex-coffee salesman shows extraordinary compassion for Axel by providing him credit while "selling a bag of coffee per month" (4) as he does not want to see his wife and two little daughters to suffer Rosen keeps on advising him to 'get out' of that place quickly by saying "This place is grave [...] [where] they will bury you if you don't get out quick" (5) as if he is farseeing their upcoming suffering but it goes in vain as Axel drops to death, leaving his wife and daughters to starve and struggle alone.

The real suffering of Eva starts after the death of her husband as their business disintegrates. Yet, her suffering is circumscribed by her consciousness of the harsh reality that she is a Jew and she insists on being a Jew, suffering throughout her life



and this is what she thinks defines her life as she says to Rosen : “In my whole life, I never had anything. In my whole life, I always suffered I don’t expect better. This is my life” (7), relating the fate of all Jews as for them suffering is the part of Jewish life, when Rosen gives her advice to find somebody to get married.

Finally, she along with her two children comes close to starving. She all over the day “work [s] like an animal” and her girls are fearful to look at with a visible bones in their faces. They are fighting with death having nothing to eat and tell Rosen that “Mamma says today is fast day”, when Rosen offers them some cakes “Her children were starving but she always says no to a “man that he want [s] to help her” (11).

She reacts aggressively when Rosen proposes her for marriage in order to overcome her suffering. She has no interest in such things like house, car, money nor is interested in him. Rather, she imprisones herself inside the world of suffering. Rosen always feels pity for her and her children but could not convince her and pours down his sentiments:

I tried to understand this woman but couldn't. Why should somebody that her two children were starving always say no to a man that he wanted to help her? What did I do to her bad? Am I may be a murderer she should hate me so much? All that I felt in my heart was pity for her and her children, but couldn't convince her. (10)

Her strong will does not allow her to take pity from him saying “but charity we are not needing” (9) which resists all attempts of Rosen driving him finally to death.

Eva is a arrogant and equally unmoved by her stubborn nature. She is forced by Rosen to run away from that place to get rid of suffering but she has “no place to go” except where she is. When Rosen told her to go to her relatives, she is

mesmerized by the remembrance of her relatives whom “Hitler took away” (6) from her and it seems that her deepest pain lies beyond the present suffering when she lost her everything in holocaust to whom she was strongly affiliated. But there is still a glimmer in her soul that “her children have their mother” in this world, who is enough to care them without depending on other’s charity and for this, she is ready to dive into the ocean of suffering.

Again and again Rosen tries to help her but she adamantly refuses to be helped. Rosen, in a last ditch effort kills himself to impose his charity, pity or love on fiercely independent widow, a sufferer, Eva. Even after he turned on the gas and leaves everything to her, she appears at window a drift in space alive or dead, “staring at him with haunted beseeching eyes, rais[ing] her arms to him” (12), we suppose, imploring and berating him in a final gesture of defiance.

Thus the story explores the suffering of Jews either by their fate or by their acceptance that a Jew must be suffer, between goodness and aggression, generosity and control, independence and sacrifice and where all the sufferers stubborn to death and a Jew gets victory over a long suffering only after his death as it is said that a Jew is purified only through an intense suffering.

## **Afro-Jewish Relationship**

In several stories published in few decades before, Bernard Malamud has confronted the problem of Jewish-black relation in American society. This kind of tensed relationship between Jewish American and African American people can be seen in a vivid way in his story “The Black is My Favorite Color”.

In this story, Malamud describes many unsuccessful attempts of the Jewish shopkeeper Nat Lime, a narrator, a white Jewish bachelor, in his forties, to form a stable relationship with Black Americans. He repeatedly tries to integrate himself into African American community by helping his childhood friends, dating on black woman, hiring a black personnel in his liquor store and trying to do good deeds for blacks wherever possible. But all of his efforts end up backfiring as his status as a white Jewishman, continually alienates him from all African Americans.

