

Human Relationship Assuages Identity Crisis: A Critical Study of Ruskin Bond's *The Room on The Roof* and Neil Simon's *The Prisoner Of Second Avenue*

T. Hepzibah Mary

Lecturer,
Pandit Deendayal Petroleum University,
Raisan,
Gujarat

hepzibahmartin@gmail.com

The world progresses at an alarming rate hailing in many comforts and amenities that add to man's bliss. Nevertheless it is not without its vice. To keep pace with the fast developments man is under duress to be creative, imaginative, illustrious and industrious which in due course of time take its toll on him. Ironically the facilities that are presumed to make his life easier have also contributed to his unease. The increase in societal demands and expectations prods man to push himself beyond his capabilities. With the rise in privileges he has sadly forgotten to be human. In search of name, fame and wealth he has become greedy, deceitful, hypocrite and lustful. Striving for betterment man has pathetically abandoned his legacy and heritage of goodness, values and principles. These complexities have made him forget what really is valuable, useful and needful. Caught in this web man has lost his hold on himself and his life and it makes him suffer from many maladies. These maladies result in depression, stress and anxiety. And once it reaches its breaking point man does not know who and what he is. He struggles with identity crisis as he tries to understand his surroundings. The complications have set man apart from the others making him drift alone. This is where human relationships come into the picture. When other things are fleeting, human relationships alone hold fort till the end working miracles and wonders. The concept is illustrated using Ruskin Bond's *The Room on the Roof* and Neil Simon's *The Prisoner of Second Avenue*. The protagonists Rusty and Mel strive with identity crisis – Rusty because of his upbringing and Mel because he loses his job. When all is lost they are brought back to meaningful and useful life through human relationships that make realize their worth and purpose.

The expedition of man from being a wanderer and food gatherer to leading a settled life had been incredible and amazing. A settled life bestowed man with time and that embarked him on a journey of insatiable quest. Riding high on the wings of inquisitiveness man became the king of many inventions, discoveries and findings that gave a cutting edge to his existence and living. The paradigm shift thus brought about in man's lifestyle and manner of living made a world of difference in the way he conducted his everyday business and in his thought, perception, attitude and social life. It added zest, colour and vitality to his life. All about him life was a marvel and a

beauty and simplicity was the key word. Gratifying his small wishes and whims was man's ultimate mission from which he derived great joy and content.

Succeeding years and centuries hailed in more inventions and discoveries altogether taking man to a higher plane of living where supreme was the word that defined his existence and work. Not being satisfied with what had been achieved, he marched ahead undaunted and unstoppable in his quest thirsting for more achievements and accomplishments. Passage of time had a different story for man taking him by surprise. At a point of time man found himself in a tight corner where he allowed his creations to overpower and rule over him vividly bringing to mind the horrible sequences of events in *Frankenstein* written by Mary Shelley. Frankenstein the creation of Victor Frankenstein sadly became the cause of the destruction of him and his family. Similarly man's continued search for riches, fame and comforts has opened the Pandora' Box unleashing into the world a flurry of events, feelings and emotions. When the creation overpowers the creator all hell breaks loose. The avalanche of unrest has thus triggered and aggravated many evils like rootlessness, anxiety, stress, depression, identity crisis, insecurity, uncertainty, instability and the list is endless. The pursuit for material blessing has chased away emotional compatibility.

The Room on the Roof is Ruskin Bond's first novel that won the John Llewellyn Rhys Prize and written when he was just seventeen. He was born in Kasauli, Himachal Pradesh and grew up in Jamnagar, Dehradun, New Delhi and Simla. The Indian Council for Child Education recognized Ruskin's remarkable contribution to children literature in India. He was awarded with the Sahitya Academy Award in 1992 for *Our Trees Still Grow in Dehra*, the Padma Shri in 1999 and Padma Bhushan in 2014. Most of his works talk about his childhood experiences and growing up years in hill stations in India. His works reflect his Anglo-Indian experiences, changing political, social and cultural aspects of India based on his experiences of having been through colonial, postcolonial and post-independence phases of India. His writing career that spans a period of forty years has seen over three hundred short stories, essays, novels, and books for children and edited two anthologies.

