CHAPTER 2

IMAGE OF MAN
John Steinbeck believed that “man is a double thing, a group animal and at the same time an individual... he can not successfully be the second until he has fulfilled the first”! This concept of man informs the meaning and controls the artistic material of Steinbeck’s writings throughout his career as a writer. Starting with his first novel *Cup Of Gold* (1929), and continuing through his last work, *The Winter of Our Discontent* (1961), Steinbeck shows man caught up in the process of living, trying to rise above an individuality which prevents him from becoming a group animal, and trying, as a group animal, to retain his individuality. The concept, it seems, has three parts – man as just an individual, man as a group animal, and man as a “successful” individual, or ideal man. When man becomes a successful individual in Steinbeck, he attains dignity.

Steinbeck’s image of man can be studied conveniently under four conventional aspects: man’s relationship to a physical world in which he finds himself; man’s relationship to a metaphysical world which may be; man’s relationship to a social world which he creates; and finally, man as a distinct and ideal individual. In Steinbeck’s best works these facets of his image of man find expressions in each of the technical aspects such as choices of mythical structure, legends, protagonists, imagery and prose style. *In Dubious Battle* (1936) and *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939) can be cited as the best examples exhibiting technical perfection and his image of man.

John Steinbeck’s writings unfold an image of man characterised by comprehensiveness, complexity and variety. It helps in visualising in general the major drives and motivation in human life. This image has also the universality of appeal, even though Steinbeck views life through a predominant American
perspective. Further this image gives unity as well as continued relevance to the
fictional microcosm of Steinbeck.

Edmund Fuller has rightly emphasised the significance of such an image;

All fiction is comment upon the life and nature of man – though not necessarily
consciously so...The writer can not be wholly coherent artist, unless he possesses
a wholly coherent view of man to inform, illuminate and integrate his work.²

Such a picture of man projected in modern fiction is “the abivious product
of despairing self hatred, extended from the individual self to the whole race of
man, with its accompanying will to degradation and humiliation” ³

Steinbeck’s is an image of man which uplifts us and makes us aware of the
potentialities inherent in us. It helps to sustain our sagging spirit and beckons us
to distant and unsuspected possibilities, His method of apprehending reality and
his humanistic and compassionate perspective condition and influence this image
of man.

In his novels up to Burning Bright (1950), Steinbeck’s physical image of
man is of an animal capable of reason, but otherwise not clearly distinguishable
except in the denotation of his genius and species. Man may pursue goals a little
more abstract than those pursued by other species, but the motivation for such
pursuits are not essentially different. In his very first novel Cup of Gold, Steinbeck speculates that his youthful hero’s yearning to leave Wales and seek
his fortune in the world “was a desire for a thing he could not name. Perhaps the
same force moved him which collected the birds into exploring parties and made
the animals sniff up-wind for the scent of winter.” ⁴ Steinbeck does not shrink
from the logic of extending this understanding of individual motivation to man in
general: In Sea of Cortez, he thus posits his view:
might not at future time, but without some mutation it is not likely that they will
lose this trait. And perhaps our species is not likely to forego war without some
psychic mutation which is present, at least, does not seem imminent. And if one
places the blame for killing and destroying on economic insecurity, on inequality,
on injustice, he is simply stating the preposition in another way. We have what
we are. Perhaps the crayfish feels the itch of jealousy, or perhaps he is sexually
insecure. The effect is that he fights. 5

The above statement is merely the explicit setting forth of a physical image which
can be copiously illustrated from the novels preceding it. Joseph Wayne’s
reflections on the ecological relationship of eels, pigs, mountain lions and man in
To a God Unknown, (1933) Grandfather’s statements about the motivations of the
pioneers in The Red Pony and Doc Burton’s explanations of mob action in In
Dubious Battle, significantly contribute to such an understanding.

Early in A Russian Journal, (1948) Steinbeck writes that “the hardest thing
in the world for a man is the simple observation of what is” 6 But in The Log, he
was able to observe ‘what is’ and still fuse thought and things into an integrated
nucleus with dimension and tone. In A Russian Journal, Steinbeck and Capa
simply report what they saw. Since the volume is a minor work which tells us
what the Russian people wear, what they serve at dinner, how they dance and sing
and play, it really does little to help us achieve a fuller understanding of either the
scenes described or the minds of the describers.

As a writer Steinbeck belongs broadly to the naturalistic school. He has
imbibed the best elements of American naturalism. As Charles Child Walcutt has
pointed out,
the heart and the demands of the mind are Steinbeck's constant preoccupation; they form the poles of his thought in everyone of his novels. In Steinbeck there is an endeavour to blend rebellious progressivism with determinism. Actually out of the naturalistic heritage, Steinbeck forged a powerful and effective kind of realism which is both human and forward looking. He is in certain respects akin to Maxim Gorky's Socialist Realism. As Alfred Kazin remarks, Steinbeck, Standing apart from both contemporary naturalists and the new novel of sensibility that one finds in Faulkner and Wolfe, brought a fresh note into contemporary fiction because he promised a realism less terror-ridden than the Depression novel, yet consciously responsible to society.