Malamud wrote this story when the conflict between these two racial groups were at the peak. Jews and blacks both were minorities and both of their status was a social outcast. But after, the social class affiliation of the two groups diverged evermore radically. The Jews were increasingly successful in social and financial terms while blacks themselves could not reach this social acceptance and position of power, as a result the close alliance between the two groups began to disintegrate almost beyond repair. But Malamud’s character Nat is unaware that as a Jewish Liquor dealer located in Harlem, he represents not merely a replica of the white milieu but also a kind of exploiter that blacks feel powerless to combat.

Nat’s black childhood friend Buster Wilson is his first attempt with whom he tries to come close, when he himself is a boy of ten. He tries to give a company to this lonely black boy by taking him to “movie” several times and to “Hershey chocolate

Bars,” , offering him “water melon slices,” , even his “best Nick Carter and Merriwell books” that he spent “hours picking up in the junk shops and that he never gave black” to him . But they “never got to be friends. May be it was a one way proposition” -from him to Buster. He one day answers the question, why he will not play with Nat, hitting him in the teeth and saying, “because you are a Jew bastard. Take your Jew movie and your Jew candy and shove them up your Jew ass” (77). Nat feels like crying not because of pain but of the hatred he showered at him.

In the similar way, Ornita Harris, a black woman with whom Nat falls in love, treats him very badly, initially by saying, “I don’t like white man trying to do me favour” (78), when Nat picks up the glove which she has dropped. But slowly she starts to take discount in his store and even to date him and from her relationship Nat too “knows what love is” (81). But when he proposes her for marriage, she rejects because she does not believe the couple would lead a normal life in American society. He is attacked several times by the black people in the street just because he loved that black woman. After the last physical attack on a street corner in Harlem, Ornita realizes that she has broken the unwritten law code of her own race and thinking that she has to suffer more in future if she continues to meet him, goes for a long visit to her relatives in the South leaving Nat alone.

Like wise, his generosity to blacks can be seen when he pays a good wage to “his two colored clerks, Mason and Jimmy [...] as well as gives discounts to certain colored costumers” (83). He even tries to help a blind man to cross the street as he was “going in the same direction. So takes his arm” but surprisingly the old blind man easily recognizes him as a white saying “I can tell you’re white” and rejects him by taking help of “a heavy colored woman” (84). The subtlety of prejudice is that even a blind man can detect a white person.

Finally, Malamud presents the black cleaning lady Charity Quietness, who refuses to spend her lunch break in Nat's kitchen and prefers to eat up in the toilet in Nat's apartment. The story opens up with this woman as "CHARITY QUIETNESS sits in the toilet eating her two hard boiled eggs while I'm having my ham sandwich and coffee in the kitchen. That's how it goes..." (73) and it is her every time routine whenever she comes to clean his apartment. The story ends also with the name of the same woman when narrator says, "Charity Quietness- You hear me? –come out of that goddamn toilet!" (84). Although "Nat a forty four year old bachelor" (73) invites Charity to eat lunch with him, she insists on eating in the toilet. As Nat says "Its my fate with colored people" (74).

In spite of those bitter experiences with coloured people, Nat still thinks that black is his favourite colour. This colour becomes the metaphor for racial identification contrast between black people and white people. But the image of blood as he states:

What I'm saying is, personally for me there's only one human color and that's the color of blood. I like black person if not because he is black, then because I'm white. It comes to the same thing. If I wasn't white my first choice would be black. I'm satisfied to be white because I have no other choice. (74)

It conveys the philosophical issue of equality of all human race.

Nat's fixation on blackness illustrates Jewish identification with African Americans and their shared experience of persecution. Although Nat does not seem interested in Jewish observance, he is reminded of ethnicity in brutal ways. Malamud here stressed the unbridgeable gap between the separate black and Jewish worlds. Nat

always tries to erase the gap, again and again trying to come close to them but always gets only the pain and suffering in return.