Marvin Neil Simon was born on 4th July 1927 in The Bronx, New York, to Jewish parents – Irving Simon, a garment salesman and Mamie (Levy) Simon, a homemaker. He is an American playwright, screenwriter and author. He grew up with Danny Simon, his elder brother, in Washington Heights, Manhattan during the period of the Great Depression and graduated from DeWitt Clinton High School. Simon's primary theme is about the majority of people who are

frustrated, edgy and insecure. It is something that Simon inherited from the bitter memories of his unhappy childhood. Plays pivoting on the themes of marriage, family and human relationships helped the audience identify themselves with the characters and situations. For Simon writing plays is giving expressions to his frustration, insecurity and instability, yet the message is sugar coated with humour. These experiences and thoughts gave wings to his passion for writing and set the stage for him to become a comedy writer. For Neil Simon it is art for life's sake. He opines that art truly does imitate life. Neil Simon's writing career that spanned a period of four decades is dotted with series of successes that have made his name a recognizable theatrical commodity. Writing dramas gives him the utmost satisfaction because for him it is the best form of self-expression, the healthiest outlet for his neuroses and frustrations and the best way to share his joys.

Identity Crisis and Loneliness:

Having one's own identity and individuality helps in carving out a niche for oneself in this highly depersonalized and maddening world. It is indispensable to stay rooted and sane. Man is swept off his feet by the blinding forces of the happenings of the world. Man's industry has added to his comforts and amenities but alarmingly they have conspired together to dethrone and uproot him. With nothing to anchor him he has lost his sense of achievement and direction pushing him to the verge of insanity. Amidst the whirlwind of so much happening around him man is at a loss to figure out who he is, what he wants, why he lives and where he is headed. The conflicts, both within and without, demoralize man blurring his vision, clouding his perception and blocking his imagination. To be a successful and constructive human being man should have a well formed perception of his identity. According to the developmental psychologist Erik Erikson the formation and growth of identity play a pivotal role in the development and progress of an individual. It is required to confront challenges and tackle experiences thereby equipping a person to face life and events with confidence and certainty. When a person fails to form his identity he spends his time and energy grappling with who he is and struggling to find himself. This failure develops negativity in the person leaving him crippled to make choices in his life. It strips them of a sense of belonging making room for rootlessness and restlessness to creep in. Life ceases to be normal for them after being plagued with having no idea of who or what they are, where they belong or where they want to go.

In *The Room on the Roof* Rusty is a sixteen year old Anglo-Indian orphan boy who is brought by his guardian Mr. John Harrison. Mr. Harrison who happens to be Rusty's father's

cousin agreed to bring up the boy after the death of Rusty's parents. He has great contempt for Indians and Rusty because his mother was an Indian. For Rusty the upbringing in the English community of Dehradun is claustrophobic. The lack of understanding, communication, respect and love between Harrison and Rusty creates rift between them. Unknown to his guardian Rusty develops friendship with Indians, much against Harrison's liking and warning, and spends time with them in the Indian bazaar. On learning the truth Harrison severely punishes him. The punishment does not put Rusty off for the very next day he joins them in celebrating Holi. This leads to a scuffle between Harrison and Rusty and Rusty revolting against his guardian runs away from home to live with his Indian friends. On becoming the tutor of Kishen Kapoor Rusty lives with the Kapoors and falls in love with Meena Kapoor. The love is reciprocated. But the love dies prematurely with the death of Meena in an accident. Rusty's life becomes meaningless when Kishen is taken away by his aunt and Rusty's friends leave Dehra one by one. He decides to leave India and on his way to Delhi visits Haridwar to bid the final goodbye to Kishen. In Haridwar Rusty is stricken with the plight of Kishen and it prompts him to come back to Dehra where he sets up home permanently.

