

The Influence of Dostoevsky on Bellow in the context of characters

Farha Naz¹

Abstract: Fyodor Mikhailov Dostoevsky (1821- 81) one of the towering figures in world literature, a nineteenth century Russian modern realistic novelist, in his art and prophetic message has influenced the twentieth century author, Saul Bellow (1915- 2005), a Nobel Laureate and an American Jewish novelist in a post war, post depression era. Both of them have protested against dehumanization, fragmentation, faithlessness and hopelessness of their respective times. Both Dostoevsky and Bellow deal with the problem of freedom and attempt to deal with the existential, psychological and spiritual crisis of their protagonists who subsequently find peace and stability in the spiritual brotherhood advocated by Christianity for Dostoevsky and Judaism for Bellow. Nevertheless, there are differences between the fictional characters of the two authors. To Dostoevsky, the concept of man as only a rational, wise creature is an imagination. Dostoevsky throws light on how the sense of freedom directs man either in the path of good or evil whereas Bellow's heroes are not in search of their materialistic identities rather they want to give meaning to their life. In this context my study will observe how Dostoevsky's fictional characters influence those of Bellow's.

Keywords: Dostoevsky, Bellow, Influence, Characters, inner conflict.

The influence of Dostoevskian fictional characters is very prominent in many of the characters portrayed by Bellow in his works. Both Dostoevsky and Bellow deal with the problem of freedom and attempt to deal with the existential, psychological and spiritual crisis of their protagonists who subsequently find peace and stability in the spiritual brotherhood advocated by Christianity for Dostoevsky and Judaism for Bellow. Nevertheless, there are differences between the characters portrayed by the two authors. To Dostoevsky, the concept of man as only a rational, wise creature is an imagination. Dostoevsky throws light on how the sense of freedom directs man either in the path of good or evil. Dostoevsky, who has much faith in man's inclination towards good, has glorified the angelic part in mankind. In contrast, Bellow's heroes struggle to break through life and attain self-knowledge. Bellow protagonists even after being influenced by the traditional and contemporary psycho-social norms, philosophical ideas and historical experience are not lost by these all engulfing forces. Blake protagonists do not become slave to this deterministic force under the sun. But to be independent of this determinism they acquire life experience from the surrounding. By understanding history, separating good from bad they find their own positions in their own time. Bellow's heroes are not in search of materialistic individual identities rather they want to give meaning to their life, they are in search of metaphysical identities and love. In this context my study will observe how Dostoevsky's fictional characters influence those of Bellow's characters. In Gross's words:

1. Senior Lecturer, Dept. of English. Northern University Bangladesh.
E-mail: riminaz@hotmail.com.

In Bellow's work the hero has become an Americanized fusion of Dostoevsky's Underground Man and Kafka's Joseph K, not so much a victim of external authority as of his own weakness, someone who has forced himself out of that society. Their condition is suffering towards love.

As we probe into their canons we observe, their characters are all undergoing transformation. As if they are the passengers of train journeys and during their travel of life time they gain self-knowledge, maturity, spiritual transformation and reawakening.

The objective of this paper is to shedlight on how the nineteenth century Russian writer, a titan figure in world literature Fyodor Dostoevsky influences the Nobel Laureate, twentieth century post war era American Jewish writer Saul Bellow in his art of characterization. Both the writers have scorned in their works absurdity and nihilism. This paper highlights how Dostoevsky pens the gradual transformation of his characters from despair to hope, from alienation to a loving human being under the influence of the Christian spiritual teaching of brotherhood and how his characters immensely influence most of Saul Bellow's characters who are also in search of individuality yet are people not content with material success. Influenced by their Jewish spiritual background Bellow's protagonists are in search of metaphysical identity.

