

Novelists involved in the Jewish American Literature**Seema G.Jagatap,**
Research Student**Dr. S. D. Sindkhedkar****Abstract: -**

The novelists Isaac Singer, Saul Bellow, Malamud Bernard, Philip Roth and Cynthia Ozick are a few writers who write Jewish literature. In their novels the protagonist shows the condition of the Jews in America. Bellow, Singer and Malamud's writings shows the positive aspects of the Jews and their troubles in the American society. But Philip Roth's writings are usually a satire on the Jews. Cynthia Ozick, a feminist with a strong Jewish identity warns the Jews of what America means to them who are forgetting their Jewish identity.

Keywords: -Judaism,Holocaust, American literature.

Introduction:

The year 1950's can be said the start of a 'Golden age' of Jewish American literature, and it enlighten and be a part of American culture. The publication of 'The Adventures of Augie March' in 1953 and its opening lines "I am an American Chicago born", Saul Bellow announced that Jews were the inseparable part of American Society. In that same year in 1953, "Gimple the fool" translation into English by Singer marked the new stream of Jewish literature in America, which remembered old Judaism, which had been wiped out forever by Nazis. These two authors won the Nobel Prize in literature-Bellow in 1976 and Singer in 1978; the only Jewish Americans to ever achieve this. After them Bernard Malamud, Philip Roth, Cynthia Ozick and Grace Paley followed the path shown by Singer and Bellow.

These writers describe the historical moments of Jewishness and also about the guilt about Nazi atrocities for Jewish American. As Ruth wise describes it, American Jews were not spared the Holocaust; they unwittingly drew from the moral credit that occurred to its victims. Quotas in major American universities for Jewish professors were lifted, and Jews filled departments of science, mathematics and economics and among other fields. Even English departments, which had considered Jews as foreigners because of the culture they were preserving, swelled with Jewish academics, their new keepers of the grand Anglo literary tradition. Although the special circumstances of World War II

followed by an unprecedented economic boom, help explain the rapidity of this change, it also fits within a larger American theme of widening the circle of dominant culture, from those of English decent, to Germans, to Irish, Italians, and Jews. Along with this widening circle has come to a broadening of what is considered literature worthy of study in universities.

The ascent of Jewish American literature may be considered to have marked a threshold, the first of a range of ethnic literatures that the academy, would crown as worthwhile. Even by the 1950's a large number of Jewish American themes, notably the tension between Assimilation and maintaining historical and religious traditions. Abraham Canon, Anzia Yezierska and Henry Roth are a few of the major names. Whether they received less attention because of their work's quality or the cultural mood cannot be answered here. But Saul Bellow and Isaac Bashevis Singer were major authors over the course of their careers. They produced an enormous output of important works with a stunning range of themes that forever altered the status of Jews in literature.

Singer: -

Isaac Bashevis Singer is commonly thought of an extending the tradition of Yiddish literature among his contemporary Yiddish writers he was considered something of a usurper a sensationalist who distorted the literature. Singer's relationship to Judaism was complex and unconventional. He habitually doubts beliefs and claims presented as accepted by others, so he felt alone but still he felt a connection to his Orthodox roots. Singer was raised

Orthodox and learned all the Jewish prayers. Although Singer believed in a god, as in traditional Judaism, he stopped attending Jewish religious services of any kind, even on the High Holy Days. He struggled throughout his life with the feeling that a kind and compassionate God would never support the great suffering he saw around him, especially the Holocaust deaths of so many of the Polish Jews from his childhood.

Despite the complexities of his religious outlook, Singer lived in the midst of the Jewish community throughout his life. Although he spoke English, Hebrew and Polish fluently, he always considered Yiddish his natural tongue. Especially in his short fiction, Singer often wrote about various Jews having religious struggles; sometimes these struggles became violent bringing death or mental illness. In the end, Singer remains an unquestionably Jewish writer, yet his precise views about God are open to interpretation. Whatever they were, they lay at the centre of his literary art.

Bellow Saul: -

Saul Bellow, like many of his contemporary Jewish American writers is concerned with the fate of the afflicted imbalanced with disillusioned man probing for meaning the plight of modern man is a consistent aspect of his fiction. He has unique background. He is a second generation Russian Jew, living in America. He is a writer immigrant background. The Jew is rarely viewed as a part of mainstream culture. He is labeled as Jewish writer because of his Jewish background. He knows that Jewish people respect him for his Jewishness. But as a writer, he writes for all.

Bellow's parents were Russian Jews. He always spoke English but he learnt Yiddish, which was his sign of his Jewish identity. He had his roots in the Jewish culture. He was brought up in the Jewish spirit. Bellow's Jewish identity is reflected in his novels. He presents the picture of American Jewish community, the progeny the immigrant generation. The protagonists of his novels are exclusively Jewish. In 'Herzog' Bellow evokes the joys and miseries of a Jewish childhood spent in the St. Dominick street ghetto of Montreal. His personal life is reflected in his novels and short stories as well. In his novel 'Dangling Man' the protagonist Joseph

is waiting for a draft call from the army. His Jewish Canadian citizenship is an obstacle so he is in a dangling condition for almost a year. In 'The Adventures of Augie March', it deals with a Chicago born immigrant Jew, Augie March. 'Mr. Sammler's planet', is his most Jewish novel. It depicts the plight of the Nazi haunted Jews. Arthur Sammler is a man of seventy plus. The novel deals with the extinction of the Jew during Holocaust era. Mr. Sammler wonders to find place among the living and is convinced that he is marked by Holocaust experience.