The novel meanders through the journey of Rusty from being a moody, lost boy to being on the threshold of becoming a writer. Rusty's identity crisis is the result of being orphaned when he was a baby and his guardian's reluctance to speak of his parents out of contempt. He has only memories:

His idle hours were crowded with memories, snatches of childhood. He could not remember what his parents were like, but in his mind there were pictures of sandy beaches covered with seashells of every description. They had lived on the west coast, in the Gulf of Kutch; there had been a gramophone that played records of Gracie Fields and Harry Lauder, and a captain of a cargo ship who gave the child bars of chocolate and piles of comics – *The Dandy*, *Beano*, *Tiger Tim* – and spoke of the wonderful countries he had visited. But the boy's guardian seldom spoke of Rusty's childhood, or his parents, and this secrecy lent mystery to the vague, undefined memories that hovered in the boy's mind like hesitant ghosts. (13-14)

Moreover, identity crisis is inevitable to Rusty for he enjoys no close relationship with his guardian and he is unfamiliar with his guardian's companionship. There is no instant connection between them and what worsens the already strained relationship is that Rusty is not an active

participant in the communication between them. Being a heavy smoker Harrison “erected a curtain of smoke between himself and the boy” (10) with the result being “Mr. Harrison did not reply. He seldom answered the boy’s questions, and his own were stated, not asked; he probed and suggested, sharply, quickly, without ever encouraging loose conversation. He never talked about himself; he never argued: he would tolerate no argument” (10). Rusty is lost to himself and the world because of this lack of understanding and interaction. Interaction leads to coordination and cooperation which in turn seal survivability. What makes the situation here more distasteful is the fact that human beings need each other and it is this lack between Rusty and Harrison that heightens his identity crisis. With nothing to anchor him at home he merely drifts and does not live but merely exists. The situation turns him to a dreamer who lives in a faraway place and is “brooding on the future, or dreaming of sudden and perfect companionship, romance and heroics; hardly ever conscious of the present” (13).

Fear and intimidation take the place of mutual dependence, love and companionship in the relationship between Rusty and Harrison. Without a person to share and mirror his feelings, emotions, thoughts, experiences and imagination Rusty fails to have a solid foundation on which to construct the edifice of his life. Harrison’s attitude, ideas, opinions and thoughts tweak and distort Rusty’s perception of himself and the world. Harrison does no more for the boy than what obligation merely demands. Though Harrison has done a lot for the boy, there is no love and affection between them and the reason is:

Mr. Harrison, who was really a cousin of the boy’s father, had done a lot for Rusty, and that was why the boy was afraid of him. Since his parents had died, Rusty had been kept, fed and paid for, and sent to an expensive school in the hills that was run on ‘exclusively European lines’. He had, in a way, been bought by Mr. Harrison. And now he was owned by him. And he must do as his guardian wished. Rusty was ready to do as his guardian wished: he had always obeyed him. (10)

Rusty does not understand himself and his situation and it is not palpable. There are no other children in the English community with whom he can associate for “the community consisted mostly of elderly people” (12). It is a relationship where gratitude is replaced by subordination; love by fear; care by meek servitude and compassion by resentment. A ubiquitous human nature is to love others for what they are for without human relationships man becomes empty. Human beings need others to have a better understanding of themselves which fosters

appreciation and acceptance of differences. Close knit among human beings was the foremost reason for civilizations to flourish and survive. Relationships extended to families, tribes, clans and societies. Hence, Rusty has a skewed sense of self for lack of fostering human relationships. Human beings are needed to mirror and reflect one's ideas and feelings. In this unhealthy setup Rusty becomes an emotional wreck. He is unhinged and feels completely separated and isolated from the others. It is ingrained in him that he dreams of companionship but when opportunity presents him with one, he shies away. One day while returning from his usual walk up in the mountain Rusty meets Somi and his friends who freely offer their friendship. But Rusty turns down the offer: "When an opportunity for friendship did present itself, as it had the previous day, he shied away, preferring his own company" (13). Rusty is trapped within himself and it does not allow him to emotionally reach out to people. It worries and depresses him leading to a sense of helplessness: "To his surprise and disgust, he found himself wishing he had gone into Dehra with Somi. He stood in the sidetrack and stared down the empty road; and, to his surprise and disgust, he felt immeasurably lonely" (8). Identity crisis in Rusty breeds loneliness which is passive and Rusty passively allows it to seep into his system.