Many of Dostoevsky's fictional characters are the mouthpiece of his youthful zealous utopian thought as well as epitomizing his older days of spiritual maturity. The people of this world are suffering from spiritual, psychological crisis, they are alienated human beings, they are solipsists and existential heroes. The world of his novels are not ordered, they are chaotic. He has portrayed characters which have their doubles. In this connection we may direct our attention to Dostoevsky's saintly protagonist prince Myshkin in The Idiot. It seemsas if the dark character Rogozin is Prince Myshkin's double. They are tied in love-hate relationship concerning love for one woman Nastasya Philipovna. Moreover, his novels include murder, suspense, mystery. He has created in his canondemonic characters like Raskolnikov or Stavrogin. Raskolnikov is a cold blooded murderer in Crime and Punishment and Stavrogin,,a dark prince whose character is tinted with gothic supernaturalism in The Possessed. Further, it is to be pointed out that Dostoevsky combines comedy with the grim, isolated, macabre world of his characters. In his hands the comedy takes a modern mode. He mingles tragic atmosphere with farcical dramatic elements in order to captivate the temporariness of this world where light and darkness, happiness and misery are inseparable. Characters like Prince Myshkin who has been created after the image of 'holy fool' also give people enough amusement and irritation with their naivety, simplicity, innocence, clear insight and otherworldliness. Simultaneously there are realistic, optimistic spiritual characters like Father Zossima and his spiritual son, Alyosha Karamazov who work as a unifying force in the face of chaos. Lucas rightly points out that one of Dostoevsky's minor characters about the other characters in Dostoevsky's canon says: "They are all as if at a railway station". And through their journey they undergo transformation. The journey reveals different phases of life differently for each character and thus they attain spiritual maturity and understanding.

The Influence of Dostoevsky on Bellow in the context of characters

In Bellow's work the hero has become an Americanized fusion of Dostoevsky's Underground Man and Kafka's Joseph K, not so much a victim of external authority as of his own weakness, someone who has forced himself out of that society. Their condition is suffering towards love.

As we probe into their canons we observe, their characters are all undergoing transformation. As if they are the passengers of train journeys and during their travel of life time they gain self-knowledge, maturity, spiritual transformation and reawakening.

The objective of this paper is to shedlight on how the nineteenth century Russian writer, a titan figure in world literature Fyodor Dostoevsky influences the Nobel Laureate, twentieth century post war era American Jewish writer Saul Bellow in his art of characterization. Both the writers have scorned in their works absurdity and nihilism. This paper highlights how Dostoevsky pens the gradual transformation of his characters from despair to hope, from alienation to a loving human being under the influence of the Chriastian spiritual teaching of brotherhood and how his characters immensely influence most of Saul Bellow's characters who are also in search of individuality yet are people not content with material success. Influenced by their Jewish spiritual background Bellow's protagonists are in search of metaphysical identity.

Many of Dostoevsky's fictional characters are the mouthpiece of his youthful zealous utopian thought as well as epitomizing his older days of spiritual maturity. The people of this world are suffering from spiritual, psychological crisis, they are alienated human beings, they are solipsists and existential heroes. The world of his novels are not ordered, they are chaotic. He has portrayed characters which have their doubles. In this connection we may direct our attention to Dostoevsky's saintly protagonist prince Myshkin in The Idiot. It seemsas if the dark character Rogozin is Prince Myshkin's double. They are tied in love-hate relationship concerning love for one woman Nastasya Philipovna. Moreover, his novels include murder, suspense, mystery. He has created in his canondemonic characters like Raskolnikov or Stavrogin. Raskolnikov is a cold blooded murderer in Crime and Punishment and Stavrogin,,a dark prince whose character is tinted with gothic supernaturalism in The Possessed. Further, it is to be pointed out that Dostoevsky combines comedy with the grim, isolated, macabre world of his characters. In his hands the comedy takes a modern mode. He mingles tragic atmosphere with farcical dramatic elements in order to captivate the temporariness of this world where light and darkness, happiness and misery are inseparable. Characters like Prince Myshkin who has been created after the image of 'holy fool' also give people enough amusement and irritation with their naivety, simplicity, innocence, clear insight and otherworldliness. Simultaneously there are realistic, optimistic spiritual characters like Father Zossima and his spiritual son, Alyosha Karamazov who work as a unifying force in the face of chaos. Lucas rightly points out that one of Dostoevsky's minor characters about the other characters in Dostoevsky's canon says: "They are all as if at a railway station". And through their journey they undergo transformation. The journey reveals different phases of life differently for each character and thus they attain spiritual maturity and understanding.