Steinbeck's realism has a constructive quality; it is affirmative in tone. It thrives on hopeful and optimistic spirit, unlike Emile Zola's. The latter's approach is mechanistic and grossly materialistic. Steinbeck's endeavour is not only to study phenomena with scientific exactitude, but also to search behind facts for a philosophical resolution of their complexity. In this respect he resembles Thomas Mann who is the outstanding example in Europe of purposeful and significant realism. Like Mann who presents an example of novelist as thinker, Steinbeck also belongs to that school. It is the super adding of the speculative element which distinguishes Steinbeck's realism. In fact he has assimilated the intellectual tradition of the great American writers, brought it up-to-date and invested it with a contemporary relevance. As Frederick Carpenter points out, in him "the mystical transcendentalism of Emerson reappears and the earthy democracy of Whitman and the pragmatic instrumentalism of William James and John Dewey".
characterization, setting and style. He chooses invariably the lives of ordinary human beings and portrays those aspects of experience which are of everyday occurrence. In his earliest novel, *Cup of Gold*, he deals with a pseudo-historical tale. But the theme of loneliness and alienation is a universal one which high and low feel and experience. In other novels too, Steinbeck portrays the rough and arduous exertions of ordinary human beings to survive in a hostile and ungenial environment. In *To A God Unknown*, he pictures the spiritual quests of ordinary mortals to identify their religious propensities. Nature and society are invariable the backdrop in his works. While *The Pastures of Heaven*, *East of Eden* etc. have the Californian landscape as their setting, the strike novel, the stories of the itinerant farm hands and migrant workers are seen in the background of an inequitable system of property ownership and exploitation of the weaker sections. These novels are perfect examples of creative realism, not only in form and theme but also in characterisation and style. Except in *Cup of Gold*, in all other novels Steinbeck’s style, which is simple, effective and vigorous, moves in harmony with his theme and characterization.

Thus Steinbeck’s realism is of a class by itself. It enables him to portray American life with a vividness and immediacy found only seldom in modern fiction. In many others realism as a technique serves to cramp the author’s vision, and restrict it to a narrow segment of life. On the other hand Steinbeck’s realism provides amplitude and comprehensiveness.

The Nobel Prize citation acclaimed Steinbeck

As an independent expounder of the truth with an unbiased instinct for what is genuinely American, be it good or wicked... He likes to contrast the simple joy of
American temperament also expressed in his great feeling for nature, for the
tilled soil, the wasteland and the mountains and the ocean coasts. This unique understanding of man and life is made possible because of a special quality of his realism. It is ambivalence, he has a divided vision which keeps him artistically at an uncommitted distance. This enables him to see life and to envisage the human predicament with disinterestedness and impartiality. Indeed amateur biology and scientific bias have endowed him with a non-teleological perspective. This has added an additional dimension to his realism. Consequently he sees life steadily and as a whole. Hence he apprehends rightly the inherent conflict in life which often drives a man to the brink of tragedy. Behind Steinbeck’s lambent pessimism can be discerned a realisation of this tragic potentiality. But this does not atrophy his love of life: nor does it lessen the zest and vigour with which he portrays it. Because of this double vision which oscillates between laughter and tears, his understanding becomes all the more penetrating and consequently his portrayals of typical situations in life are suffused with a warmth and immediacy which produces spontaneous recognition and delight. Steinbeck’s brand of realism helps him to comprehend a variety of situational stresses which even ordinary, unheroic natures are also subjected to. In other words he apprehends the heroic even in ordinary human beings. This is a democratic extension of sensibility.

Suffering and failure result from the inability of the individual to measure up to the conflicting pulls which encompass him. The successful ones are those who survive with marginal discomfiture. Such characters manage to stay within an uncommitted middle distance. They observe men and situations with a wise
discrimination, while accepting the built-in limitations of life caused by environment, inherent flaws of character and the arbitrariness of chance.