### **Image of Holocaust**

Numerous people fell victim to the Nazi regime for political, social or racial reasons. German Jews were the first and large number victims to be persecuted. Approximately six million Jews died in the Nazi concentration camps and most were released, after their spirit was broken. The image of such explicit treatment and the pathetic condition of the survived refugees in America can be seen in the story "The German Refugee".

This story describes the tragic fate of German refugee, Jewish intellectual Oscar Gassner, in United States, who manages to escape from Nazi Germany but commits suicide at the end after Nazis in Germany kill his wife like many others Jews.

This story is completely devoid of fantasy and utterly convincing in its sympathetic understanding of the way grand forces of history can crush a helpless individual, like Oscar. Oscar settles in New York City but he has difficulty feeling in the new world. Though he manages to hide his despair could not hide his 'pain' of what he has seen and experienced in Germany.

Oscar tries desperately, literally and figuratively to find his voice in English. He speaks with thick German accent like "Impozzible", "Do you sink I will succezz?" (97). English, which he has come to grip after his arrival in New York, is as alien to him as the harsh climate of city. To many of the refugees who were driven away by Hitler, like Oscar:

The great loss was the loss of language –that they couldn't say what was in them to say. They have some subtle thought and it comes out

like a piece of broken bottle. They could of course, manage to communicate, but just to communicate was frustrating. (97).

Oscar attempts to say something, then stops "as though it could not possibly be said" (94).

Oscar is in dilemma. He is about to give a lecture on "The Literature of the Weimar Republic" for his new job in the institute, for Public Studies in New York. But somehow he can not bring himself to propagate German Culture after all terrible things Germany has done to him and his people. He feels intellectually paralysed since he looks upon his native language as "Filthy tongue". He curses the German language. He hated "the damn country and the damn people" (99). Oscar is certain that "humanity doesn't grow long on German earth" as narrator states:

he conveyed his intense and everlasting hatred of the Nazis for destroying his career, uprooting his life, and flinging him like, a piece of bleeding meat to hawks. He cursed them quickly, the German nation an inhuman, conscienceless, merciless people. (100)

His hatred of all things of German doesn't leave his wife either. She is not a Jewish and after twenty seven years of marriage, he left her behind in Germany thinking that she "in heart was a Jew hater" (95). He says, "My wife was gentile. Her mother was an appalling anti-Semite. They returned to live in Slettin" (95). He has offered her to come with him but she refused.

We can get the first inkling of his tragic turn when the narrators of the story ask, "Could there be something more than a refugee's displacement, alienation, financial insecurity, being in strange land without friends or speakable tongue?" (102). And when narrator tries to sneak in a news broadcast on the radio, he requests to shut off saying, "Please I can not more stand of world misery" (100). He does not want to

remember and hear of the atrocities of Nazis as his perception of the world around him has already become distorted.

Sometimes even his dreams cause him pain for casting the shadow of disaster like:

fantastic frightening dreams of Nazis inflicting torture, sometimes forcing him to look upon the corpses of those they had slain.[...] he had gone back to Germany to visit wife. She wasn't in home and he had been directed to a cemetery. There, though the tombstone read another name, her blood spread out of the earth above her shallow grave". (104)

And he groans aloud at the memory of this nightmare of Nazi cruelty.

Slowly, the scarce of holocaust is about to fade away and "his eyes turn to life". He even quotes some hopeful lines of Walt Whitman while giving his lecture; hiding his deepest wounds. As the lines say:

And I know the spirit of God is brother of my own.

And that all the men ever born are also my brother.

and the women my sisters and lovers.

And that the keelson of creation is love. (107)

But this kind of hope in the face of despair doesn't remain long last. At the end of that awful Summer of 1939, Nazis invade Poland and the war is underway. Suddenly, he gets the letter from Germany by his mother in law. From that he learns that his wife converted to Judaism out of her solidarity with the persecuted Jews and tragically, she, along with many other Jews in Europe, "is shot in the head and toppers into an open ditch with the naked Jewish men and their wives and children, some polish soldiers;



and a handful of gypsies" (108). And he finally turns on the gas and commits suicide, knowing about the destruction of the Jews including his wife.