The need to reach out to other human beings becomes stronger and purges Rusty of his passivity. When Harrison leaves for Delhi, Rusty decides to make the most of his guardian's absence: "So he threw himself on the bed and visualized the morrow ... where should he go – into the hills again, into the forest? Or should he listen to the devil in his heart and go into the bazaar" (14-15)? Showing signs of life Rusty goes to the forbidden Indian bazaar, enjoys with his Indian friends and thoroughly savours all. It makes him bold and he ventures again the next day wherein he promises Ranbir that he will play Holi with him. Harrison, who has his dubious ways of discovering, finds Rusty's lapse and he is taken to task. The hurdle in the form of Malacca cane whips puts off Rusty. The punishment sharpens his sense of isolation and Holi holds no significance for Rusty: "Holi, the festival of colours, the arrival of spring, the rebirth of the new year, the awakening of love, what were these things to him, they did not concern his life, he could not start a new life, not for one day ..." (36). Yet, overcoming his disillusionment Rusty celebrates Holi with his friends. The warm welcome and embrace by Ranbir and his friends dispel loneliness and for the first time in his life exhilaration washes over him: "... he had been caught up in the excitement of the colour game, overcome by an exhilaration he had never known ... He wanted this to go on for ever, this day of feverish emotion, this life in another world" (41-42). The human touch and connect add a new meaning and purpose to his life.

The fight with his guardian throws Rusty out of his home and he wanders to the Indian bazaar where he meets none. It intensifies his sense of loneliness and once again Rusty is pushed to the brink of the dismal abyss of separation and isolation. The abject situation frightens him for he knows none in the Indian bazaar. While sitting in front of the chaat shop, a woman's hand beckons him. Rusty eagerly goes in anticipation of companionship and shelter. The woman's sexual advances turn him off and he declines the comforts that he so earnestly seeks. The void in him cannot be filled by the woman's loneliness for the woman is also lonely and a cast away like Rusty: "They were both pitying each other, liking each other, but not enough to make them understand each other" (50). The dread of what the morrow may have in store for him sinks him "for there was nothing like loneliness for making Rusty conscious of his unhappy state" (51). He spends the night at the maidan acutely aware of his predicament. It makes him replay the past events of his life and every part serves to reinforce his lowly state: "Crouching there, wet and cold and muddy, he was overcome by a feeling of helplessness and self-pity: everyone and everything seemed to have turned against him; not only his people but also the bazaar and the chaat shop and even the elements" (52).

Neil Simon's *The Prisoner of Second Avenue* chronicles the story of Mel Edison. He lives with his wife Edna Edison on Second Avenue on the Upper East Side of Manhattan, New York City. An middle aged, he loses his job after twenty two years of working and not able to find another employment because of economic recession. Not wanting to worry his wife and being very confident of finding another job he does not confide in Edna in the beginning. A succession of events leads Edna to the truth. With each passing day Mel's confidence ebbs away leaving him with the doubt that there is a big conspiracy to undermine the working class in the United States. His identity and personality are defined by his job and the loss of the job makes him paranoid. He suffers a nervous breakdown wherein he rants against everyone and everything – neighbours, jarring street noises, malfunctioning air conditioning and toilet, lack of safe, good tasting food and the smell of garbage – things that were an integral part of his Manhattan apartment life and things that did not trouble him when he had his job going. When the job is lost, Mel is stripped of his identity. Without the identity to anchor him in reality, his ranting escalates making Edna fear for his mental health. He does not savour his food and sleep eludes him. He hollers back at Edna when she tries to calm him and he very acutely feels himself losing control of his life and things around him. Amidst such crises he refuses to seek medical help declaring that the doctor is dead and therapists burn a hole in his pockets.

He treasures the place where he had been living for a long time and cherishes the things he has accumulated over the years. When Edna suggests that they leave for a place that does not cost as much as Manhattan, he bluntly refuses. The tie pulls him back. The job, place and things have etched his identity and without them to remind him of his personality he would be like a boat without a rudder, lost in the waves of anxiety, doubt, depression and hopelessness. For a person who is already wilting under bouts of depression the burglary in his apartment wherein robbers loot everything becomes the breaking point. With them goes his identity. He fumes, rants and lashes out at everyone. Even Edna is not spared. Edna's decision to work and her finding a job as a secretary further aggravates Mel's sense of loss of identity. There is a reversal of role. Mel's role as the breadwinner is donned by Edna. These things conspire to isolate Mel and there comes a point of time when he simply refuses to talk to anyone. Edna attempts to draw him out draw flak. Hearing the news over the radio further increases his sense of loss and he is now convinced that he is the victim of "the social-economical-and-political-plot-to-undermine-the-working-classes-in-this-country". With no identity to hang on to Mel gradually distances himself from others. Normally a peace loving man Mel picks quarrels with his neighbours every thing in his mundane life gnaws at him with the noisy neighbours, accumulating garbage, out of order air conditioner and toilet, shortage of water and electricity and jarring street noises serving to add to his despair. Societal demands wreck havoc in Mel's life. It is the societal expectation that a man should earn well that pushes Mel to have a very low self esteem of himself. He believes that he has become a subject of mockery when Edna begins to earn bread. Moreover, it is a masculine trait to protect and preserve one's family and house. And Mel comes out as an incompetent man and husband when robbers strip his apartment.