As an artist, Steinbeck's standpoint is also affected by this dichotomy. His circumscribed, ambivalent stance gives to his realism pressure and strength. In more than one sense Steinbeck is a committed writer, involved totally in the cause of the common man. Hence he cannot escape moral involvement. But his artistic 'negative capability' impels him to withhold commitment. This conflict has generated much heat and energy in his mechanism of sensibility. To contain as well as assimilate this energy, Steinbeck is compelled to seek the side of the inexhaustible source of all power namely nature and primitivism. This makes him a fabulist who exploits myths and fables for objectifying his vision of life by a process of extended symbolization of the existential stresses of contemporary life. His realism manifests itself invariably through allegory and symbolism. Even in his most distanced work, *In Dubious Battle*, there is Biblical symbolism and Miltonic echoes of unjust contention of the fallen angels against God. The *Old Testament* parallelism of the main action of *The Grapes of Wrath* and *East of Eden* enhance their artistic and ideological significance.

The esthetic distance which Steinbeck adopts in his works is a salient feature of his realism. In this respect Reloy Garcia discerns similarity between D.H. Lawrence and Steinbeck. Both have a divided vision arising from ambivalence.

It is the ambivalence, this evolving conflict between the public man and the private person, this conflict between social and political immersion, and an
Steinbeck’s realism is satisfying because it provides illumination and delight. It is affirmative in nature and induces acceptance of life. Never does it sponsor defeatism. This is a trait which he shares with the great masters of European fiction. As with them, Steinbeck’s primary concern is with life itself. Form and convention, allegory and myth, are means to an end namely to visualize his image of men. Even scientific concepts help in interpreting life. Biology assists him in formulating his ideas about group psyche and mass psychology. Like George Bernard Shaw, he makes use of Darwinian Evolution in understanding the rhythm of progress. The great books of the world like The Bible and Hindu Scriptures, transcendental concepts like Emerson’s Oversoul, help to confirm him in his great faith in human perfectibility. Study of nature and biology enables him to see man in his relational background. His purposeful realism gives vistas of man’s enviable role in the universal scheme of things. Indeed in his realism and art, Steinbeck reveals a close affinity to Chekhov and Dickens, both of whom studied and portrayed man with sympathy and insight. He has also imbibed the philosophical realism of Leo Tolstoy who wrote with the unreflecting conviction that men ultimately are more like than unlike one another.

Steinbeck’s humanism is another factor which conditioned his image of man. It is the king-pin of his artistic vision. His humanism manifests itself as an undiscriminating love for man and for all his work. This love also makes itself explicit negatively as protest, moral indignation and a tragic sense of failure, besides in its constant and ever present form of compassion. Born out of this instinctive love is his optimism and a fond faith in a millennium. While
contemporary literature wallowed in despondency and scepticism, Steinbeck maintained a sturdy faith in abiding human values.

Steinbeck’s humanism made him a bitter critic of the Establishment and this made many mistake him for a communist. The only intelligent interpretation is that he was more far-sighted than many. He observed the simmering discontent of the day and saw in it the symptoms of a more serious malady, which has blighted the life pattern of present day America. As James Gray notes,

Steinbeck accepted as early as the 1930s the obligation to take a stand in his writing against tendencies in the American way of life to which the campus rebels of the present have been making vigorous objection.\textsuperscript{12}

The dissidents of \textit{Tortilla Flat}, (1935), \textit{Cannery Row} (1945) and \textit{Sweet Thursday} (1954) are, according to James Gray, forerunners of the hippie generation of today. In his Nobel Acceptance speech, Steinbeck reiterated the duty of the writer “to declare and to celebrate man’s proven capacity for greatness of heart and spirit, for gallantry in defeat, for courage, compassion and love”\textsuperscript{13}. He asserted that the ancient commission of the writer has not changed. The writer’s task is the exposing of man’s grievous faults and failures, and the dredging up to the surface our dark and dangerous dreams, for the purpose of improvement. He declared that the danger and the glory and the choice rest finally in man. He summed up thus:

Man himself has become our greatest hazard and our only hope, so that to-day

St. John the apostle may well be paraphrased: In the end is the \textit{word} and the word is \textit{man} and the word is with \textit{men}.\textsuperscript{14}

Steinbeck envisages man as a complex creature with a multitude of drives and motives. The paradoxical and often mutually exclusive motives are characteristic of this highly evolved being. The inhibitions he suffers from and
the inadequacies, which blur his noble nature fascinate rather than repel Steinbeck. Indeed the less fortunate and more malformed among the species evoke more of his sympathy and considerate attention. To him man is preeminently a "two-legged paradox". 

Steinbeck's humanism is essentially an inclusive one. Not only man but also his handiwork to the extent that it is helpful to his existence is welcome and acceptable to him. Through influenced by Thoreau in his pantheism and nature worship, Steinbeck is not an enemy of machine. He welcomes it if it is a help and a blessing and condemns it when it becomes the enemy and oppressor of the wage earner. In *The Grapes of Wrath* Steinbeck indulges in a tirade against the tractor which pulls down the hearths and homes of the share croppers. It is an infernal machine in the hands of the exploiters to drive away the sons of the soil. Here the machine is the minion of a diabolical system. But the Jalopy which the Joads buy and rebuild to help them ferry themselves across the desert to the promised land is a lovable agent of survival. It becomes the new hearth and the living center of the family. It is almost made human by its symbolic significance and becomes a minor character in the novel. Juan Chicoy's run down wayward bus, Adam's Model T Ford, Doc's ancient automobile and Lee Chong's truck which Mack and the boys take on their frog-hunting expedition are examples of machines with no diabolical attributes.

