

Chapter-IV

Conclusion

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Sinclair Lewis emerged as a novelist during a period of significant social change in America. The Hamiltonian policy of industrialization and commerce had been fully implemented with the result that America underwent a series of rapid changes on all levels.

Industrialization gave birth to capitalistic economy and competitive spirit. The idea of the ethic of success become dominant. America became a rich and powerful land throughout the world. People from all over the world started migrating to America. Industrialization gave birth to new problems of urbanization, business and factory workers. The rise of the middle class and its demands a new centre of power in American society.

America's participation in the First World War also gave her a historical and political importance. America lost her provincial nature and become part of the modern world. During this post-war period, the middle

class achieved a certain kind of importance. This period of rapid social change created a set of socio-economic and socio-moral problems in American society. It is precisely these socio-economic and socio-moral dimensions that Lewis's satire captures in his novels.

During this period, realism and naturalism were the two dominant literary trends. The pioneers of these trends in America were Hamlin Garland, Stephen Crane and Frank Norris, Sinclair Lewis, however, wrote his novels in a predominantly realistic tradition, though he does share with the naturalistic writers the basic problem of the relationship between the will and the environment.

Sinclair Lewis's realism gave importance to native culture and average experiences of the middle class. He concentrated on the middle class and their moral behaviour. He used satire to attack American society. He satirized social, political, economical and religious conditions of society. As a satirist, Sinclair Lewis gives a critical analysis of his age.

II

If we take a general view of all the five novels studied so far, we find that the basic relationship which generates that satire in Lewis's works is the between the will and the environment. In Main Street, Babbitt, Arrowsmith, Elmer Gantry and Dodsworth, we find this basic relationship in different forms. In Main Street, Carol's idealistic will is fitted against the hostile environment of Gopher Prairie. Babbitt shows the corruption of the individual will in an environment which itself is corrupt and decayed. In Arrowsmith, the hero is a mature extension of Carol's idealistic will. As a dedicated scientist devoted to the cause of knowledge, Martin Arrowsmith fights a lonely battle against the corrupt environment that surrounds him. In Elmer Gantry, the pattern of relationship between the will and the environment runs parallel to that of Babbitt to a great extent; because here also the will of the protagonist is made corrupt by the forces of environment that surround him. Main Street and Arrowsmith form one group in that they show the battle between idealistic will and environment, while Babbitt and Elmer Gantry portray the process of the corruption of the

individual will in a corrupt environment. Dodsworth places this pattern of relationship in a different key. Here the conflict shown is that between two cultures, European and American in the domestic context of marital disintegration.

These different explorations of the relationship between the will and the environment are a natural product of Lewis's realism and satire. To borrow Northrop Frye's term, the kind of satire Lewis uses in his novels ^{is} the "Menippean Satire". As a result Lewis ^{is} not very much interested in plumbing the inner psychological depths of his characters. He is more concerned with their mental attitudes than with their innermost experiences. Using ^a loose, episodic narrative structure, the technique of contrast, parallelism, the strategy of verbal irony and sometimes caricature, Lewis's satire as expressed in these five novels, becomes an effective, penetrating comment on certain basic aspects of American culture and society.

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