



## **NATURAL: THE PROBLEMATICS OF AMERICAN DREAM**

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Bernard Malamud (1914-1986) transformed his life experiences and observations into tales of comic-tragic and moral artistry. His father, a Russian immigrant in America spent 'a poor' grocer's life in Brooklyn. Young Malamud's life was unhappy at fifteen on, for he was motherless and his father remarried. He had the responsibility of his handicapped brother while his father carried imprisoned life the grocery store. There was an acute sense of anguished life when Malamud wrote his tales.

One's identity as concerned to surviving is apparent in all of Malamud's writings. Malamud's people in his writing are part of American Dream and great cultural 'melting pot' of America. Bernard Malamud chose to work with the accounts of the poor and suffering. The cultural issues are socially construed ideas; changes are inherent. The 'sense of belonging' to a culture or sub-culture concerns ideas of aspirations and longing for life in Malamud's *The Natural* (1952); in reality indicate the fragmented cultural meanings, human concerns alienated and contradictions reconciled. The affected conditions of living and subsisting of people that matter significant are paradoxically involved.

Malamud's First novel *The Natural* (1952) is about American Base ball. Roy Hobbs, 19 years old, a country chap, a believer in his hope, dreams ambitious in American Base ball and Sam, the scout of Chicago Cubs identifies Roy's talent takes him on long journey to Chicago. Roy feels drawn by stranger, Harriet Bird who is seated by Walter Whambold nick named Whammer, a famous Baseball Icon and three times champion award winner, Harriet wanted to know what would Hobbs aim to accomplish? Hobbs answer reflects his confidence and ambitious dreams:

“sometimes when I walk down the street I bet people will say there goes Roy Hobbs, the best there ever was in the game.” (Malamud, 1952, p. 38)

The senior high school Base ball matches gave him dreams. His long journey to Chicago enlists him among millions to join ‘American Dreams.’ Malamud has made the struggles of the poor and middle class, and the hopes and dreams of the migrants a subject his frequent engagement in his writings.

Roy tells about his childhood to Harriet in train journey, how he lived in grandfather’s home, after grandfathers death, his father put Roy into some orphanage and his father went to somewhere on his job and Roy came home for summer; his old father had taught him Base ball. Roy’s childhood consciousness is shaped of his father’s obscure working class life. His father took him to places around Oregon. Malamud draws Roy’s memory of “refugees” in Oregon. Migrants appearing in fiction of Malamud is a frequent feature that the writer uses their presence in addition to the main characters suffering. Malamud had seen a lot of them in New York and has worked out their suffering alienation in his The Assistant (1957). When Eddie the porter in train asks whether he wants to go there again Roy answers, he hopes to be a ball player. (Malamud, 1952, p. 6) Roy as against his father’s misery, aspires his future in opportunities; ‘American Dreams’ are about hopes of subsisting, against all odds and hardships and it is about even about success stories beset with uncertainties of striving.

Malamud’s *The Natural* is in terms of symbolic powers of righteousness and corruption as medieval Knights adventure for ‘Holy Grail. Malamud’s Base ball player is a hero to save the Fisher King towards regeneration. Living can be a myth or life. Roy’s hope and natural strength characterize his merits and the three woman characters presented in *The Natural* allegorise the respective influence potential for evil temptation or prospective good as Roy chooses his life and future.

An attraction for Harriet Bird, the “silver eyed beauty” led Roy to choose her; his wrong choice of evil was Harriet’s invitation to her hotel room; only to ask him second time, -what he hoped to accomplish in ballgame? For his ambitious answer, Roy receives bullets in his guts. He does not die but does not live. The incident leads him to hospitalization, pain and long slump of career and hardships in life.

This incident forewarns his future. Sidney Richman remarks on the incident:

“Roy is the image of the unintegrated man, the hero who acts incorrectly despite his awareness. From this lack of integration his pain proceeds”. (Richman, 1966, p. 35)

Before the shooting incident, Roy had come to see headlines from Sam’s Newspaper; WAIST COATS OLYMPIC ATHLETE SHOT.” (Malamud, 1952, p. 14 ) After this, the police were after searching the

mysterious killer of the two Athletes in this incident. Harriet's shooting of Hobbs Roy equates a real incident report in America. Malamud's the character of Harriet's is probably the infatuated fan of Eddie Waitcus; Ruth Anne Steinhagen who shot Eddie Waitcus, the famous Base ball player in 1949 in a hotel room of Edgewater Beach Hotel in Chicago exactly in Harriet's method. Malamud brings in American sports' incidents of shooting into his fictional frame and the underground of sports world. The But at the bottom lie different facts; the infatuation to the degree of obsession for sports star or for a film hero or for godman or God takes the form of neurotic condition.

After his fifteen years, again a hope dawns on him. Roy aged 34, is in New York Knights as a rookie. The team manager and partner of New York Knights, Pop Fisher has lost his hope. His team has lost all matches; all players were desperate when Roy joins and turns his chance into a success. His bat he made himself of the lightning blasted tree performed;

“wonderboy flashed in the sun. It caught the Sphere where it was biggest. A noise like a twenty one gun salute cracked the sky. There was a straining, ripping sound and a few drops of rain spattered to the ground.” (Malamud, 1952, p. 83)

Then the parched Wasteland receives rain and the green sprouts in terms of Grail legend. Now slumped team had a hope and old Wham[b]old is bound to die; Roy valued as “Natural talent” is spurred by Pop Fisher. He is the Knight of Knights in prowess that ‘New York Knights had on its side.

