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Ethnicity in Saul Bellow's Fiction

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Introduction:-

American Literature is the literary area which contains many of the most renowned writers in English. Although it is the literary area of America, its literary tradition begins with the tradition of British Literature. But now it has its own literary tradition. Most of the American writers proved that their novels are the reflection of the society in which they are grown up. Moreover, the political writings in American Literature discussed the social issues like liberty, education system of modern culture etc.

In the 20th century American Literature, it is found that the American writers were much interested in the field of socialism. It includes many political writers and many journalistic critics. We can find many autobiographical writings in the same period. American writers were highly inspired by the British writers because present day United States was a series of British colonies in early days. In the middle of 19th century they found their own tradition, style and themes. It led to their contribution of inimitable styles and themes to the world of literature. During this period, many American writers exhibited their sensitivity to the people who were victims of the World War II.

They have panoramised, in their writings, the cynicism that followed the war. Other problems of the early 20th century society were social segregation, suppression, lack of education, lack of peace etc. The American writers used to react against these social problems through their novels with critical depictions of American life.

The major themes that found in the American writings are:

(1) Historical issues of the society
(2) Personal issues
(3) Political issues and
(4) Theme of Alienation

Saul Bellow is a renowned American writer and is considered as one of the most colossal figures in America. His fictional world is woven intellectually affirming the

value of human beings and recognizing the needs of society and frightening inaccuracy of daily life. His fiction attempts to reduce the pessimistic feelings of the American society to offer an optimistic persistence to it. His protagonists are the reflections of the common people who were part of the urban American society.

It is very interesting to analyze the fictional world of Saul Bellow who showed meticulous attention to the Jewish cultural elements to analyze the way the author related himself to this tradition. It is necessary to analyze his work and to find out the elements in his works used for pertaining to a Jewish literary and ethnical heritage and find out how this specific heritage was used by the writer in the American culture. It is also interesting to analyze how the work of Saul Bellow who belonged to an ethnic minority managed to enter into the society in the USA. According to Saul Bellow, a novel is a mirror of society. His aim was mirroring the society of urban America in his novels. An investigation of Saul Bellow's writings show the varying methods used to portray the concept of ethnicity by a minority American novelist.

The characters of Saul Bellow's novels play an important role in their society. Social role is one of the major themes in his novels. Herzog who is the protagonist in the novel 'Herzog' plays various social roles throughout the story. Family is also a very important theme in his novels. He narrates the sacred relationship among his characters in all his writings. It is vital to mention the fact that Bellow's fictions do not tackle religious ideas obviously, but the daily life of his characters is constructed on a profane basis. Death is a major concept of Saul Bellow's writings. According to Saul Bellow, one must face death to know the meaning of life and this is the message he drives home in almost all his novels. In his novel '*More Die of Heartbreak*' Saul Bellow pictures the distinguishing blends of pathos and farce in contemplating the relationship with life and death. Another major theme of Saul Bellow's writings is nature. Most of his novels open with narration of nature's harmony and there he narrates the quest of his characters for the beauty of nature.

Alienation is one of the major themes in his novel '*Seize the Day'*. Through this novel he conveys the message that the world has no significance on feelings and emotions and it is a world that has an animal framework.

The characters in Saul Bellow's fiction seem to have been influenced highly by the concept of Judaism. Since the author is born and brought up in a Jewish family, he undoubtedly had grown up as a Jewish American writer. According to his concept, every man is responsible for his deeds and he must learn to love, he must be helpful and he must live a worthy life to fulfill his existence in the society. The author tried to transpose this concept of ancient Jewish people to the American Jewish Culture. In his fictions it is found that the ethical concept of the characters was also highly influenced by the Jewish culture of the author. Most of his fictions have their root in the Judaism and its religious concepts. His novels pertains both morality and religion and these concerns the religious faith among the people who lived in his period.

Saul Bellow's most renowned fiction '*Seize the Day'* was written during the post World War. The novel reflects the factors that were influenced by the war like the frustration, anxiety and the feelings of people during the period. Many people were immigrated to other countries because they were forced to flee from their country. This dislocation results in alienation and frustration in the society. '*Seize the Day'* was written during this period and so it reflects this mood throughout the story. The protagonist 'Tommy' is always in desperate loneliness and we can analyze the theme of alienation in this character. He is always alone in the crowded society. Tommy cannot communicate with any other people in the society for he feels that it is difficult to learn other languages. He feels humiliated in the society because of this lack of communication.

Other characters in this novel Dr.Alder and Mr.Perls are found to be highly materialistic. They are not interested to worship God, rather they worship only money. They do not have any religious morals but they find time only for making

money in their business. Mr.Rappaport is another character in the novel that has a materialistic spirit. He tries to make money through his business of selling chickens. He thinks "This was the way a man who had grown rich by the murder of millions of animals, little chickens, would act." (110).

The character of Dr.Tamkin in this novel tries to deceive Tommy by saying that the investment of money would make him rich. Believing the words of Tamkin, Tommy was agonizingly cheated by him. Through these characters Saul Bellow tries to reflect the deceitfulness which controls the modern society. Tommy's marital life was also a failure for his wife was always finding opportunity to oppress him for her self-interest. She tries to spoil him both economically and psychologically throughout their married life. Tommy is a victim of all these treacheries of the modern society that never has ethnic values. In his fictions Bellow tries to throw light not only to the Jewish American society but also to the present modern world.

Thus this paper analyzed the Jewish culture in the fiction of Saul Bellow and found out the ethnicity in his writings and also finds out these elements in the works of Saul Bellow used for pertaining to the Jewish literary and ethnical heritage. The study of Judaism and the Judaic religious elements present in Saul Bellow's fiction is very essential.

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