Malamud Bernard: -

Born and raised in the United States, Bernard Malamud was at one point considered part of the triad defining Jewish American novelists, along with Bellow and Philip Roth of the three Malamud stands most obviously in the tradition of Yiddish literature, particularly in his short stories, which combine the folksy realism of the East European masters with Singer's supernatural folk tales.

Malamud's characters can be seen as following the tradition of 'Gimple the fool', humble protagonist's often living in obscurity. Indeed to suffer quietly seems Malamud's portrait of human condition. His epigraph "All men are Jews" points to a sensibility less American than universal, and his stories are imbued with a mythic, timeless quality. Jewish suffering then is seen as a pointed metaphor for the human condition; we are born to struggle, although tire Jews perhaps more. Other stories hark back to eastern European persecution, as in 'The Jewbird' wherein a bird is persecuted, first by other birds and then by humans. The persecutors however are Jews; the human condition is to suffer and to cause suffering.

His later novels are more Jewish and less pro to typically American. In the Assistant Frank Alpine an Italian American, betrays a Jewish storekeeper. The narrative one of atonement, and Alpine ends the novel converting to Judaism, in Malamudian terms joining the stream of humanity who suffer and ultimately do the right thing. The fixer is a historical novel of a Russian Jew unjustly imprisoned. The Tenants is a parable of black Jewish relations, while Gods Grace portrays a post-apocalyptic world.

Philip Roth: -

Philip Roth's *Goodbye Columbus* shocked the literary world with its critical portrayal of Jews. If previous Jewish American literature had a certain concern for portraying Jews positively, Roth taking a cure from Jewish co-medians, was more than happy to illustrate, exaggerate and satirize Jewish dysfunction. In *Goodbye Columbus* this takes its most extreme form in the story 'Defender of the faith', wherein a Jewish soldier takes advantage of his background to avoid his duties. Yet the volume is little concerned with the military or with the World War II, but concentrates on Jews growing as they settle into the suburbs and scrambling to assimilate into American society.

Roth's reputation took a self-inflicted hit with the publication of his most notorious novel *Portnoy's Complaint*. The novel takes the form of a monologue to a psychiatrist from its narrator, Alexander Portnoy. Filled with gripes about his parents' idiocy, memories of masturbation and lust for shiksas everything Jews fear will appear as stereotypes the outside world.

Among Roth's various books perhaps his most critically successful is the *Zuckerman Unbound* tetralogy, later expanded with a fifth and still later a sixth volume. In *The Ghost Writer*, the first of Zuckerman's books the protagonist falls in love with Amy Bellette, who turns out to be Ann Frank, escaped from the Nazis and alive after all.

Seymour Levov seems more quintessentially American than Jewish, recalling the assimilating Jews of *Goodbye Columbus* in the more epic form. The events of the Vietnam War and see radicalization, however disrupt Levov's idyllic life at the Jews, Roth seems to be saying if not for everyone, the comfortable America is only a temporary respite from vicissitudes of history.

Cynthia Ozick: -

Cynthia Ozick, who draws on the same fort of literature reconstituted in America and themes of Jewish in contact with an assimilationist society, as do the males, Ozick sees herself as in the same tradition as Singer and Bellow. Ozick is overtly Jewish. *Painstalker* describes her as the product of a background in which Jewishness meant religious

study and observance, community affiliation and work on Israel.

Although self-consciously Yiddish inflected, Ozick is extremely literary, her writing a modernist palimpsest. Her early short story 'The Pagan Rabbi', in which a rabbi turns to worship of nature and hangs himself in a tree that he believes to be a goddess, reveals religious questioning and angst in a new world that has jarred the historical continuity of the Jewish people. Like 'The Pagan Rabbi', many of Ozick's short stories mix Jewish themes, modern day American, and a touch of magic realism.

Another central theme of Ozick's upon which her work of memory and change is brought to bear, is the Holocaust. The search for the meaning of art and literature in light of the Holocausts destructive nihilism is central to *The Messiah* of Stockholm a literary work based upon a lost text, *The Messiah*, by the literary master Bruno Schultz killed by the Nazis in his prime. Ozick deals with the Holocaust most directly in 'The Shawl' her most famous work.

A paradigmatic work for Ozick, mixing short stories and novella from a swath of her career, is *The Puttermasser Papers* [1997]. Some critics see the protagonist, Ruth Puttermasser, as a version of Ozick herself. Yet Puttermasser lacks two elements apparent in Ozick's life; a literary career and a strong Jewish identity. She may therefore be more of a warning of what America can do to Jewish woman, stripping them of their identity, of a sense of place and purpose.

She is the modern feminist, single woman a drift, perhaps a warning of what America means to those who have forgotten their Jewish identity.

Conclusion: -

During the 1950's the Jewish writings flourished widely in America. The ironies in all these successes are starting to become apparent now. The Jewish writers could achieve this because of weakening of nineteenth-century 'Jewishness' throughout American society. This weakening was apparent in the disappearance of faith, which was a worldwide phenomenon, and also in the disappearance of Yiddish, the language through which Jewish culture was propagated. Isaac Singer, Saul Bellow, Malamud Bernard, Philip Roth and

Cynthia Ozick entered the American literary stream through writing in English, which is the language of the dominant culture.

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