America takes Roy across to different cities to play in the major leagues ahead of World Series. Roy wins fans and he dreams of success money and love as Roy emerges into power.

Malamud creates a world of ethical choices and a haze of dark forces for the protagonist to choose for his rise or fall. Pop Fisher, keeps telling Roy not to keep company of his niece Memo Paris, the dead Bump Baily's girl friend, for Pop thought her, ‘a bad omen’ but Roy Hobbs is infatuated with the beautiful Memo, even had consulted an astrologer Lola who told he would soon meet and fall in love with a dark haired lady.

After a partial success, somewhat long set back had followed with his bat. One day, Roy happens to see in stand a woman in red with white flower, standing up. His restless eagerness to meet her is never over until he possessed her on a moon lit day by a lakeside. In conversation, Irene answers to Roys words:

“I hate to see a hero fail, There are a so few of them...without heros we are all plain people and don't know how far we can go...yes it is their function to be the best and for the rest of us to understand what they represent and guide ourselves accordingly.” (Malamud, 1952, p. 167.)

Irene is made a symbol associated with the good; but her other side was, she was cheated unmarried mother at seventeen, whose subsequent life became care and love of bringing up her daughter. Irene, a suffering woman past thirty is lonely. The image of love's fruitful fertility and the spiritual redemption for life is associated with Irene Lemon and is a contrast to Memo Paris on dark side of life. Roy had ignored Irene as she was grandmother. As Roy presses Memo for marriage, she expressed her failed dreams about Hollywood and conditions of materialistic calculations for future. Memo is always seen with Gus Sand, the millionaire gambling bookie. Roy had his suspicion disbelieved.

The climax of Roy Hobb's play is victimized, in manipulated Memo, Banner and Gus Sand's gambling. Roy demands for renewed contract on rise of his salary income. Miser Banner strictly denying it forces Roy to throw his next match. Judge Banner's negotiation with Roy comes for thirty five thousand dollars, with wise moralising and blackmail, using Roy's love for Memo and Roy's future prospects in Baseball. The Judge had many ways of corruption, exploitation and evil; he schemed to fail and remove his partner Pop Fisher -who is also a manager and coach -involving players.

When *The Natural* presents American Baseball in terms of the medieval Grail legend all ideals are shattered and what is left is in terms of Marx "the bourgeoisie has left no other nexus between man and man than naked self interest, than callous "cash payment" 330 (Engels, 1965)

In what follows as a quick turn of things; Roy regrets, thoughts of quitting his deal and confusion over his love for Memo and his loneliness besiege him. A decision to play an honest game is made. Then a commotion in stand takes Roy to the scene; he recognised Irene half conscious, she revealed her pregnancy, and before being taken to the hospital she asked him to win for the boy and win for them -'The three'.

The Harriet incident returns with Memo who shoots Roy; he would have been dead but bullet sped past over his shoulder. It had Roy to do with his self hatred about his involved wrong which could not be erased. When he went to club office, it was scene of tussle; Roy sends down Gus to floor, Memo intervened, he slapped Judges' head with an envelope and showered thousand dollars advance on Judge's head. He beat judge on his back "till the bowel moments" Memo never shot another time he gently took the pistol from her hands, dumped down and came out and Hobbs senses:

"I never did learn anything from my past life" (Malamud, 1952, p. 261)

In the Street a boy hands a news paper to Roy Hobbs. SUSPICION OF HOBBS SELL OUT -Max Mercy. Could Roy be able to bury this as he hid his past background of his poverty and place from Memo sports writer Max Mercy and others?

Malamud's writing brings up American sporting culture subsumed under dark scheming world of big business in sports. The texture of the novel has players, coaches, team managers and the business of team owners, Stars chasing success, fans, a hero's rise, struggle, slump and death, at the end, *the image* of sports itself to which belong thousands of athletes' lives and dreams.

People struggle in hope of rising to their dreams. Roy's good father, Roy's mother who turned whore and left husband, Scout Sam a drunkard, porter Eddie a fan of Base ball, Pop Fisher a lonely man, Memo Paris Hollywood dreamer who could not make it, good or bad have been the victims and are part of the alienated world. Iris Lemon whose life could have been anything but for hardships for daughter kept her living a hope:

“We have two lives...the life we learn with and the life we live after that. Suffering is what brings towards happiness.” (Malamud, 1952, p. 171)

Alienated Roy helpless, when he felt utterly let down, frustrated he would become nostalgic, remembers himself walking to forest with his dog in village, or he would remember his good father who taught him Baseball or abuse his mother. Alienation has wrecked lives of everyone and artists choose to write in symbolism as to what Leontrotsky said “intelligentsia's escape from reality, its way of constructing another world its artistic bringing up in self sufficient day dreaming, contemplation and passivity” (Trotsky, 1965, p. 348) Bernard Malamud could not have done otherwise than presenting the problems.

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