One of the basic aspects of Steinbeck's humanism is its forward looking qualify. It is entrenched deeply in optimism. But this faith in progress and evolutionary perfection is not absolute. With his ambivalent perspective he could easily guess that progress is slow and tardy. The way man is made ensures error
and failure. But the endeavour is always there. It is this effort which is the true measure of the progress achieved. In his masterpiece, *The Grapes of Wrath*, Steinbeck avers:

This you say of man—when theories change and crash, when schools, philosophies, when narrow dark alleys of thought, national, religious, economic, grow and disintergrate, man reaches, stumbles forward, painfully, mistakenly sometimes. Having stepped forward he may slip back, but only half a step, never the full step back.\(^\text{16}\)

The above passage reminds us of Lenin's famous dictum "Two steps forward; one step back"\(^\text{17}\). Further it echoes Emerson, who saw human progress in a "zigzag line of a hundred tacks,"\(^\text{18}\) which, when seen from a "sufficient distance", straightens itself out; beneath the variety, the lack of pattern, there is a harmonious agreement which occurs with a little height of thought.

Steinbeck's humanism is an ethically committed one which enjoins upon man to do unto others as he would do unto himself. It puts a great burden and responsibility on him. Steinbeck upholds the stern voice of duty and in his creative endeavours he has lived up to it. He declares this will and testament of his in a casual way in his least serious work, *Sweet Thursday*.

Men seem to be born with a debt they can never pay, no matter how hard they try. It piles up ahead of them. Man owes something to man. If he ignores the debt it poisons him, and if he tries to make payments the debt only increases, and the quality of his gift is the measure of the man.\(^\text{19}\)

By observing life from an objective distance, he notes life's zigzag course and recognizes a harmonious agreement on basic values. He communicates this vision through his fiction. He studies man because man is the measure of everything. And in studying man he makes intelligent use of all that has so far
been thought and known. Marxian socialism and Emersonian transcendentalism are the two poles of his survey. In between lies Dewey’s pragmatism, Darwinian biology, Freudian psychoanalysis and Einsteinan Relativity. Fostered and led by these major guidelines, Steinbeck envisions an image of life and man which is comprehensive and all embracing.

Steinbeck’s image of man is as complex and fascinating as American life itself; it reflects the same vitality and ebullience. An irrepressible zest for life is what characterises it. It has strength, credibility and an onward thrust. Further it fully personifies the hopes and aspirations of the common man. With the help of biological analogy, he unravels the impulses and motivation of man in the mass and adduces certain strange conclusions about the survival qualities of the species. He comments on the success and failure of human beings by studying social organisms in the light of observed biological phenomena.

The biological bias has exposed him to the charge that he has an animalizing tendency. There is a general stricture voiced by discriminating critics like Edmund Wilson that he succeeds best in portraying animal natures. Edmund Magny-Claude observes how Steinbeck “has an extraordinary power to catch and paint man in his most elementary terms,...those that bring him closer to other men or even to other beings.”

It is true that in his earlier novels, as Prof. Lisca notes, Steinbeck succeeds “in exploring and giving new significance to those aspects, which in the hands of earlier naturalistic writers had resulted only in the degrading of man”. Steinbeck did so, apparently with a preconceived purpose he thought it “valid to understand man as an animal before I was prepared to know him as a man”.
Steinbeck images man with nature as his foil. The flora and fauna provide an exalted background to his picture of humanity in action. Indeed man seems to imbibe a part of the elemental strength they possess. From them Steinbeck draws much of his imagery. The most unforgettable among such symbolic representations is that of the turtle in *The Grapes of Wrath*.

The image of man in Steinbeck’s works is unique because it is a steadily amplifying one. It grows and spreads to become more inclusive. It “progresses physiologically and morally from the self-centered child view to the family view to the world view.”\(^{23}\) The image itself partakes of an evolutionary quality. Its source is his amateur scientific interest. “With his deep amateur interest in biology, it gave him the necessary detachment and slow curiosity to approach the modern social struggle as a tragic-comedy of animal instincts.”\(^{24}\) Embler rightly says that Steinbeck deduced not only his method but also his philosophy of life from the natural sciences:

> In Steinbeck’s search for a social philosophy which could meet the problems of his day, he turned for assistance to the biological sciences. In these he found sound method, tested hypothesis, and if it could be translated into language of human behaviour, a body of usable information about sub-human life.\(^{25}\)

Steinbeck’s method was so successful that the social thinking of many readers has been affected by it. But in his later work it is philosophy and religion which produce a stronger impact on his image of man.