For my paper's sake, now I would like to shift my gaze to Bellow's works. Though the theological teachings of Judaism and Jewish cultural background influence Bellow's literary creation, Bellow is also a child of American cultural tradition. Since Bellow was influenced by many modern writers Bellow's works can be analysed from existential perspective. Bellow like his contemporary modern novelists and influenced by his Russian precursor Dostoevsky does not shun the theme of alienation or individualism. But simultaneously Bellow sharply criticizes the degradation of individual dignity and worth, and has put much confidence in the individual's salvation and very self-contradictorily his protagonists give up individuality to join the mass in all his novels. Moreover, like Dostoevsky Bellow seems to be quite fascinated by the themes of double or nightmarish haunted feeling and comedy pervades Bellow's otherwise tragic lives of his fictional characters. Modern materialism turns the people of the society superficial, opportunists, hypocritical and hence ridiculous. Moreover, like Dostoevsky many of Bellow protagonists like Tomy Wilhelm, Herzog, have been created after the image of holy fool as they do not fit into the hostile society with artificiality and materialism. They appear sometimes to be comical, they are laughed at because of their sense of truth, simplicity, naivety and vulnerability. But in operating female characters Bellow differs from Dostoevsky even then in few points the similarities of both the authors cannot be ignored.

In the context of Bellow's art of characterization Ada Aharoni in "The Cornerstone of Bellow's Art" points out that that train journey has become a recurrent image of life in Bellow's novels. According to her the Bellow hero, if not a driver can miss the right stations or make a right choice of where to alight. Bellow always gives direction to his heroes of which stop is coming up.

Both Dostoevsky and Bellow's heroes suffer from existential crisis. In this respect Dostoevsky's Underground Man influences Bellow's Dangling Man almost directly. In Robert Alter's words:

"Dangling Man will continue to swing through all the novels until he is finally set down on convincingly solid ground at the end of Herzog. The most obvious literary influence on the first novel is Dostoevski. The general plan of the book would seem to derive from Notes from the Underground. Bellow's novel, like Dostoevski's is presented as the journal-confession of a frustrated intellectual who focuses in himself the general condition of anomie suffered by individuals in modern society"

Dostoevsky, as a modern realistic novelist has explored the existential concept through the thoughts and actions of his existential characters. Dostoevsky's underground man is a failure to fit himself into the society and discontent with the identities he creates for himself. And Ivan Karamazov's existential outlook about life in Dostoevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov* is revealed in his famous utterance: "There is no virtue if there is no immortality". In this connection, I would like to explore Ivan's attitude towards life. In Book II before Fyodor and his eldest son Dmitry's confrontation concerning the latter's claim for the share of his mother's property we find Ivan has become a known persona even in the monastery of his native town by writing an article on the position of the ecclesiastical court and now he is discussing it with the monks. In his discussion he argues that the church is only taking limited control and he asserts that it should not be separated from the state. Equipped with full control if it punishes the criminal, then the enormous number of crime will be decreased. Father Zossima agrees with him to a very limited extent and points out

The Influence of Dostoevsky on Below in the context of characters

that sin should be recognized at the level of individual soul by conscience and that is why it is not the church which should intervene in the state's law matters. Moreover, Ivan argues that man does not love his fellow human beings from innate tendencies rather they are more coveted by the pleasure of afterlife or intimidated by its punishment. All his arguments surface his lack of faith in the immortality of soul and that is why he argues that basically there is no separating line between good or bad so people should be permitted to do what they like. The same thread of existential philosophical questions Ivan puts forth is continued in the scene in Book V: Pro and Contra where he is dining with Alyosha. He proves his lack of faith or no faith when he converses with Alyosha and states, "perhaps I too accept God", but what he cannot accept as his argument implies that if God is so benevolent then how can he create a world full of wrong and viciousness. Ivan further argues man who is full of cruelty cannot conceive the concept of God transcending his own savage nature or if men were so noble a being how do the innocent children suffer in their very presence. Ivan's all these questions indicate that Ivan is undergoing existential spiritual crisis but simultaneously it proves his love for humanity. It is his concern for human suffering basically which instigates him to reject God. But what he forgets during his celebration of the way of life where everything is permitted that it opens the gate also to the life of debauchery enjoyed by his father Fyodor which he loathes. He falls entrapped in his logic and is maddened. His madness increases when Smerdyakov tells him that by killing Fyodor Karamazov, Smerdyakov only materialized the concepts proposed by Ivan. At this stage, Ivan is forced to face two truths. One he is responsible for other human beings which he has rejected hitherto since he did not want to be the keeper of either his father or brother as he says to Alyosha: "Am I my brother Dmitry's keeper?" The other is that he has paved the way for the murder of his father. Ivan has a detached attitude towards life but he adulates a life of living as he says to Alyosha: "I have a longing for life and I go on living in spite of logic. Though I may not believe in the order of the universe, yet I love the sticky little leaves as they open in spring". His cold blooded love for humanity has a seed of hope as love itself is a source of warmth which needs to be germinated. Could be Alyosha awaits this seed of love to grow which will build the way for Ivan's redemption. Both Alyosha and Elder Zossima are opposing characters to Ivan's theory of all is permitted. Father Zossima teaches the Christian teaching all are responsible to all. Zossima teaches that we have to win against our bestiality as for this major vice we humiliate others. We hurt others' dignity by showing pity or self love ('nadryv') as we see Katerina wants to take advantage of a sinner's weakness, Dmitry with her assumed virtue. Zossima preaches a religion where one should accept others with deficiencies and one should be forgiving in nature. He teaches human beings must share joy and suffering as opposed to Ivan's isolation and glorification of self will. About Alyosha initially Ivan was not mindful. He used to look down upon Alyosha as an empty brained religious fanatic. But over time he came to understand that Alyosha is a realistic person and sound in his understanding. Ivan says: "The little man stands firm". As for Dmitry, apart from his sensuous nature he has a passionate loving heart. His capacity for great suffering and love has been well perceived by father Zossima when the elder bows Dmitry as a sign of respect for Dmitry's love for humanity. Another character, Grushenka, a slavophilic Russian woman tainted with moral flaws, will be redeemed and thus