Thus, this story portrays the horror of holocaust and both physical and mental suffering of the Jews. The tragic end of German Jew Oscar illustrates two things that are of equal importance to both Germans and Jews: Firstly, as a result of holocaust, a German Jewish Gassner suffers his fate because his Jewish identity has fallen victim to his self hatred of his assimilated German part of his identity. Secondly, the German in the title of the story underlines how German by persecuting, expelling or killing its Jewish population, also killed a vital part of itself.

### **The Schlemiel Figure**

The schlemiel has a typical place in the stories and novels of Bernard Malamud. It is described as a weak and funny caricature of manhood. He is a magnet attracting bad luck in Yiddish connotation. In the story "The magic Barrel", Leo Finkle represents the model of schlemiel. Setting in the ghetto of New York, the story centers on Leo Finkle, a rabbinic student, who is continuously tricked by the marriage broker. Like most of the Malamud's Schlemiel protagonists, Finkle's problem is an inability to be loved, failure to link his isolation with other and becomes the subject of trickery of Pianye Salzman.

The suffering of a rabbinic student Leo Finkle, and his heroic but ungainly attempt to turn his life inside out as he grasps desperately with his forlorn search for a marriage partner, are wrenching and inexpressibly moving. Suffering is Malamud's focus and the progress of typical Malamudian protagonist nearly always involves identification with suffering and some strategy for taking the burden of others.

Nonetheless, comic misfortunes dog his protagonist's collectively heels. In Finkle's case, he takes the burden of Salzman, his fallen daughter.

Salzman bully Leo into marrying his befallen daughter Stella. Eventually, he falls in love with her but does not know the reality of the girl. She is a prostitute but Leo thinks her as a Virgin Mary, his dream girl. Salzman is a weird, half devil, half cupid, who constantly shadows powerless and innocent Finkle and infact seem to have planned the match.

Leo Finkle, a spiritually wanting rabbinic student, deeply dissatisfied with lonely existence, remains as do many of Malamud's schlemiel figure in a state of deprivation, in a loveless prison to self. And with the advice of an acquaintance, Finkle opens himself to marriage broker and his fate as saintly fool. Salzman meets Finkle only on the basis of what he revealed himself in curriculum vitae" (126), contemplating a marriage between his daughter, Stella and the new client, Finkle. After he meets the student, the intention solidifies, Salzman "heartily approved of Finkle" (125) and "let out a soft, contented sigh " (195) If his stratagem works, he will in one swoop "save" his daughter and elevate his own social status, and Finkle is just a prey in the hand of Salzman, who wears a broker's mask.

Finkle gradually begins to see Salzman's portfolio as a microcosm of the world's suffering. Moreover, Salzman's portfolio makes him suffer the loneliness and indignation of being damaged. Salzman pretends to show the picture of different girls but his comment about them "hunching his shoulders in an almost imperceptible gesture of disappointment" (127), discloses his hidden intent of making him a sainted fool. And to net Finkle, Salzman does two things: makes Finkle disenchanted with the regular clients and correctly packages Stella for him. Though Salzman in his 25 years of in business readily discerns where Finkle's chief interest lies, he every time shows

the unsuitable bride for him. First one, five years older than Leo, and another, a widow and again older than him and next though, beautiful, " a little lame on her right foot" (29). But Finkle is plainly ignorant of the status of Salzman's gambit. He stalwartly fains a nonchalant attitude:

Casually coughing Salzman come immediately to the point; "so how did you like her?"

Leo's anger rose and he could not refrain from chiding the matchmaker: "why did you lie me, Salzman?"