When stripped of one's identity, human beings tend to react in different ways. Rusty in *The Room on the Roof* becomes a passive sufferer taking in everything and Mel in *The Prisoner of Second Avenue* rants and raves. The problem of identity crisis affects them in different ways but Rusty and Mel have lost the essential connection with themselves and the external world. Without the identity to define and label them they become stagnant and stop evolving which is a continuous process. Having lost their sense of belonging, an essential trait to bloom and survive, they become emotional wrecks failing to see hope at the end of the tunnel. They fail to understand themselves and hence fail to understand their environs. The identity crisis leads to a sense of loneliness. It poses a challenge to their sense of self. The kind of loneliness they Rusty and Mel suffer is

different and the degree of loneliness also varies between the two. Harrison's contempt and disregard stop Rusty from reaching out to others and Mel becomes lonely because he is suspicious and doubtful of everyone having lost his job and that Edna, his wife becomes the sole breadwinner. It empties them of all emotions and feelings. They are physically, emotionally, socially and intellectually isolated. They think hard but never put them into action nor are they willing to commit. Rusty broods the future, dreams of sudden and perfect companionship, romance and heroics and Mel about the conspirators who are out to strip the middle class of their status quo.

The inner pent up turmoil within them make them restless and when it reaches a breaking point they are completely unaware of their actions and their repercussions. Rusty is whipped for celebrating Holi and it maddens him to the extent of retaliating against his guardian: "The cut across his face had stung him to madness, to an unreasoning hate, and he did what previously he would only have dreamt of doing. Lifting a vase of the missionary's wife's best sweet peas off the glass cupboard, he flung it at his guardian's face" (46). Mel verbally abuses Edna and hurls abuses at the woman upstairs who later drenches him with a bucket of water. Their violent and aggressive behaviours make them afraid of themselves and Rusty shudders to realize that "madness and freedom and violence were new to him" (51). Edna forces her husband to seek medical help for his deteriorating mental state. Believing that giving vent to their bottled up anxiety and fear would release them from stress and depression makes them violent. But they realize that it does not match with their true inner feelings as Rusty soon learns in the maidan: "Crouching there, wet and cold and muddy, he was overcome by a feeling of helplessness and self-pity" (52). Wrong perception of themselves also leads Rusty and Mel to have identity crisis. Rusty's physical appearance is not favourable and it tweaks his self-image:

Rusty spent much of his time studying himself in the dressing table mirror; ... He was white. His guardian was pink, and the missionary's wife a bright red, and Rusty was white. With his thick lower lip and prominent cheekbones, he looked slightly Mongolian, especially in a half-light. He often wondered why no one else in the community had the same features. (14)

On the other hand, Mel sees himself as a failure and a victim – a failure on account of losing his job and a victim because he believes they are men more powerful than him to underscore him.

The mighty waves on the oceans are indistinguishable from one another but together they make an invincible power. Except for a few traits that set human beings apart they remain

essentially the same underneath. What they can realize and attain together is incomprehensible and beyond one's imagination and understanding. And it is an unexpressed canon that they come together to do so. Human relationships bring out the best in people and help recompense shortcomings. Nurturing human relationships stifle vices and advance virtues. Affirmation, love, approval and acceptance shown by people help overcome identity crisis. Encouraging and endearing words work wonder pulling out people from the trenches of rootlessness brought about by identity crisis. Right approach and attitude in a relationship can make a person feel whole and complete. Life experiences of Ruskin Bond and Neil Simon have taught them the indispensable bond of human relationships for they have struggled with identity crisis and the ensuing effects – Ruskin Bond's identity crisis the offshoot of being an Englishman in India and Neil Simon a Jew in America. Problems and troubles loom large in their works but every cloud has a silver lining in the form of human relationships. The cure to tribulations and adverse predicaments is provided by human relationships. By their very nature and their power of sustenance human relationships are redemptive and curative. They form the chief cornerstone of the way to emotional and spiritual healing. Rusty and Mel Edison are brought back from the brink of self-destruction through human relationships.