It is true that some of the most memorable characters in Steinbeck are those simple and elementary natures who are incomplete human beings, existing in a state of arrested growth. In matter of intellect and social reciprocity, they are primitive and primordial. In many respects they are no better than animals. They
represent the image of man at the lowest and most unsophisticated level. Under this broad group come the paisanos, bums like Mack and the boys, the imbeciles, idiots, the criminally insane and even the whores. These characters are drawn with such a sure touch that they become alive and independent. Many among them are most memorable in Steinbeck. Johnny Bear and Tularecito in the short stories of *The Long Valley*, the pirate of *Tortilla Flat*, the crazed radicals of *In Dubious Battle* are most convincing specimens of mediocrity and under-development. The mentally retarded giant, Lennie, of *Of Mice and Men* is an allegorical figure for the unreformed spirit of man. Danny Taylor, the alcoholic of *The Winter of Our Discontent*, shows how man can relapse back into unreason because of enslavement to temptation. The unbefriended child, Frankie, of *Cannery Row* (1945) is depicted with great pathos and compassion. Thomas of *To A God Unknown* shows how even with animal-like instinct humans hope to live useful lives.

Along with the turtle and white quail, nellie and red pony of domestic and wild life, Steinbeck’s subhuman types are delineated with sympathy understanding and compassion. Among them the bums and paisanos show greater awareness of the complex issues of life. Their primitivism is also a partly purposeful armour against annihilation. Instinct helps them to choose a way of life which alone ensures their survival in a hostile social set up. With an understanding of ecological and environmental factors, Steinbeck pictures them as an integral and inevitable part of life. Previously they were ostracized and discriminated against as unfit for portrayal unless it was for purposes of caricature or symbolism. Steinbeck has allotted them their due place in the panorama of life.
and has pictured them with compassion and understanding. This is major reason
for the vitality of his image of man.

Apart from these beings, there are those who are normal in the sense that
they have a properly evolved consciousness as human beings. Among them we
note three broad categories and they happen to be important subsections in Stein-
beck’s image of man.

First of all there are human beings who are suffering from illusions of
different types. Some of them are out and out egoists who indulge their material
and spiritual hallucinations in erratic and eccentric ways. Henry Morgan is after
wealth and glory and surrenders even humanity in his overreaching pursuit of
them. Faustlike he fails ignominiously and pursued towards the end by
frustration and loneliness. Joseph Wayne’s egoistical obsession is of another
kind. It has a spiritual undertone. He seeks after the God to be propitiated for
assuring fertility and continuity of life. His is an elevated spiritual quest. Its
culmination is in a powerful sense of identification with nature. Such romantic
idealists are destined to be disillusioned. By depicting such Napoleonic natures,
Steinbeck identifies the megalomaniac element in man and rejects by implication
the credibility of such bloated individualism.

After rejecting such dominating natures as the exception and not the rule,
Steinbeck portrays ordinary human beings who are harassed and destroyed by
petty illusions. Such people he visualizes in *The Pastures of Heaven*. They clash
with the norms of social conduct and are shaken thoroughly into conformity. The
demands of group existence impinge on their ostrich-like natures and compel
them to adjust themselves to the accepted codes of conduct and behaviour.
Steinbeck rejects this type of man, both of the egocentric and humdrum type, who are the ultimate failures as individual human beings.

The next aspect of study in Steinbeck’s image of man concerns the group and the individual’s place in it. *Tortilla Flat, In Dubious Battle, Of Mice and Men, The Grapes of Wrath, Cannery Row, The Moon is Down* and *The Wayward Bus* are studies of group life. They envision the strange predicaments and predilections of individuals in collective life. Except *East of Eden* and *The Winter of Our Discontent* all the major works of Steinbeck are forged around the thematic pattern of group existence.

