



## Saul Bellow's Art of Characterisation

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### ➤ Abstract :-

World renowned writer Saul Bellow, who was awarded by the Nobel Prize for literature in 1976, is one of the greatest novelist of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. A personality of an international fame, is a great American novelist and a powerful critic of American life, culture, modernity, degradation of moral values in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. His deep contemplation of human psychology, his analysis of human mind, yearning for virtuous life, effective and fluent language, his writing attacking the vices hypnotize the readers. In today's world, where moral values are hanging on the gate, there is a need for spiritual happiness, peace and love and Saul Bellow's attempt to cultivate humanity in the world in the true sense is seen in each of his novels. For more than 40 years, he dominated the American literary world. Saul Bellow was a multidimensional, rich and multifaceted personality: a story writer, a biographer, a critic, novelist who produced the literary works of highest rank. His literary graph was rising and he created quality novels one after another. The purpose of this research paper is to present Saul Bellow's lifeistic approach through his characters that have been immortalized in his writing and this paper also aims to trace the thematic study of his world famous novels.

➤ **Keyword :-** novelist, critic, biographer, characterization, thematic.

### ➤ Introduction :-

Saul Bellow is regarded as a writer who has a positive outlook on both life and art. In American literature, the period of three to four decades after the First World War a period that cast a negative tone on life, created a penetrating view of the culture vacuum created by the destruction of human values and painted a picture of human loneliness and frustration. In literary scenario, we see the picture of a man who has lost his identity in such an artificial culture and despairs of the realization that all references to life have vanished. But even in such desperate and hopeless environment, the indomitable optimism and the faith in life that overcomes it despite the circumstances that challenges and undermine that optimism is the focus of Saul Bellow's novel. Saul Bellow may be said to be the first writer to present a positive outlook on life in post war American literature. The ideological background of writers and artists is formed from their experience,

from the surrounding society, from the culture, manners received from the family. “The artist is concerned with the record and perpetuation of the experience which seem to him most worth having. He is also the man who is most likely to have experiences of value to record.”<sup>1</sup> Bellow believes that if the sensitivity has become a desert of emotions, then it is a duty of a writer to find a cure for this disease. So he looks at literature as a community’s medicine.

True art brings the human mind to a sublime and holy state of contemplation. It is with this truth in mind that Saul Bellow state the moral duty of writers as “to cure human minds.” He carried this positive attitude towards art throughout his life. He adopted this positive attitude not only to challenge the surrounding negative environment but it was part of his vitalist vision of looking at life in a positive light as a whole.

### ➤ **Bellow As a Value Preserver :-**

Saul Bellow was a dominating writer of his time; it was precisely because of this vitalist stance. A writer named Grey Paul mentioned his ‘as a novels have a different tone than most of his contemporary writers. Norman Meller called him to be “the most fanciful and talented writer of his generation.” Edmund Wilson considers Saul Bellow’s first novel “Dangling Man” as a novel evident of psychological insight into the generation that grew up in a war period. Saul Bellow doesn’t look at novel merely as a tool of entertainment but he looks at it as a weapon of expressing artistically his life experiences. He looks at literature as a tool to justify his existence. He regrets that the humanity of today’s people has been lost due to mechanization, materialism, the state of total spiritual destruction. So he thinks solitude is better than modernity, chauvinistic culture. “Saul Bellow believes that modern man can find communion and beauty in the midst of bleakness and isolation of the modern world.”<sup>2</sup> As a writer, Saul Bellow feels it is more necessary to give importance to human values and human dignity than to turn nose at this situation. In order to effectively fight against evils, Bellow puts forward in his novels that what is good in man should be strengthened and all kinds of attacks against it should be fought with strength. Not in just one or two but this is effectively expressed in all his novels.