Rusty takes everything with a pinch of salt after having been burnt too many times. The ingrained doctrine of his guardian makes him take a step backward when it comes to association with other human beings. He does not freely proffer friendship nor does he accept. There is a strong barricade that he has built around himself that cannot be easily penetrated. But the barricade tumbles down like a castle of cards in the presence of Somi's warmth and friendship: "It was impossible to resist the warmth of his nature" (4). Rusty is irresistibly pulled, much to his amusement and surprise, towards Somi and Ranbir. They help Rusty come out of his cocoon. With free abandon Rusty enjoys and celebrates Holi with Ranbir and for the first time tastes and understands freedom of spirit and mind: "And, for one day, Rusty forgot his guardian and the missionary's wife and the supple malacca cane, and ran with the others through the town and into the forest" (41). The same day when Rusty leaves his guardian's house, Somi very gladly welcomes him into his home and shelter. The sight of Somi dispels darkness, anxiety and doubts: "... and he no longer felt alone: once again, Somi gave him a feeling of confidence" (56). At his house Somi provides for all the needs of Rusty. He provides not out of his wealth of money but out of the wealth of love, compassion and magnanimity that his little heart holds dear. The instant

connection that Rusty has with Somi and that which makes him feel at home compensates for all the troubles that Rusty had known since his parents' death: "His laugh rang out merrily, and there was something about the laugh, some music in it perhaps, that touched a chord of gaiety in Rusty's own hear" (22). Such familiarity and closeness offer solace to Rusty's bruised heart. He begins to learn that not all is evil and Rusty has more than he bargained for: "Rusty knew Somi well enough now to know that it wasn't necessary to thank him for anything; gratitude was taken for granted; in true friendship there are no formalities and no obligations" (60). Somi serves to enhance the notion that not everyone has the same insight. Somi sees through Rusty and has a glimpse of his heart and soul. This revelation draws out Rusty who is thrilled at the idea that there is something good and desirable in him. It boosts his identity and self-image. Rusty invents his identity. Friendship roots his wandering mind and heart giving him a reason to live and enjoy life.

To earn his livelihood Somi sets Rusty as Kishen Kapoor's tutor whereby Rusty gets to live in the house of the Kapoors where he falls in love with Meena Kapoor. The comfort and warmth that he received from the Kapoors make him bloom. His life takes on a different hue and dimension and Rusty is delighted to find a new meaning and direction in his life. The wild and uncontrollable Kishen takes on Rusty like a house on fire and it flatters Rusty: "Rusty had liked him in spite of the younger boy's unattractive qualities, and now liked him more; for Kishen had taken Rusty into his home and confidence without knowing him very well and without asking any questions. Kishen was a scoundrel, a monkey – crude and well-spoilt – but, for him to have taken a liking to Rusty, he must have some virtues ... or so Rusty reasoned" (81). The bond between them metamorphoses into something beautiful and delicate having passed through different phases. To begin with it is the bond between a teacher and a student gradually becoming a bond between two friends and still later it becomes a spiritual bond cementing the relationship between them as brothers. Under Rusty's care and counsel Kishen also flourishes and opens out. The role gives a new insight into his own identity and individuality. He discovers himself and his potentials. With a new identity he has the confidence and courage to take the bull by its horns:

Rusty felt protectively towards the boy, for a bond of genuine affection had grown between the two. Somi was Rusty's best friend, in the same way that Ranbir was a friend, and their friendship was on a high emotional plane. But Kishen was a brother more than a friend. He loved Rusty, but without knowing or thinking or saying it, and that is the love of a brother. (114)