Salzman's pale face went dead white, the world had now snowed on him. (136)

Salzman planned it all to happen that way and finally becomes successful. Then places Stella's picture in the envelope along with others. When unable to fend for himself, Leo turn in last resort to the pictures the broker has left. He sees women "all past their prime, all started behind bright smile, not a true personality in the lot. Life despite their yahooing had passed them by" (138). In them, perhaps, he glimpses his own future. Then he beholds Stella, vibrant youth in a moribund gallery. When he flashes the snapshot of Stella and ejaculates, " Here is the one I want" (141).

Salzman knowing that Finkle is deeply in love with Stella, now pretends to refuse by telling him the reality of his daughter:

"She is not for you. She is a wild one wild, without shame.

This is not a bride for a rabbi."

"What do you mean wild?"

"Like an animal. Like a dog, for her to be poor was a sin. This is why to me she is dead now."

"In God's name, what do you mean?"

"Her I can't introduce to you," Salzman cried.

"Why are you so excited?"

"Why he asks", Salzman said, bursting into tears. "This is my baby, my Stella, she should burn in hell," (142)

But actually Salzman is excited as his play is working. He has wrapped Stella in a perfect grab. Later when Finkle sees her under the street lamp, he imagines "in a troubled moment". She has on a red dress instead of white one. Consciously, he had adopted the role of savior.

Malamud's treatment of Finkle is unremittingly comic. In the course of the study, he does not learn much about himself as he thinks. He represented a tortured Jew attempts to achieve spiritual resurrection by choosing Stella, a prostitute. Indeed, it is Finkle's highly stylized movement toward Stella that turns him into a saintly fool, in the sense that his goal of spiritual regeneration is incommensurate with his activity. And the concluding lablean of the story crystallizes the matter of Finkle's up coming destruction. Thus, Leo Finkle is archetype of the wise and sainted fool, who is a common type in Yiddish literature. He is the virtue of powerless innocence, tolerance and conformity of which Salzman takes advantages. As an archetypal schlemiel, he is a foolish but wise individual found in Yiddish literature. Along with the role as a scapegoat, as he is tricked by Salzman is also a reminiscent of the figure of the wandering Jew, a sufferer, a schlemiel, also a representation of the Jewish experience during world war II.

## Conclusion

Bernard Malamud's selected short fictions are exploration of the 20<sup>th</sup> century Jewish experience in American Land: their experience of suffering, trauma of anti-Semitism, an acute sense of loneliness and pangs of estrangement in the lives of millions of exiled Jews, who try unsuccessfully to adjust in the vast multifarious American society with diverse segments of American life, including Christians, African Americans, Native American and many other ethnic groups.

Through these fictions of Malamud, it is understood that even in the pressure of the great suffering, they do not escape the limitations of Judaism, which are forbidden to the Jews. But their attempt to preserve their Jewishness does not give them new achievement but provides them a disastrous result. But still they prefer to get entrapped into burden of Judaism rather to live a life of assimilation, being conscious of their Jewishness at any cost.

In the story "The Magic Barrel," Leo Finkle gets conscious of his Jewishness in two ways: Leo, being a Jew and a rabbinical student, living in a ghetto of New York, thinks he should not cross the boundary of Judaism. So, he prefers to arrange his marriage with the help of matchmaker, which is the tradition of the Jewish society. Premarital love, in Jewish ghetto society is taken as a sin, which is also included in the teaching of Talmud. So, Leo Finkle being a rabbinical student must have learnt the lesson of Talmud morality and prefers traditional system of marriage as the Jews, who strictly follow the rules of Talmud, could not dare to go for the premarital love. The role of matchmaker too defines the Jewish tradition and we can see how Leo preserves this tradition in such a modern world too. Malamud wrote this story when the inter-marriage between Jews and non Jews was on the process of flourishing. But

through the character Leo, he wants to tell that there are still some Jews, who have not escaped the Judaism yet and equally conscious of their Jewishness.