contributes to the theme of truth, for her acceptance of her share of guilt in the murder, her being exploited by this world and for helping out Alyosha from his misery when Father Zossima's body decays with the grace of a fabled onion. Moreover, children have been presented as moral touchstone. The boys, Ilyusha and Kolyastoryline in the novel bears much importance in this novel since they are less susceptible to corruption than adults. In contrast to Ivan's intellectual pride the innocence of the children has been put much faith in by Dostoevsky along with Russian monks and peasants.

Bellow's work highlights human dignity rather than utilitarian gain. In all his novels the complexity of our time and its impact on the individuals has been portrayed. The existential mode of his characters is in tune to the absurdity of physical universe. In consequence his protagonists suffer from existential alienation. In seeking the answers to their quests the Bellow protagonists take resort to spirituality as revealed by Jewish philosophy. Bellow's works resonate with moral optimism, Jewish family values, the brotherhood within the community and faith in eternal existence of soul. Bellow basically absorbs the humanistic approach of existential theory which exalts human beings free choice. Bellow's heroes Joseph in Dangling Man, Asaleventhal in The VictimAugie in The Adventures in Augie March, Tommy Wilhelm in Seize the Day all undergo existential crisis.

In this respect, I would like to focus on Bellow's Dangling Man. The protagonist of the novel Joseph dangles between his inner changing moods and the outer ordered world of work, which he has left and now he is waiting to join the army. Joseph highly values the free time he has found and starts keeping journal to get involved into philosophic exploration about himself but disappointed to note that the days pass without any effectual use. He gradually gets isolated from his busy past, the interactive days with human beings and the environment. He starts to probe into his inner self and gradually gets alienated from his wife, Iva, his brother and his extended family. His grim mood is projected in the outer world as well. The environment cluttered with billboards, streets, tracks, houses appears to him monotonous, dull and lifeless, only aggravating his loneliness. Joseph's conflict with the outer world increases when he starts to have conversation with his alter-ego, a Spirit of Alternatives. In this scene we see a reflection of the scene in The Brothers Karamazov where Ivan is talking to Devil, his double. Joseph realizes that the old Joseph, from whom he deliberately detached himself was a better person than the Joseph who is glorifying individualism in isolation and accordingly he wishes to join the army as soon as possible. He realizes 'goodness is achieved not in vacuum, but in company of other men, attended by love. I, in this room, separate, alienated, distrustful, find in my purpose not an open world, but a closed, hopeless jail.'

From the above discussion we note a major influence of the under ground man from Dostoevsky's Notes from the Underground on Joseph as both the anti-heroes are isolating themselves from the society in order to prove that they are unique. Joseph resembles also Ivan in The Brothers Karamazovs. Both of them are intellectuals and to guard their individualism seek isolation from the rest of the world. But both Ivan and Joseph finds peace in human company. Joseph realizes his isolation does not transform him to any better human being and Ivan becomes like a motherless child without Alyosha's care.