### ➤ **Writer’s Role Behind Writing :-**

In an ostentatious culture, people living ostentatious lives at all levels find it difficult to know what is beautiful and what is ostentatious. It is the moral responsibility of artists to bring about change in society. Therefore, the artist should be aware of this and bring the difference to the attention of the society. We are living in an uneasy present. All sectors are overwhelmed by newly created problems. “A personal response made with full awareness of the social, intellectual, moral, political and religious insides that conditions human existence in society.”<sup>3</sup> People of all the countries are confused by unexpected questions. Majority of the people of the world are living under great mental stress. No one can escape from these tensions and dualities of the world today. But this does not simply mean that we should indulge in escapism. This is the time of test for the artists and the writers. An artist should tell through his work how to live as a human ideal when there are no living conditions around. It requires emotional loyalty more than ideological loyalty. There can be no authenticity in literature or any work of art without the addition of emotional integrity. And so Saul Bellow considers emotional integrity more important than ideological integrity and loyalty. Bellow

was opposed to ultra - rationalism and Gnosticism. Rather he gave more importance to the dynamics of feelings and emotions in his writings. His characters are conscious of taking meaningful actions from their hands. A protagonist's obsession with goodness creates a passion for life, and he has an unshakable belief that his journey through life is to maintain this goodness. He is not ready to accept any compromise in this journey of life.

### ➤ Characters of High Sensitivity :-

Saul Bellow's characters always justify their actions because their every actions are deliberate actions. Most of the characters of Bellow are wise fools. His characters are characterised by their nature to accept sufferings and sorrows with a smile, without any complaint and to live unrepentantly. Since Bellow is Jewish, his writings are automatically infused with Jewish philosophy. As per Jewish philosophy, it is our responsibility to justify our every action and Bellow's characters are fully aware of this. These characters accept the moral burden that we must be able to justify whatever we do in our lives. Bellow's characters are acutely aware of not only their every action, but also the role they play from time to time as they live, In this regard, the hero of his first novel "The Dangling Man" (1944) Joseph, can be cited as an example. He joins the army as his moral duty during the wartime. But Joseph is aware that he doesn't want to use the war for his personal gain or advancement at all. War is always a negative thing, it is always a tragic thing. War never brings grand prosperity and eternal happiness. He already makes up his mind that he does not want to build his future by climbing on the backs of the martyred soldiers.

In Saul Bellow's novels we can find that there are no heroes but there are people who are constantly learning from experiences. Although it is true that life is not easy, one should not be discouraged in life. One should never loose our confidence, never to loose identity of own. What is evil cannot be overcome by hatred but it can be overcome by love. As there is suffering, we realize that we are alive. The importance of our living is not in success but in the dignity of living as a human being. To live without feelings is not to live life at all because the first condition of living as a human being is to maintain a sensitive mind. We must never dull the sensitive mind needed to discern the difference between moral and immoral. As Bennet Henry Russell puts it: "The stated purpose of this analysis of Saul Bellow's characters is to reach an understanding of the author's message about the human conditions and situations against which the human conditions must react."<sup>4</sup> All these tensions seem to play an important role in the lives of the characters of Bellow's novels and the formation and upbringing of these characters. His protagonists aggressively assert themselves by listening to their inner voice.

### ➤ Dilemma Between Self and Society :-

His characters are those who prefer their own thoughts to those of others. In this context, the example of Augie [a character from "The Adventures of Angie March" (1953)] can be cited. Augi is seen constantly defying the ideas imposed by the people. His whole journey of life is like let me find my place, don't impose your thoughts on me. In the ad amidst of society, the crowds of people, Angie is a personality preserving his own identity and individuality. He does not like the attack on his self. Be it the grandmother who straightens the shirt collar, checks the nails, teaches him table manners before going to school to groom him as a child

or the beloved who tries to change him through clothes. The conflict between individual and society is at the centre of his novels. This struggle is in the form of a society that imposes ideas and a self that rejects them. Society and self are trying to outwit each other in their own ways. Actually their existence depends on each other. But still the self struggles to maintain its uniqueness while the society constantly pressures it to surrender. At the end of the novels, Saul Bellow's characters realize that the self cannot have a meaningful existence and fulfilment without society and from this realization they dedicate themselves to society. But since this dedication comes with the wisdom of experience, there is no sense of victory or defeat. The journey of Bellow's characters between the two extremes of insistence on selfhood and the ultimate destiny of collective assimilation finally ends with Bellow's vitalist chords. His heroes have their own high goals. They sacrifice their lives to fulfill their dreams and become successful in worldly life. But finally they realize that they have to live in the society after this they dedicate themselves to the society.

