



JOHN STEINBECK'S FICTIONAL ART AND SKILL IN DEPICTING THE IMAGE OF MAN AND GROUP LEADER CONCEPT IN HIS FICTIONAL WORLD: A BRIEF ANALYSIS

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Abstract

This research paper is an out and exploration that sheds light with an aim to promote a conceptualization of John Steinbeck in his fictional domain. This research paper sharply unfolds John Steinbeck's fictional art and skill in illustrating the image of man and group leader concept in his fictional realm. This research paper comes up with a fact that most of Steinbeck's fiction represent American dream through the character for the betterment of their life and it is neatly ends up with open declaration of Steinbeck that the danger, the glory and choice rests finally in man.

Key Words: Conceptualization, Image, Leader, American, Dream, Betterment, Life, Danger, Glory, Choice.

What is commonly understood is that man is a complex creature with different drives and notions and he incessantly thrives with hope so as to overcome his inadequacies. John Steinbeck's pre-occupation with life and living unfolds the image of man and his image of man has been taken as a product of dreams and instincts. Though his image of man has a universal appeal, it is "the obvious product of despairing self-hatred, extended from the individual self to the whole race of man, with its accompanying will to degradation and humiliation" (Fuller 7). This accompanying will present in man makes John Steinbeck declare rather openly that the danger, the glory, and choice rests finally in man. Steinbeck himself declares thus:

"Man himself has become our greatest hazard and our only hope, so that today St. John the apostle may well be paraphrased. In the end is the word and word is man and the word is with men" (Noble Prize Acceptance Speech 22).

Most of Steinbeck's fiction represents the American dream – for betterment and this dream is prevalent with successive phases. In the words of Frederic Carpenter, "First the dream of conquest, then of escape, then the settlement and ownership. But something was lacking in all these dreams – some possessive egotism vitiated them. The novels of Steinbeck's second period describe more unselfish types of Americans, who fail for other reasons: irresponsibility or fanaticism or defective mentality. Most recently **The Long Valley** and **The Grapes of Wrath** have suggested the possible realization of the American dream through courage and active intelligence..." (P 68). Taking into account the second period of Steinbeck's dream in **Of Mice and Men In Dubious Battle** and **The Grapes of Wrath**, it is also worthy to abduce it with the appetites – desire to satisfy the natural necessity. The natural necessity to own a house and a piece of land in **Of Mice and Men** gives significance to a study of outcastes and failures. This simplest form of this dream is found in George, Lennie and Candy and these characters achieve significance because they give expression to the American Dream. Here what one can find is:

"Steinbeck has compassion without mandlinity, sentiment without sentimentality, a stern, realistic, very observant and deductive sense about the realities and about the consequences in a chain of cause" (Rascoe 346).

Even un mindful acts of Lennie and George's rescue of him thereafter do not lead them to lose hope thereby rejecting their dream. In due course, because of their lack of pragmatic intelligence, they remain merely dreamers. The intensity of the dream, devoid of self interests, takes shape as a dream which stresses the struggle for freedom in **The Grapes of Wrath**. The Joad family is 'tractored out' by the share-cropped and they move to California with a hope of surviving. The experiences which Jim Casy and Tom Joad undergo make abandon their 'possessive egotism' and educate them to work for the development of the whole mass. Warren French has put it thus:

"Wherever prejudice and a sense of self-importance inhibit co-operation.... (which) can be achieved only through willingness of individuals of their own volition to put aside special interests and work towards a common purpose" (French 78).

Jim Casy is the advocator of the great human soul and is the action hero who even sacrifices himself for the cause. The selfless unity amidst the dispossessed thereby paves way for a new strength and is first suggested when Tom and Casy meet Muley Graves. Casy's wilderness philosophy incorporates with Muley Grave's idea of sharing the food and the past holiness