The Influence of Dostoevsky on Bellow in the context of characters:

The theme of double and hauntedness is overt in both the author's oeuvre. The protagonist is always haunted by his nemesis. To mention, the theme of hauntedness derives from the theme of double. In this respect, also Dostoevsky influences Bellow's works: As Coetz in "Bellow's Gift" writes:

"The Victim" is Bellow's most Dostoevskian book. The plot is adapted from Dostoevsky's The Eternal Husband, the story of a man accosted out of the blue by the husband of a woman he had an affair with years ago, someone whose insinuations and demands become more and more insufferably intimate. But it is not just the plot that Bellow owes to Dostoevsky, and the motif of the deserted double. The very spirit of The Victim is Dostoevskian. The supports for our neat, well-ordered lives can crumble at any minute: inhuman demands can without warning be made of us, and from the strangest quarters, it will be only natural to resist (Why me?); but if we want to be saved we have no choice, we must drop everything and follow. Yet this essential religious message is put in the mouth of a repulsive anti-semit.

The above extract suggests that any human being could be asked questions by his other self, his nemesis. In Dostoevsky's works the theme of double is a very prominent one. Many of his characters visualize their mirror image in their other selves, a result of mental disintegration. In The Double the other self of senior Golyadkin is projected in Junior Golyadkin. In The Possessed Stavrogin, the dark prince has many doubles. Pyotor stands for his social double. Kirilov and Shatov they are symbolic of two metaphysical poles of Stavrogin's personality. For the theme of double The Brothers Karamazov also provides scope as we observe the multi voices of Ivan's speech.

In this context, I would like to concentrate on Dostoevsky's second novel The Double, based on the doppelganger theme as the title suggest. In The Double Mr. Golyadkin, a civil servant comes of a middle class background is publicly humiliated by his replica, Golyadkin Junior. This Golyadkin Junior as the story implies very possibly is a product of Mr. Golyadkin senior's schizophrenic madness. Golyadkin Junior is a double of Golyadkin Senior and a projection of the dark side of his soul, the id, hidden in his subconscious urging him to transgress his limits which his bourgeois bureaucratic persona would not dare to. In this nightmarish story Dostoevsky has operated realism psychologically, the theme later developed in Crime and Punishment and The Brothers Karamazov. In The Brothers Karamazov we sense the multi voices of Ivan's speech. In this relation Victor Terras comments: "Ivan is constantly telling lies and mostly to himself". Terras rightly observes that during his meeting with "Katerina Ivanova both are lying to each other and to themselves." Ivan speaks in his natural voice which is most of the time controlled by intellectuality, his second voice is apparent in the ambitious dream of The Grand inquisitor, he has another doubtful voice of himself when he confronts the devil during his hallucination. As we once again shift our attention to Dostoevsky's The Double we notice it has a strong influence on Saul Bellow's The Victim. The novel exposes the inner struggle of the hero Asa Leventhal with his nemesis, now an enemy and previously an acquaintance. Leventhal is a middle class Jew who works as a newspaper editor. For the time being is living alone in New York as his wife has gone to look after her mother. His

loneliness makes him vulnerable to the accusations thrust upon him by Kirbee Albee. Albee believes that Leventhal is the reason behind for his being fired by his superior Rudiger from his job and the consequent social uneasiness he has to face. Albee has an anti-semitic hostility towards Albee for he believes that Leventhal is a member of some kind of Jewish association and availing every opportunity for himself from this source and Leventhal intentionally caused his dismissal from the job. Though the accusation is totally baseless, somehow or other Leventhal starts feeling guilty. In this connection, I would like to add that in one of the novels epigraphs, which is from the Thousand and One Nights, tells the story of a merchant, who being careless starts throwing away date seeds in torrent and which caused the killing of the son of an Ifrit. He very justly demands that the merchant should be sentenced to death. The story implies that man is responsible for being harmful to others and he has to compensate for his wrong. Leventhal who resists taking responsibility of others like Ivan in The Brothers Karamazovs and who reluctantly is looking after his brother's family is now being burdened with a guilty feeling that he might really be responsible for Albee's personal and social crisis. Being alarmed Leventhal allows Albee to stay in his apartment with him. Albee doesn't leave him and as if returns to become Leventhal's alter-ego, another self whom Leventhal repulses but loves. Eventually Leventhal throws away Albee for good from his place but once again they meet each other years later.

The haunting theme which is derived from the theme of double is all pervading in Dostoevsky and Bellow's works. In Dostoevsky's Crime and Punishment there is a chaser who chases the wrong doer in the form of its double self as we see detective Porfiry chases Raskolnikov, until the wrongdoer is devastated by the burden of guilt and confesses his orhercrime. Or in this respect I could also mention Dostoevsky's Eternal Husband which directly influences Saul Bellow's The Victim. The haunting theme in The Victim is very much alike to that of The Eternal Husband. Here, we find Albee always seeking an opportunity to take revenge on Leventhal as Trusotsky is after Velchaninov.