Steinbeck visualizes different kinds of groups. The earliest is in *Tortilla Flat*. Danny and the other paisanos together represent a distinct group. It is collective action and group morality which hold the group together. It is a group with inverted values meant to ridicule and burlesque those of the so-called civilised group. Such ironic intention is discernible also in the groups of *Cannery Row* and *Sweet Thursday*. Mack and the boys are meant as an incriminating foil to the sophisticated sections. In both these groups, there is a leader—Danny and Doc respectively. With Danny’s final fling and his death from a broken neck, the modern Round Table breaks up. With the successful party to Doc and his marriage to Suzy, the group of Mack and the boys reaches a happy consummation in their efforts.
Both these groups are integrated ones in the sense that groups and leaders work with identical motives. *In Dubious Battle* introduces a new phenomenon namely the group animal. It is exploited by an alien leadership. Their aims and objectives differ. In fact these are antithetical. The group throws up its leader. But they become just cat’s-paw in the hands of the professional agitators, Mac and Jim. The group itself degenerates into an awe-inspiring manifestation of the irrational in man. The distorted groups ethos of the striking fruit pickers brings into being a frightening Frankenstein monster. It is the natural offshoot of unmitigated exploitation, fear complex, Machiavellian leadership and the adoption of violence as an end in itself. The irrational and insane are incarnate in the group-animal. Its personalised manifestation is Lennie of *Of Mice and Men*. George stands for the protecting and preserving leadership which arises from within and which alone can guarantee the wholeness and healthiness of the group.

Gregariousness is a major impulse of man. Steinbeck considers collective action of the group as a fundamental aspect of his image of man. As Karl Marx said, “Man is not only a social animal, but an animal that can develop into an individual only in society.” But the group animal, subject to symptoms of mass hysteria and led astray by self-seeking and unscrupulous leadership imposed from outside, is rejected by Steinbeck. He considers it a pernicious transformation which does more harm than good.

It is not accidentally that in *The Grapes of Wrath*, Steinbeck makes the family take the place of the group. He visualises the ordeals and misfortunes of the migrant Okies in concrete terms by turning the searchlight on the Joads. It is a typical evacuee group. The family is the nucleus of society. It is a mould which
casts the individual. Hereafter Steinbeck studies social movements and the growth and maturation of individual consciousness exclusively through the perspective of the family. The family is the basic democratic unit. It is where a true trusteeship is in action. The family ensures the fullest growth of all elements in it. Further it is where the woman plays a crucial role as mother and wife. Perhaps the strongest sustaining and fostering influence in life is that of woman.

The Joad family is a representative family. It outlives its vicissitudes and unites with similar family units to usher in a co-operative, democratic pattern of life. Life in the Federal Government camp gives a foretaste of an ideal social order. In *The Moon is Down* the subdued nation groaning under the heels of the fascist invader is egged on by the example of their elected leader to take up the challenge and fight. Mayor Orden is like a patriarch who heads a big, intimate family group which this highly traditional and integrated nation resembles. In the topsyturvy world of *Cannery Row* family life almost suffers total atrophy. Its place is appropriated by the whorehouse. In all novels hereafter Steinbeck conceives family as the burning heart of social relationship. Like Ma Joad, most of the women characters-Juana, Mordeen, Liza Hamilton-proclaim the seminal importance of woman in group life.

The third factor in Steinbeck's image of man is his idea of the leader, Sometimes leadership assumes heroic proportion; it also takes the form of the anti-hero. In fact we come across different categories of leadership, with fluctuating potential for good or evil. Morgan and Joseph are not leaders. They stand for two distinct varieties of megalomania. Both remain outside the group and hence isolated from it. The earliest hint about the constructive role of the
leader is Danny of *Tortilla Flat*. As long as Danny was alive the group remained intact.

The leadership issue gains urgency in *In Dubious Battle*. Party minions lead the credulous fruit pickers into the abyss of mass suicide. Leaders emerge from the ranks; but they become plastic tools in the hands of the professional agitators. The relationship between the leader and the led is ideally portrayed in *Of Mice and Men*. Lennie is like the irate group-animal. He is blind, unreformed brute force. George is the intellective factor which directs and controls its complement.

This reciprocal relationship between the leader and the led is palpable in all its subtlety in *The Grapes of Wrath*. Steinbeck’s idea of leadership is important because it is a basic aspect of his image of man. Ideally leadership must emerge from within. Then only can it feel the pulse of the group and act with maximum utility. Jim Casy, Tom and Ma Joad are leaders thrown up by the intriguing compulsions of circumstance. They have a down to earth quality because they are of the group and hence they reflect its hopes and aspirations. Being the wife and mother, Ma Joad is the nucleus of the family. She is thus a natural leader. In fact Ma Joad is like an emanation from the earth, endowed with the qualities of wisdom, patience and love which we attribute to Mother Earth. The most idealized leader of Steinbeck is Mayor Orden. Because of his inherited tradition and built-in democratic approach, he is a perfect, self surrendering leader. Added to that there is a subtle and discriminating understanding of self. Leaders of such eminence and nobility are conceived as the finished products of truly civilised group existence. Theirs is the freedom of choice which great humanists like
Socrates have exercised. Through Lee of *East of Eden* Steinbeck identifies it as the privilege immanent in the Biblical sanction, “Thou Mayest”. In Cal and Abra, we discover these nascent qualities of understanding and acceptance. They have proved powers of initiative as well as qualities of leadership which alone will guarantee success in life. True leadership is also fostered by democratic humanism.