of mankind – and this transforms him and leads him to realize the dream by his death. Tom learns both by Casy’s deeds and words that even if Tom dies, it will not matter, for the dream will live. “His soul will become the soul of America, struggling for freedom His soul goes marching on. The dream continues” (Carpenter 78). This dream for betterment for the whole humanity is present in *In Dubious Battle* which presents the actual problems of the promised land – California – and its real state of the farmers’ association and the migrants. This objective novel suggests’ “the abyss between dream and reality, the heroic describes the attempt to make the dream real therefore it becomes exclusively realistic. The very existence of the dream is denied by its dreamers” (Dreamer 75). The leaders – Jim and Mac – guide and torment the ranch workers for a feeble protest. The workers dream of high wages, while Mac and Jim dream for the cause and Doc Burton dreams for the values of his people. They all fail because of the steadfastness to achieve it without thinking about the imbalance of power. They live on a realistic level as a man of action should and abandon the very existence of it. On realistic grounds, they struggle and fight for their survival, while trying to accomplish the dream. They, as a group or as individuals, are subjected to the condition of animal existence.

John Steinbeck depicts his man as a social organism being imbued with certain instinctual qualities. These instinctual qualities present in his man make one feel the animalizing tendency of his man, for Steinbeck himself found it valid to study him first as an animal. Man in his success or failure exposes his animal nature. As Edmund Magny – Claude says,

“Steinbeck has an extraordinary power to catch and paint man in his most elementary terms those that bring him closer to other man or ever to other beings” (Claude 148).

The animals, presented with a symbolic significance in Steinbeck’s novels, help one to find out the underlying drives and urges present in man. The primordial nature of Lennie, represented in *Of Mice and Men*, gives his man a bestial quality. Regarding intellect, he lacks for social motivation. In *In Dubious Battle*, the whole group, when they resort to violence, become a group animal being subjected to bloodshed, starvation and death. James Seth holds:

“The best ambition a man could cherish, both for himself and for his fellows, is that he and they alike may, each in himself and each in his own way ... find the fellowship of a common life and a common good” (P 245).

This seeking of the common good by malformed leaders makes the strikers purely animals. In *The Grapes of Wrath*, the presentation of animals with their symbolical significance directly or indirectly presents the instinctual nature of man. Here Steinbeck began to express a sense of limit to the biological mysticism of non-teleological thinking – and instead to open himself to political humanism – a sense of outrage of social injustice. Steinbeck’s assertion of a man’s achievement in a group paves the way for his non-teleological thinking which “concerns itself primarily not with what should be, or could be, or might be, but rather what actually ‘is’ – attempting at most to answer the already sufficiently difficult questions **what** or **how**, instead of **why**” (Steinbeck 135). His biological analogy assisted him in formulating his idea about group with an objective reality. This realism paves the way to apprehend the inherent conflicts which often drive a man to the brink of a tragedy and social dynamism. The group man concept is highlighted in a subtle manner in *In Dubious Battle*, *Of Mice and Men* and *The Grapes of Wrath*. In these novels, Steinbeck’s men form a group to achieve their ends and “this group idea is American, not Russian and stems from Walt Whitman, not Karl Marx” (Carpenter 246). The group theory evolves in *Of Mice and Men* with the leadership of George over Lennie and Curley over others, except Slim, which thereby suggests for two groups – George, Lennie, Candy and Crooks and Curley, Curley’s wife and his father. With this group, especially under the leadership of George, Steinbeck makes the American dream prevail thereby giving us the idea about egocentric nature present in it. Later in *The Grapes of Wrath*, the group concept is merged with Emerson’s ‘over-soul’ concept to the big soul by Jim Casy, and merges with Walt Whitman’s religion of love of all men and his mass democracy” (P 324). This love to his fellow feelings makes Tom Joad and Ma Joad evolve as leaders from the strugglers and the experiences found parallel in their society where “oppression and intimidation only serves to strengthen the social group” (Lisca 172).

Having achieved the democratic way of life, they strive to attain it. When they fail, they still emerge with hope and courage to achieve it. In *In Dubious Battle*, the group idea is informed by Doc Burton and is not maintained by the malformed leaders. Here “Human life is wasted for the sake of dogma, and the strike portrayed on the surface of it as so glamorous – emerges indeed horrible” (Geismar 262). The leaders – Mac and Jim – favouring the cause fall prey to their ideologies and Doc Burton emerges as an ideal hero who thinks of the group – man values and wishes to know his nature, his ends and his desires.



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