The cuckold theme is another aspect of the two authors' works. Dostoevsky's The Eternal Husband has a tragicomic touch and about a cuckold, Pavel Pavlovich Trusotsky and Alexi Ivanovitch Velchaninov, the man who slept with Trusotsky's wife Natalia, during his year-long stay at his friend Trusotsky's house. The fact is, at one point Trusotsky finds out his wife's infidelity after her death. In no time, he tracks down Velchaninov, his friend and his wife's former lover. Then onwards Trusotsky pretends to be very much in friendly terms with Velchaninov but his hatred increases and in one night he shows his fang, he attempts to kill Velchaninov with a razor knife.

For the cuckold theme I would like to turn to Bellow's Herzog and would like to point out the similarity conspicuous between Bellow's Moses Herzog and Dostoevsky's Trusotsky. Moses Herzog is a middle-aged college professor who is temporarily living in his country home Berkshire. He keeps on writing letters to his family, friends, and writers and even to the dead. These letters he never sends as he is on the verge of mental breakdown. He has been betrayed by his close-friend Gersbach and his ex-wife Madeline as Gersbach and Madeline were having affair for a long time and Madeline being in the marriage. Moreover, now they are together and Moses' daughter June is with them. Like Trusotsky in The Eternal Husband, Moses is in the mind to murder his

The Influence of Dostoevsky on Bellow in the context of characters

ex-wife and her lover, with the gun of his late father, Jonah Herzog of which he got possession of when he went to his childhood home Chicago. But somehow Moses declined the idea of killing his opponents when he saw his ex-wife, his friend and Moses' daughter in harmony. Garsbach could be Moses' other self of which Moses is not aware of as Velchaninov is to Trusoysky since both of them love the same woman Natalia.

Both Dostoevsky and Bellow have mingled comedy with tragedy as an outcome of life experience. Many of their characters exhibit comic aspects of their nature and appear ridiculous. Both Dostoevsky and Bellow's fiction are cityscapes. These narratives deal with the theme of urban materialistic ambition and aspiration which turns characters greedy and eccentric. Sometimes human beings abuse human beings, behave with monstrosity because of materialistic lures. Yet these characters put on false appearance and pretend to be great. Others around them with the readers laugh at them recognizing and perceiving the discrepancy between the appearance and reality. People ridicule them as they lack in self knowledge and as they prove themselves hollow.

In this respect it is to be noted that in handling comedy Bellow is again influenced by Dostoevsky. Stanley Reynolds points out Bellow mingles the comic with the tragic. According to him, Bellow's Herzog is an intellectual-comic figure and in Humboldt's Gifts the plot, the characters, the protagonist, Charlie Citrine entrapped with lawsuits from his ex-wife generate adequate comic elements and he writes:

This is the stuff of a comic novel, but the Bellow trick was to make it also serious. "The name of Dostoyevsky immediately gives us our bearings," Philip Toyenbee wrote in the Observer. "his best yet and there is nobody writing novels in English who can match it," he added.

To illustrate I would like to focus on two characters, one after the other from two novels of Dostoevsky and Bellow respectively. They are Ganya's father from Dostoevsky's *The Idiot* and Charlie Citrine from Humboldt's *Gift* by Saul Bellow.

Dostoevsky's works abound in 'obsessional characters'. Those who are vain and empty inside but dissemble others in the guise of knowledge and wisdom. Such a character is Ganya's father Ardalyon Ivolgin, an ex-general in Dostoevsky's novel *The Idiot*. He has lost his circle of friends in high society due to constant lying and drinking. We get a very poignant and darkly hilarious picture in part I of the book where in the Ivolgin household amidst the family members suddenly appears Nastasya Philipovna. Entering the drawing room Nastasya starts joking to guard her against the hostility shown by the people around towards the society's fallen woman. Suddenly General Ivolgin enters the drawing room introduces himself to Nastasya, and starts telling a story about his past which is nothing but a lie. His story about his cigar and a lady's dog being thrown out of the window is caught by Nastasya Philipovna as a lie and she says that she had read the same story in the newspaper. Nastasya starts laughing hysterically and Ganya starts suffering.