In Steinbeck’s idea of leadership there is no place for the conventionally heroic. Through Morgan and Joseph he rejects that as a psychological abnormality. If the sum total of life is a tragi-comedy of good intentions lost in cross purposes, no one can afford to be a true hero. Doc is perhaps the one character whom Steinbeck admires most. The biographical sketch on Ed Ricketts celebrates him as half-Christ, half satyr. In these unheroic times Doc is an anti-hero by choice. Doc Burton, the non-teleological chorus of *In Dubious Battle*, is transformed into a quizzical and eccentric being who keeps himself intact in a wicked world by a deliberate posture of indifference and unconventionality. The image of this anti-hero suffers further atrophy in *Sweet Thursday* where he is portrayed as confused and crestfallen because of the compulsive need for adjustment in a rapidly changing world. In a mood of self-pity and disgust, Steinbeck destroys the image of this non-conformist hero and makes him toe the line of the vulgar and eccentric world around, by “happily” uniting him with a reformed whore.

The typical leaders of Steinbeck share in common a capacity for “is” thinking. They are endowed with a broader outlook and a better grasp of the rationalities of life than others. They are non-teleological in their reality
assessment. Coeur de Gris is the earliest example. Joseph Wayne also lives up to this image of the wide eyed observer who sees things without blinders. Casy, Slim of *Of Mice and Men*, Dr. Winter and, above all, Lee and Samuel Hamilton of *East of Eden* belong to this category of a wise passive and sympathetic spectator of the human comedy who outlives narrow prejudices to attest to the infinite variety of life with understanding acceptance.

Steinbeck's characters, especially the more developed and complex among them, have in varying degrees a moral and ethical responsiveness. At the lower levels it arises through instinct and at the higher by volition and choice. This acts as a counter weight to the mercenary pulls of a day-to-day life. Steinbeck sees no conflict between the spiritual and material claims. They go hand in hand as in Jim Casy whose metamorphosis is from Evangelism to trade union radicalism. The elites are generally those labouring under some elements of spiritual disquietude. That happens irrespective of economic status. Nor is it religion as it is ordinarily understood.

In Steinbeck's image of man institutionalized religion is allotted a least important place. Rather he denigrates it as part of the Establishment. Love and altruism are the true religion of man. The invidious groupings into churches and sects only make a mockery of its noble ideals. The best among Steinbeck's characters have a yearning towards Eternity. Like Santayana, Steinbeck also appears to believe that man is ever after a quest for a religion that suits his particular needs. In *To a God Unknown* the main characters show divergent religious temperaments based on denominational variations. The Catholic Priest, Father Angelo, and Burton are interesting studies. While the Father is relaxed and
happy, the bigot Burton makes an unpleasant hair shirt. Joseph seeks his own religion a pantheistic heresy which finally helps him to identify the god of his seeking.

It is significant that even the half – caste paisanos have a moral code. While they are flippant about their faith in the Church, they nurture certain ethical scruples. Their attitude to the Pirate’s quarters is an instance to the point. Doctor Burton does not accept stereotyped ideas about good and evil but he wants to know the truth and Truth is his God. Casy rejects conventional religion and concocts instead his own gospel of love. Mayor Orden upholds a secular morality which is deeply entrenched in humanism and democracy. Mack and the other bums live beyond the pale of hackneyed morality because they smell its rottenness: still they are not devoid of basic morality in their actions. They exhibit an astonishing negative capability to greed, self aggrandizement and dishonesty which are the unavoidable qualifications for success. Even Dora and her girls show a kind of morality by playing fair in their profession. Further, prompted by genuine humanitarianism, they provide relief and aid to the needy and the indigent.

In his later works, Steinbeck seems to be seriously exercised by the problem of good and evil. He visualizes the human drama as a manifestation of this eternal conflict. Kino and Juana are driven and buffeted by the encrusted evil in society. In *The Wayward Bus*, Steinbeck presents a medley of characters who impersonate the fact of evil in characteristic ways. Ethan Alley Hawley escapes temptation and moral turpitude with the skin of his teeth. Issues regarding ethics, morality and right action are illustrated with telling effect in *East of Eden*. Lee
and Samuel take their stand on hard core of ethical values and moral choices which are the cornerstones of purposive existence. These endow man with the greatest gift of all namely the capacity to choose. This places him in the center of the evolutionary process of being and becoming.