Rusty is on the road to recovery and the sun starts shining on his world with fervour when he sets his eyes on Meena Kapoor. He sees her for the first time when he goes to Kapoor's house to look for a job: "And when he lay down to sleep, he saw her in his mind's eye, and for the first time took conscious note of her beauty, of her warmth and softness; and made up his mind that he would fall in love with her" (81). Thus, Rusty's new life begins where he gains new realization about his self, worth and personality. He is too delighted to find Meena reciprocating his love. Meena like Rusty is lost to the world. She is tossed about by the waves of care, uncertainty and insecurity because of her husband's addiction to alcohol. These two castaways cling to each other. His new identity as Meena's lover adds vitality to his existence from which he derives his power and nourishment. The buoyancy, the resultant of his new found love and life, keeps him afloat. Kishen in his own innocence endorses the love between his mother and Rusty. Rusty becomes jubilant to realize that Kishen does not treat him as a rival to his mother's affection but generously shares her with him: "If you love her, he said, 'I'm not jealous'" (101).

The untimely and unexpected death of Meena Kapoor devastates and shatters him. Once again Rusty finds himself in the pits of depression and meaninglessness having lost the desire and the need to live. He decides to leave Dehra and get an assisted passage to England. On his way he goes to Haridwar to bid final goodbye to Kishen. But when Rusty finds Kishen a waif and a castaway in Haridwar he decides to dedicate his life to the cause of Kishen and his care. It gives him a new vision and mission and these once again restore his lost identity and once again give him a reason and a cause to live for:

He was sure of one thing, they were both refugees – refugees from the world ... They were each other's shelter, each other's refuge, each other's help. Kishen was a *jungli*, divorced from the rest of mankind, and Rusty was the only one who understood him – because Rusty too was divorced from mankind. And theirs was a tie that would hold, because they were the only people who knew each other and loved each other. (183)

For Mel in *The Prisoner of Second Avenue* lifeline comes in the form of his wife and his siblings. Edna is a loving, supportive and understanding wife. When Mel loses his job, she gets one and puts up with all his tantrums and verbal abuses trying to be accommodative and helpful. She is anything but vindictive. She rushes home in the afternoon to fix his lunch and to check up on his emotional state. Juggling between her job and household work and caring for Mel she runs herself ragged. By thus doing she reveals to Mel her true inner self and feeling and it begins to

work changes in Mel. Through her gestures and efforts she makes Mel realize his failings and understand that he needs help. She is not altogether righteous having her share of bickering and fights. But she rises above them to help Mel rise from wallowing in self-pity and rightful indignation. Mel gradually comes round the corner and sees what Edna had been through. It reinstates his lost identity and as a true man stands up for his wife when she is verbally assaulted by their upstairs neighbour and he even goes to the extent of plotting her destruction. On having heard about his condition Mel's sisters and brother come and do what they humanely can do to put him right. Harry, Mel's brother offers money for a summer camp for them to attend. The inherent goodness in people and their unfailing faith and trust in Mel pull him back from the brink of self-destruction. It reimburses his identity and it dawns on him that it is not the material comforts and the social security given by a job that gives him his true identity. They are transient. Rather it is man's ability to make the most out of little that lasts bringing in its wake happiness, contentment and sense of fulfillment. Mel let his external environment cloud his perception and corrode his identity. Through the strong bond demonstrated in his family Mel learns that his identity will remain with him and it is not defined or restricted by what one does or does not experience. His wife, sisters and brother even in the midst of adversity do not lose face. Particularly Edna does not lose her essential character even when she loses her job. It serves to enhance Mel's faith in the true essence of things.

Human relationships come to the aid of Rusty and Mel without which their lives would have continued in misery, dejection and helplessness. It augments their happiness, health and longevity. It is of more worth than possessions and assets for it alone can refresh, renew and rejuvenate the body, the mind and the soul. The world is not a utopia. Distasteful and unpalatable things are bound to happen. And when they happen they can have demoralizing effects. Fidelity, patience and fortitude manifested by human relationships will blunt the impact.

Conclusion:

No man is an island. Man was born to interact, communicate, converse and connect. Strong and healthy relationships result in the formation of a beautiful and perfect world. Man was created for this very purpose. Things happen that take one's breath away. Man is dumbfounded when things go beyond his control and expectation. These are very trying times when he for a period of time loses his sense of time, place and purpose. Alone he cannot redeem himself. Being adrift without an identity and a sense of belonging is frightening and confounding. But human relationships that foster love, compassion, cooperation and understanding have amazing healing

and redemptive powers. Human relationships are nothing short of miracle without which the world cannot survive.

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