Like Dostoevsky Bellow uses elements of comedy in the portrayal of his characters but the underlying implication is shockingly grave. Bellow does not let trouble, pain and hardship to dominate his protagonists. Instead he wants them to live with energy,

humorously, sensuously and with full awareness of the intellectual and physical world surrounding them. The humor of his style makes the dark tolerable.

The protagonist of Bellow's *Humboldt's Gifts* Charlie Citrine's character exhibits a mixture of despair, farce and moral fervor. Almost all of Charlie's endeavours are intervened by opportunists, obsessed characters seeking their best interest. These are the Machiavellians who are draining away Charlie's life energy. His wife is suing him for divorce and craves to avail material gain from this divorce, his old friend has squandered a lot of money to start a quarterly. Moreover, a mafia character named Ronaldo Cantabile damages his Mercedes. All these troubles get on Charlie's nerves but he sighs under the covering of laughter and humour. Bellow is a satirist who exposes vulgarity to delineate the absurdity of human existence where laughter and cry follow each other. Yet his characters are 'in search of God' and justifiably he is called the 'American Dostoevsky'

In both Dostoevsky and Bellow's canons we are acquainted with characters who could be called holy fools. Holy fools are the lovers of God, who become fools because their love for Christ, for their way towards grace and salvation. According to Christian ideas this foolishness results from their continuous rejection of worldly cares. And as Christ endured mockery and humiliation by the people around, the holy fools undergo utter humiliation and are ridiculed by their community people. Since they do not long after material gain like others, the society calls them fools. Suffering constant taunts sometimes make them behave clumsily which leads to their further harassment. Yet this behavioral inadequacy could be compensated as they have acute psychological insight to understand human mind. They have faith in human beings, they believe in human potential to do good.

To illustrate, I would like to point out in Dostoevsky's *Brothers Karamazovs*, Smerdyakov's mother 'stinking Lizaveta', Sonya Mermeladov in *Crime and Punishment* and Prince Myshkin in *The Idiot* are portrayed in the image of holy fools. In this regard, I will only focus on Prince Myshkin's character. He is ridiculed by almost everybody of the Petersburg polished high society circle because of his naivety. Ganya slaps him, Aglaya laughs at him and mocks him but it only makes him sad, but he does not react as expected by us. He is clumsy in behavior even after spending four years and being cured from a Swiss clinic because of mental imbalance and epilepsy. In this relation, I would like to shift our gaze, to the dinner party held by Aglaya's family where Myshkin while speaking very ardently about religion and the future of aristocracy, accidentally and clumsily breaks a Chinese vase. All his behavioral incompetence makes him an idiot, a person to be ridiculed.

Though Bellow protagonists tend for individualism resulting in alienation. They are filled with guilt as for not fulfilling their duties for their family and in a broader sense society members. They are suffering indignity and being laughed at in this materialistic world. They have a sympathetic heart to human failure. They are not after a quantitative life, instead they are concerned with goodness, human dignity, holiness, the joy shared in common everyday life and in a meaningful existence. They are on the way of soul's attaining grace. Bellow protagonists Moses Herzog, Charlie Citrine, Augie March, Tomy Wilhelm have all been portrayed in the image of holy fools. In this regard also Bellow protagonists have similarities with those of Dostoevsky. If we look at Tomy Wilhelm in Bellow's *Seize the Day* we realize that he does not have the

The Influence of Dostoevsky on Bellow in the context of characters:

capacity to gain material success among the urban tricksters like Dr Tamkin. His wife Margaret is relentless in her demand for money from whom he is separated but doesn't get a divorce and his father Dr. Adler, a selfish father who does not help Tommy in distress rather gives hollow advice. Tommy is clumsy in nature, his habits are unclean as he uses an electric shaver to avoid the need for water, he eats without proper manner in public places and he has a habit of stammering. To a father like Dr. Adler who has a very fine sense of manners and to the polished urban people all his ways appear comical and irritating. Yet all his failures and mediocrity, the deceptions and selfishness of the people around cannot destroy him for his life experience teaches him the lesson that human dignity lies in its struggle for existence in a noble way.

Dostoevsky generally has portrayed the female characters in his fiction with love and respect. Even the most downtrodden woman like prostitute Sonya, whose body has been corrupted by this vile world but who has a golden heart in Crime and Punishment, is created after the image of holy fool. In contrast, Bellow is not so generous in portraying female characters and accordingly some critics have designated him a misogynist. His female characters are overshadowed by men in quest of metaphysical identity in a Jewish household. No crucial influence of Dostoevsky on Bellow has been observed in this regard except for few similarities between the two oeuvres of the two authors.

