

CHAPTER - V

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From the foregoing discussion it can be observed that the present dissertation deals with the aspect of social realism in the three selected novels by Steinbeck viz., In Dubious Battle (1936), Of Mice and Men (1937), and The Grapes of Wrath (1939). In these three novels Steinbeck has depicted the contemporary social reality of the Depression period. These three novels are deeply concerned with social exploitation of the poor, migrant ranch workers and fruit pickers. Steinbeck has shown a fine contrast between the world of rich orchard owners on the one hand, and the world of poor ranch workers and fruit pickers on the other. He sympathies with the poor migrant ranch workers and fruit pickers.

In his earliest works, Cup of Gold, To a God Unknown, and Tortilla Flat Steinbeck's main concern has not been to depict the social reality. The protagonists of these novels are self-centred. The indulgence of self is responsible for their failure. In Of Mice and Men, and In Dubious Battle Steinbeck shows that man fails not so much because of indulgence of self but because of cruelty of other men. Jim in In Dubious Battle, Lennie and George in Of Mice and Men are not self centred. It is obvious from the fact that they have a meaningful relationship with other men. As group members they lived meaningful life.

They fail because a group of men called "group-man" by Steinbeck challenges the right of these protagonists. Steinbeck curiously realizes that the world of these poor migrant ranch workers cannot survive longer. These people are not capable to cope with the pressures of modern commercial ways of life. In In Dubious Battle, Jim feels alive when he works for the Party. In Of Mice and Men, George and Lennie together are able to have dream. But destruction occurs when a group of men challenges the right of these protagonists to live their lives.

The Grower's Association in In Dubious Battle, rich orchard owners in The Grapes of Wrath and big ranch-owners in Of Mice and Men, are the representatives of the modern commercial American society. They challenge the rights of these poor, migrant ranch workers and fruit-pickers. Steinbeck has realized the ultimate failure of brotherhood in Of Mice and Men in the context of civilized modern society. The values of this modern society, are those of success, property, status, respectability etc. With these values modern civilization seems to be inimical to the values of brotherhood celebrated in Of Mice and Men. Freedom, innocence, simplicity cannot be retained longer in the money-minded, developed society. The values of success, luxury, money and status belonging to society, are prominently focused on by Steinbeck in his novels- In Dubious Battle, Of Mice and Men, and The Grapes of Wrath. These three novels could together constitute an expose of modern, commercial American society.

This was perhaps Steinbeck's vision of modern American society. He investigates in his novels the themes intimately connected with modern American society-business monopolies, terrorist groups, the crowd as a social force, alienation from society and loss of moral values.

The setting, both natural and social, plays an important role in In Dubious Battle, Of Mice and Men, and The Grapes of Wrath. These three novels repeatedly evoke the beauty of the long Salinas Valley with its brutal ways of life. California is the setting of these three novels. Steinbeck's close association with that land is an important factor in his novels. The landscape which he had seen and experienced in his childhood left a great impact on his mind. Though he was living in a small town he was equally familiar with the country near his town which he has depicted in In Dubious Battle, Of Mice and Men and The Grapes of Wrath. A beautiful Californian landscape with the poor neglected ranch workers fascinated him. The physical and biological environment of California attracted him greatly. Alongwith the depiction of physical setting of nature he displays an awareness of and sympathy for minority groups.

It is curious to note in his three novels of the 30's that there are big orchards and ranches well grown but there is a striking lack of close connection with the human life.

The agricultural business of California has turned into the big farm factories. The exploitation of the workers became an inevitable part of this region. The worker was deprived of home, individual rights, civil liberties and social status. He was kept close to starvation point. Steinbeck was conscious about all these things and has faithfully depicted all these contemporary social aspects in his novels- In Dubious Battle, Of Mice and Men, and The Grapes of Wrath.

Steinbeck's characters like Jim, Mac, Doctor Burton, George Lennie, Crooks, Ma, Tom Joad, Jim Casy and Rose of Sharon are deeply rooted to the reality of the 1930's. These characters provide the realistic approach to life. These characters celebrate human togetherness. Steinbeck explores the theme of human togetherness obtaining among these poor, migrant farm workers and fruit-pickers in two related contexts i.e. community and society. These are the two prominent aspects depicted by him in In Dubious Battle, Of Mice and Men, and The Grapes of Wrath. One aspect deals with man's attainment of values of community and of brotherhood. The second aspect deals with modern civilization which seems to be hostile to community values. Steinbeck's novels thus are the grand celebration of humanistic values prevailing among the poor, migrant farm workers and fruit-pickers. He has strongly criticized the foul, perverted outlook of modern civilized society. He became indignant when he saw the cruel exploitation of these migrant farm workers and fruit pickers by rich orchard owners and big farm workers. He sympathies with these farm workers and fruit-pickers.

In The Grapes of Wrath the nature of man's struggle with the society is more severe but man is ultimately triumphant. Tom Joad and Jim Casy successfully built a bridge of contact with other men. In this novel Steinbeck is concerned with the survival of these poor farmers and their final victory in the future. He shows that these farmers have retained their morality which is based on love, humanity and unselfishness. Rose of Sharon, Ma, Tom Joad have renewed our faith in humanity because they have this ideal morality which is based on love and unselfishness. These farmers have their glorious past, their present is disturbed by the dark shadows of the Great Depression but they will certainly achieve the bright future by great social struggle. In short, Steinbeck's The Grapes of Wrath opens out into future.

The fruit-pickers of Torgass Valley in In Dubious Battle, ranch workers of Salinas valley in Of Mice and Men, and migrant farm workers of Oklahoma in The Grapes of Wrath are hopeful for new and better life. The present condition of these poor migrant farm workers and fruit-pickers is not good but they can hope for the better life by social struggle. Steinbeck's characters are marked by this sense of new life in future. This better new life is possible only when there will be a better society and Steinbeck hopes that these poor farmers will certainly achieve a better society one day by great social struggle.

Steinbeck realizes that the bright future is possible for these poor, migrant farmers and fruit-pickers because they have the ideal morality which is based on love and unselfishness. And because of this ideal morality social action can emerge in future and for emergence of such social action future is very necessary. Thus, Steinbeck is an optimistic social-critic who is very conscious about all the contemporary issues of the 30's. He is determined to show things as they actually are. In these three novels we see Steinbeck, the realist, who looks objectively and sympathetically on all forms and activities of life. In conclusion, we can say that Steinbeck is a conscious social critic with a sense of hope whose sympathies lie invariably with the exploited class.