Moreover, Malamud has revived the trend of the Jewish comic figure known as, by the Yiddish term the schlemiel. As a marker of the Jewishness, the schlemiel has a special place in the stories of Malamud. We can view the same character, Leo Finkle of the story "The Magic Barrel," an individual in search of faith and guidance and spiritual resurrection in the selfish world. Leo is seen as a wise fool or schlemiel in the context of Jewish Literary tradition and a rare example of the schlemiel figure in postwar Yiddish Literature.

Likewise, suffering lies at the core of Malamud's fiction. Along with other major issues, Jewish suffering is equally found in his every stories. His Jews suffer just because they are born Jew. According to Judaism Jews are purified only through the suffering and they need a great endurance for this. And this issue has been more extended in these selected stories. Eva, in the story "Take Pity", is the embodiment of Jewish refugee's word's aspiration and anxieties. Like Finkle in the story "The Magic Barrel," Eva too is conscious of her life taking the burden of whole Jewishness. Her perverseness of being Jew enables her to lead a life of misery, which, instead of providing her a new achievement, isolates and destroys her finally. Her strong affiliation to her Jewishness does not offer her freedom but a trial not only to herself but also to her two little girls.

Malamud's some Jewish characters go through the traumatic experience of the Holocaust and anti-Semitism, showing another picture of 20<sup>th</sup> century America. Oscar is such a character for what he has seen and experienced. We can see the Jews who have become the victim in the hands of Nazis and also the bitter experience of the Holocaust survivors like Oscar in "The German refugee", who fails to adjust himself

in the alien land of America. He is like a living dead whose zeal for life is dead because of the violence meted out on him by the Nazis and the mass execution of millions of Jews in Germany, including his wife. Because he could not bear the pain of the massacre and of the possibility of the whole Jewish community turning into ashes that he committed suicide.

Jews were not only hated by the Nazis, even a Christian society of America could not tolerate them. Jews were the troublemakers to them. So, they have strictly rejected the 'Dogs and Jews' in the public area, making them equal to dogs. Everywhere there was a quota system to them. And "The Jewbird" is the portrayal of such an experience of the Jews. The story dwells on the two facets of anti-Semitism: Gentile's hatred upon Jews and Jews hatred upon Jews. Schwartz's' endeavor to make Cohen, an assimilated Jew, conscious of the Jewish tradition and Jewishness goes in vain, when Cohen finally kills Schwartz mercilessly. Cohen is also the replica of the Gentiles in America, who treat the Jews as the animals. Schwartz tries to remind Cohen what Jewishness actually is, with Yiddish mixed diction. But for Cohen, it has no value.

Similarly, 20<sup>th</sup> century also witnesses the tensed relationship between Jews and Black Americans, and this is another vital issue of Malamud's fiction. In spite of worst treatment of Blacks upon them, his Jewish character always tries to establish a subtle relationship with them. His character Nat Lime in "The Black is My Favorite Colour" always tries to establish a mutual relationship with Blacks, as both of them are the excluded groups of American panorama. But he is reminded of his ethnicity in brutal ways, instead of getting success in his endeavor to erase the gap between Jews and Blacks. But Nat still feels attached to them, as for him, there is only one race, the race of humanity and only one colour, the colour of blood.

Therefore, in Malamud's above mentioned stories, we can find the bitter but real experience of the Jews of 20<sup>th</sup> century American society and none of the ethnic groups has suffered the way Jews suffered. The Jews even, while going through such experiences, become conscious of their Jewishness to preserve their tradition, which are in the process of fading away. They are conscious of their Jewish morality of Talmud in their every step, which too defines their Jewishness. And they are conscious of their Jewishness so that the sense of belonging to their own Jewishness and mutual relationship with other ethnic groups can be established.

So, by showing Jews' tragic experience in the alien society of America and bringing them in contact with other ethnic groups and making every character suffer and conscious of their Jewish heritage, Malamud himself becomes conscious of his Jewishness and writes about them in a very realistic way. By doing so, Malamud too has striven to establish mutual bond, understanding and harmony among Jews and Jews, and Jews and other non Jewish communities in America.



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