

An Intriguing Journey: From Delusion to Reality in Malamud's The Fixer

B. Sam Jerome Sharone

M.A., B.Ed., M.Phil. SET.

Assistant Professor, PG & Research Department of English, St. Joseph's College (Autonomous) Tiruchirappalli - 620002

Abstract: *This article sheds light on Malamud's writing of human beings experience with sufferings. This article examines Jewish suffering as a caricature of human suffering. Once Jewish race was despised by many nations, after a long struggle, it has emerged as a nation but at present, it is at stake. This article intends to put forth the traumatic experiences of human beings in common not focusing on particular race. Mental agony, deepest hurts, bereavement and rejection of self are experienced by each man in every society. Being born in a particular race, people are simply ostracized from the earth. This is the worst thing that ever happens to the people in the world. These sufferings are experienced and well expressed through the character Yakov. It analyses the unending and excruciating pains and perennial sufferings of man. The character Yakov attempts to find answers for the life threatening questions of human beings and it overstates such life on earth could be livable. Yakov challenges the readers by keeping his identity and endures all the sufferings without complaining. Thus the article examines the implicit life of human beings and suggests that suffering alone is the solution for the problems.*

Twenty-first century is meant for revolution in wider spectrum, in every field of Science, Economics, Technology, Management, Engineering, Archeology and more specifically and poignantly in Literature. It revolves around a notion that ideas govern the world. Man's intelligence plays a vital role in every field but at the same time it drags the whole universe into a terrific situation. It also created needless hate, callous cruelty and senseless violence and is vulnerably practised by human beings to impose the same on one another.

This article exposes the realization of mankind through the sanctification of sufferings. In today's world, every man's life is embedded with sufferings. The world in which we are living is crammed with angsts and existential trauma. It offers a paralysed hope for human beings. However, man has to wrestle with his sufferings to attain a miniature amount of happiness and sufferings which mould him to be a good human being. The role of conversion would not have taken place without the act of suffering. This vital concept is powerfully handled by the Jewish-American writer, Bernard Malamud in his novel, *The Fixer*, which is a classic example for the existential ideology that catharsis happens only through the sufferings of human beings. He proposed "Every man is a Jew" (94). He looks upon a Jew as a paradigm of human values and not a creature of a chosen tribe. His works intend to express that suffering and love are common to all men.

Malamud was born on April 26, 1914 in the United States. He was the son of Russian Jewish Immigrants. He is one of the most compassionate writers of the twenty first century. Humanism is the central idea in his novels. His novels are more realistic and humanistic by nature. It pokes his readers profoundly into the roots of ungovernable human feelings. Even Hasan admits, in the view of humanistic mode in Malamud's writings, "What is to be human, to be humane is his subject: connection, indebtedness, responsibility, these are his moral concerns" (56).

The Fixer is based on a real occurrence of Anti-Semitism known as 'Affaire Beiliss' in September 1913 in czarist Russia. Mendel Beiliss, a Jew, was criminated of killing a Christian young boy for a ritual murder. Though he was acquitted by the court, the case ended in deadlock. Yakov, the protagonist of the story, enjoys his freedom. His parents were dead, his wife had left him and he has no children. His job necessitated only a bag of tools. He was a fixer by profession, and he was free from the worldly restraints. He left the Shtetl free to set off and to see the world.

The novel opens with the sad image of a dead poor Russian boy found near a Brick-factory. His body was rotten and stabbed with wounds. After the funeral, a handful of leaflets were distributed to the people. Leaflets contained an accusation that Jews were the murderers. It was printed by the Black Hundred organization. Their emblem, the imperial double-headed eagle, was imprinted on the cover and the slogan "SAVE RUSSIA FROM THE JEWS" was inscribed under it. Jews were forbidden to the city of Kiev in Russia. The murder took place in Kiev. The Boy was killed for making of Passover Matzos.

Yakov is a Jew and he disowned his religious faith to survive in the city of Kiev, but he was victimized for killing a Russian boy and then his life was filled with struggles of life and death. In prison, he was tortured to the core and he tried to prove his innocence in vain. Yakov's isolation and intense sufferings strengthened him to withstand the hope of survival. Russian authorities imposed Jewish identity on Yakov by forcing him to grow his hair long like the other Jews. They gave him phylacteries, small leather boxes containing parchments with Hebrew Scriptures and wrapped his head with a prayer shawl. Their intention in doing this was to make him look like an orthodox Jew, but he himself realized the value of Jewish identity during his days in the prison. Yakov's life-struggle disseminates the message that ironically human beings find the meaning of life through pain and loss. Everyone's life is accentuated with struggle by the human experience of death. Since it is twined in the form of pain and suffering, eventually, it raises the question on the existence of God, pain prompts the human spirit to question 'Where is God?' When it gets hurt, Yakov had to pass through the valley of sufferings but the realization of his Jewish identity makes him accept his yoke of suffering. In the beginning, he struggled a lot and questioned the faith of his religion Judaism:

"don't forget your God!"