### ➤ Characteristics of his Characters :-

Sensitivity, sensibility, contemplation and self-realization are the characteristics of Saul Bellow's characters. They know their actions are the result of the nurturing of their whole personality. They are very much sensitive about their personality being reflected in their actions. Joseph, who is engrossed in enjoying the music is angry that the house owner Gessel has turned off the electricity and in a fit of rage, enters Gessel's house and scold and beats him. But suddenly he realizes that some calamity has happened by his hands, he asks for his forgiveness there and for a long time afterwards he is disturbed by the thought that he should not have behaved in such a way, that is really contrary to his nature. Such wise, repentant and sensitive characters are found in his novels. Intellectually profound, conscientious characters are seen in Saul Bellow's novels. So Forrest Read says, "Bellow has perfected the novel by using the academic hero; that is he doesn't put Herzog in the setting and situations which are characteristics of such novels, but in the centre around which whirl centrifugally the Camus, the business world, the city of the mind, the sensual and emotional life, family, personal values, politics and history."<sup>5</sup> The demon of cruelty and indecency can suddenly and indiscriminately attack us anywhere. Suddenly something bad, unexpected events happen from our hands and we keep regretting it.

Ramona, a lady who loves Herzog tells him that we must take care of each other in a culture where compassion, empathy, kindness are rare, where all forms of spiritual references are broken. Even the smallest particles of goodness saved for each other can occasionally show a ray of hope to the entire human race. No matter what happens, this stream of life must not be stopped. Even if we don't deserve it. It is from this care that Herzog says, "Let us all stand in the streets of Moscow and Washington and cry out to the world. O fathers, elderly people let this stream of life flow. Let it flow freely even if we don't deserve it. Bellow creates the accumulated strength of living in such a cursed age in his protagonists.

### ➤ A Critic of Modern Culture :-

The process of dehumanization in modern culture has devalued human beings and reduced them to emotionless lumps of flesh and bones. Bellow's heroes fight against this devaluation. He fight against the forces that have started this devaluation. The greed for money and prosperity is one of such devaluation forces. A class of those who believe that the life of materially successful people has some meaning is created in the capitalist system. They do not know about morality, humanity, sensitivity. They live on the false satisfaction that comes from money and prosperity. Joseph, the main character in "The Dangling Man" says to his nephew named Ita, who lives intoxicated with such false prosperity and behaves rudely with everyone, "You cannot have any influence on me." It is only the class that prides itself on false social prestige and Saul Bellow claptraps such class under the cover of his heroes. Through the characters in his novels, this author attacks bitterly American life, modernity, society and culture. "Bellow's fiction examines the problem of men as they meet the responsibilities defined for them by American society or seek erotic pleasures from women. His heroes, whose awareness dominate each narration, are waiting to go to war, establishing their identities through advertise, sensitizing their past or searching for a woman to love."<sup>6</sup> He deliberately uses his characters in his novels to attack the contemporary society.