Accordingly, here, I would like to focus on two scenes side by side from the two authors' works respectively where we see the disadvantaged position of women in male dominated society. In Dostoevsky's The Brothers Karamazov we are disgusted by Fyodor's cruelty and callousness to his both wives and in Bellow's The Adventures of Augie March, we observe how Rebecca, a simple minded woman was abandoned by her sons' father along with her sons, Augie and his two brothers Simon and Georgie, a retarded child in utter poverty and disgrace.

The Great Russian sage Dostoevsky's many characters have influenced the American writer Saul Bellow's characters. They belong to different times and different parts of the worlds. Yet the similarities of these writers speak about human universality. Their works only retell one story that human beings are different in terms of color, race and religion but they share the same kind of struggle for existence, feelings of love, compassion, envy and hatred and inclination towards good or bad. In Dostoevsky's oeuvre human beings are at ever conflict with good or evil. Dostoevsky's acute psychological insight and his profound spiritual and philosophical understanding has revealed the secret of grace to himself. He well perceives that it is the screen of impurity which hides the inner beauty of man from himself. But Dostoevsky puts much faith in human beings and senses that mankind is capable of attaining perfection as once they were blessed by grace. He asks his countrymen through characters like father Zosima or a 'holy fool' like prince Myshkin, that it is only the human beings who can ask for forgiveness and can forgive and thus attain salvation. Similarly, in all Bellow protagonists we observe the celebration of human dignity. They want to give meaning to life. Instead of being after material success they are in search of metaphysical identity. Which needs love, peace and happiness derived from human ties. His many characters being immensely influenced by the religious teaching of

Judaism and Dostoevskian characters advocating love, forgiveness and fraternity are urging mankind to see the light of their soul which connects them to God Almighty and his creation. Both the authors urge humankind to forget animosity towards each other, to subdue the evil inside and thus to be restored once again to grace.

References

- [1] A Aharoni (1982), The Cornerstone of Bellow's Art, Saul Bellow Journal 2.1, pp. 1-12.
- [2] D Galloway (1965), Clown and Saint: The Hero in Current American Fiction, Critique 7.3.
- [3] G Lucas (1962), Dostoevsky: A Collection of Critical Essays, Ed. Rene Wellek, Prentice- Hall, Inc, Englewood Cliffs, N J, pp. 146-158.
- [4] F Dostoevsky (1960), Crime and Punishment, Richard Clay and Company, England.
- [5] F Dostoevsky (1985), Netochka Nezvanova, Penguin, Harmondsworth.
- [6] F Dostoevsky (1993), Notes from the Underground, Vintage, London.
- [7] F Dostoevsky (1967), The Brothers Karamazov, Dell, USA, pp. 51-178.
- [8] F Dostoevsky (1997), The Double, Dover Publication, N Y.
- [9] F Dostoevsky (2008), The Eternal Husband, Dover Publications, Inc, N Y.
- [10] F Dostoevsky (1965), The Idiot, Bantam, USA.
- [11] J M Coetz (27 May 2004), Bellow's Gift, The New York Review of Books.
- [12] L P Grossman (1961), The Spirit of the Times, Crime and Punishment and the Critics, Ed. Edward Wasiolek, Wordsworth Publishing Company. INC, San Francisco.
- [13] R Alter (1964), The Stature of Saul Bellow, Midstream 10, pp. 3-15.
- [14] S Bellow (2007), Dangling Man, Penguin Modern Classics, Clays Ltd, St Ives plc: England, p. 92.
- [15] S Bellow (1965), Herzog, Fawcett Crest Printing, New York.
- [16] S Bellow (1976), Humbolt's Gift, Penguin, Harmondsworth.
- [17] S Bellow (1988), Mr. Sammler's Planet, Penguin, England.
- [18] S Bellow (1996), Seize the Day, Viking Penguin, New York.
- [19] S Bellow (1996), The Adventure of Augie March, Cox and Wyman Ltd, England.
- [20] S Bellow (23 February 2010), The French As Dostoevsky Saw Them, The New Republic.
- [21] S Reynolds (6 April 2005), Obituary: Saul Bellow, The Guardian: US News.
- [22] T L Gross (1971), Saul Bellow: The Victim and the Hero, The Heroic Ideal in American Literature, Free Press: New York, pp. 243-61.
- [23] V Terras (2002), A Karamazov Companion, The University of Wisconsin Press, USA, p. 91.