"Who forgets who? The fixer said angrily. "What do I get from him but a bang on the head and a stream of piss in my face. So what's there to be worshipful about?"

"Don't talk like a meshummed. Stay a Jew, Yakov don't give up our God."

"A meshummed gives up one God for another. I don't want either. We live in a world where the clock ticks fast while he's on his timeless mountain staring in space. He doesn't see us and he doesn't care. Today I want my piece of bread, not in paradise." (17)

Yakov learnt that his religion never promised the Jews that the land of milk and honey could be attainable without perennial sufferings. It stated that the depravity of mankind and an answer for their cure was only when one underwent and accepted the painful reality of life which every human being should experience.

A passage from the Bible clearly shows that the meaning of life can be understood through redemptive sufferings and pain. It states that "suffering produces endurance, and endurance produces character, and character produces hope," (Romans 5:3-5). At the end, Yakov reaches the realization of the meaning of life by understanding the meaningfulness of life-struggle. Every religion and philosophy make people undergo their experience in their own way towards the realisation of pain and suffering, but the differences have come in the way human beings deal with their experiences. The author feels, "I am the Victim, the sufferer for my poor people. What will be will be...when there's no fight for it there's no freedom" (334-5).

Zacharias rightly pointed out the insightful words of C.S Lewis in his book *Can Man Live Without God* that "we human beings spell the pain the way we do" (48). He further argued that "Pain may well be God's megaphone to a morally deaf world" (48). Now, even Buddha's outcry is an eradication of desire that gives answer to the human suffering. For Buddhists, self-renunciation and meditation transport the human beings into an enlightened state. If one wants to live harmoniously in the world, one has to be a link in the golden chain of human community. It is not plausible for one to live a secluded life.

Malamud clearly posits his idea that human life is suffused with excruciating pain and he justifies it through the life of Yakov, which is well-documented in *The Fixer*. Yakov's journey in the discovery of his own self gives him an abundant courage in spite of his constant agony and pain. Even *The Fiction of Bernard Malamud* speaks of Malamud and Jewish novelists' learning and shared experience of human anguish from Jewish history and from Dostoevsky, a Russian Modernist. Furthermore, it also explains the redemption in life and its meaning through suffering. Dostoevsky also claims that suffering is to be treated as a mere process for purification of human soul and salvation.

In the end, Yakov begins to recognize his responsibility and yields himself to the process of conversion by accepting suffering on behalf of all the other Jews, Shmuel, his Father-in-law, his wife Raisl and her wife's illegitimate son. His acceptance of suffering enables him to suffer for others. Alan Warren Friedman in his article, *The Hero as Schnook*, says:

It hurts, It hurts mightily, but Yakov hopes... At the end, heading defiantly for the trial he has so long demanded, Yakov clearly has achieved the searing recognition and acceptance of self and the world which is modern man's equivalent for the anagnost of the traditional hero. (302)

Finally, Yakov overcomes the humiliation and claims his moral identity through sufferings. History prompts Yakov to realise that to be a Jew is to suffer. This stands for a genuine conversion in Judaic sense. Malamud certifies that if a human being has values, he has to undergo sufferings and tribulations in the world and through them he has to overcome and transfigure himself into a better human being, if it is achieved by a man, he can rightly be called a Jew.

The title of this article bespeaks of a journey of a man. It is a two-way journey from different extents – one is an exterior, the other is an interior. Yakov begins his exterior journey moving from shtetl to Kiev in search of meaning for his existence to survive in this immoral world but he failed when he hid his ethnic identity.

Therefore, his hope collapsed and shattered into pieces. Finally, he lost his significance of his race. At one point, he reverts to begin his journey from the interior and then he accepts his ethnic identity and understands the need for his existence through various trials and tribulations. Lastly, he understood the meaning of life through the weary of pain and suffering. Thereby, a paradigm shift has taken place in his life. It metamorphoses Yakov from delusion to reality and from meaninglessness to meaningfulness. He redefines his life through this intriguing journey on his own understanding of self.

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