Bellow as a novelist asserts his theme through his protagonists as well as through his secondary characters. In his novels, he has brilliantly shown how the conscientiousness of the main characters overlap with the deceitful, treacherous and scheming attitude of the secondary characters and how sensitivity, morality, conscience wins over evil. Bellow's heroes are unwilling to accept childish notions of prestige. In "The Adventures of Augie March" rich brother of Augie, Simon opens his wardrobe drawers and shows Angle that he owns a lot of clothes. Amos's wife prides herself on having several pairs of footwears. In trying to get happiness through money, power and wealth Simon feels isolated somewhere inside himself. Angie feels pity for him. Augie knows that Simon who fakes and tries hard to show how 'successful' he is in life, actually often locks himself in the bathroom and cries silently. Simon, who lacks spiritual satisfaction even after getting money, is completely drained inside. Like Simon March, Einhorn is also dissatisfied with his present life. Einhorn, is a rich, wealthy handicapped real estate businessmen. He is devoid of spiritual happiness. Augie March acts as his assistant Augie, who constantly carries the burden of a crippled Einhorn, seems to prefer to stay himself away from Einhorn's money - centric philosophy. He realizes that people like Einhorn use money and people with equal skill. In the end, in the war of life, people who use people as tools lose and those who live humanely win, this ultimate truth has been stated by Saul Bellow in his novels. Bellow's characters are thus prudent, sensitive and adventurous with the courage to face life's challenges.

### ➤ Bellow's Vitalist Approach :-

Herzog has to be mentioned as the most sensible and the most mature character of all Bellow's characters Loneliness in life is the common fate of people in the modern world today. Cut off from friends, wife, family and society, Herzog gradually fights against loneliness as best as he can. Huge mental stress and anxiety makes him self-absorbed. Insomnia, sexual tension and betrayal by his wife and friend make him literally go crazy. His wife Madeleine is a typical secondary character of Bellow who resists her husband on small domestic matters, who advocates equality between men and women. As Min Huang puts it, "Through

shaping Madeleine into the Master of her own fate, Bellow echoes Friedan's call for a new woman, expresses his disregard of the deep rooted concept of discrimination against women in a male centred society and conveys his literal feminist ideas, women should rebel against the identity imposed on them as conventional housewives, they are men's equal."<sup>7</sup> Madeleine is a character who represents a modern culture and who gives importance to women in a male dominated society. Richard Poirier calls Herzog as "own culture hero." Herzog writes letters not to drop to none one by one to relieve his stress and feel free. Letters written to the dead or living people scare him from becoming mad.

Compassion is a special attribute of Saul Bellow's characters and the character Herzog is of a special mention in this reference. Herzog is the most sensitive, sensible, compassionate, kind and matured of all Bellow's characters. He boldly accepts the ill treats given by his near and dear ones. His virtues give a sublime experience to our lives. When aggressive madeleine starts to hit Herzog, he calmly takes her blows on the sublimity back. This is really a height of sensibility and sublimity. Bellow's novels show numerous examples of how compassion can bring out the divinity in a human being in a very artistic way. Even after endless sufferings and difficulties in life, his heroes face these problems patiently without blaming the situation. Also, it has to be said that his novels are definitely called as "successful" as they enrich the world of knowledge and experience of the people by providing positivity to the human race.

## ➤ Conclusion :-

Bellow's novels is an accumulation of his contemporary reality. He kept the main purpose of writing in his mind to present the contemporary reality and universal values through his novels and through his characters till the end of his writing journey. Bellow's heroes and heroines take their responsibilities for their actions and happily accept them - selves with their flaws. Protection of human, moral values and fight against injustice, evil is the main characteristic of his chief characters. Being a firm believer in goodness, he is not ready to compromise on any wrongdoing. His protagonists believe that we as human beings must lead ideal lives, no matter how murky and muddy our surroundings are. What is evil cannot be done by hating it, but must be overcome by love. Living without emotions is not living at all. The mind must never be blunted to understand the difference between moral and immoral. On the blank paper of the human mind, his heroes and heroines are turning towards the society by learning the lessons from society and culture one after another. The sensitive and emotional personality of his characters is reflected in their actions. The journey of his protagonists like Tommy, Joseph, Asa, Hattie, Augie, Moses Herzog, Von Humboldt, Charlie Citrine, Henderson etc. between the two extremes of insistence on self-identity and the ultimate destiny of assimilation into the whole seems to end with Bellow's vitalist chords. His characters expound the philosophy that we should all take care of each other while living in a hopeless culture where mercy, compassion and kindness are seldom found. His characters living in a negative environment convey the philosophy of never giving up and the noble strength to live life in any how condition.

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