Whatever Steinbeck read and whatever he observed in real life became for him a matter to be verified in terms of each other. Literature and theology became valuable to him only when he had put to test all that he had learnt in the living laboratory of contemporary life. His work is not merely the mechanical brain-child of his mind and imagination. He was always passing through the travails of childbirth, and even his novel took life from his personal impression and experience. Whether it be Rigveda or the Bible, he did not follow any doctrine or principle blindly unless it fitted in with the scheme of his personal observation. All was holy to him that he saw embedded in the soil of truthful experience.

Man is the theme of his writings. Man’s consciousness, or development is the object of his study with its externalization in the outward social scene. But the external interested him only so far as they led him to the knowledge of the psychological, moral and spiritual reality. He never told a story to beguile his readers. He never wrote anything that was not an experience which he shared with his readers. As a keen observer and a first-rate thinker, he was always in search of analogies and similarities of life patterns in human and animal life. Such a study would initiate him into the timeless phenomenon of life on earth. For this, he scanned through the principal theological and religious literature of the east and the west; Jewish, Christian, Hindu and Buddhist. At the same time, he studied the social, economical and political working of different nations in Europe in
general and of America in particular. He observed closely the rural life and its social order. He examined the pattern of class war, the problems of the working class, the labourers, and the migrants. But everywhere he dived deeper and saw the nucleus around which the forces of the individuals and the group work on the individuals and the groups work on the level of human consciousness, so that the contraction and the expansion of consciousness, crawling into the shell of egoism and out of it, falling into a state of spiritual and moral death and being able to resurrect and to redeem itself, became the recurrent theme of his works.

In his wide ranging discovery and exploration of life and its timeless design, Steinbeck was able to see in nature on exact analogy between man and animal and it was the beginning of his biological naturalism. In his peculiarly mystic or compassionate life and animal life are two scales of the same life-pattern. If there is love between human beings or a higher scale, there also exists love and fellow feeling between animals on their own plane. But just as the lower instincts degrade and down-scale the animals, human beings have also a tendency to descend to a lower level of animalism. Selfishness, love of comfort, sense of possession, hatred and animosity are not only the qualities of animals; they are also found in human beings.

To understand Steinbeck’s biological naturalism which is found scattered in his novels, it is necessary to turn to his views in Sea of Cortez. Peter Lisca observes about Sea of Cortez that it “makes explicit several working concepts which have been implicit in all Steinbeck’s work thus for: non-teleological thinking ecology, the possible individuality of a group animal, survival of the fittest, group–psychomemory, and the mystic unity of all life.”

27
Steinbeck observes in *Sea of Cortez*:

> We have looked into the tide pools and seen the little animals feeding and reproducing and killing for food. We name them and describe them and, out of long watching, arrive at some conclusion about their habits so that we say, 'this species typically does thus and so, but we do not objectively observe our own species as a species, although we know the individuals fairly well...If we used the same smug observation on ourselves that we do on hermit crabs we would be forced to say, with the information at hand, 'it is one diagnostic trait of *Homo sapiens* that groups of individuals are periodically infected with a feverish nervousness which causes the individual to turn on and destroy, not only his own kind, but the works of his own kind...When two crayfish meet, they usually fight...And perhaps our species is not likely to forgo war without some psychic mutation which at present, at least, does not seem imminent.'

It is in this respect that Steinbeck discovers a very close analogy between men and animals. War, its organization and the instinctive tendency behind it and the violence that follows it, is a natural phenomenon on human and animal planes.

In *The Moon is Down*, Steinbeck not only observes war in an objective way but also records it without registering sympathy for any party. He looks upon it as a natural phenomenon of human life. But at the same time he does not hide his belief that war is the result of animal instincts and animal passions in man, whatever its cause-selfishness, sense of insecurity, sense of possession. In the *Sea of Cortez* he makes it more explicit. He writes,

> ...And if one places the blame for killing and destroying an economic insecurity, an inequality, on injustice, he is simply stating the proposition in another way. We have what we are. Perhaps the Crayfish feels the itch of jealousy, or perhaps he is sexually insecure; the effect is that he fights.
Now when such traits appear in a man or in a group of men, they fight. Here Steinbeck states his naturalistic law to be an integral part of the behavior pattern of both men and animals for they are within the domain of nature and, therefore, governed by this law.

Steinbeck believed that man is very much an animal, but an animal, whose drive is outside himself. He observes:

Man is the only animal whose interest and whose drive are outside himself. Other animals may dig holes to live in, may weave nests or take possession of hollow trees. Some species, like bees or spiders, even create complicated homes but they do it with the fluids and processes of their own bodies. They make little impression on the world. But the world is furrowed and cut, torn and blasted by man.... He is the only animal who lives outside of himself, whose drive is in external things property, houses, money, concepts of war... But having projected himself into these external complexities, he is them."

And it is this conscious process that makes man lose his spiritual strength and moral power. Such tendencies and actions create a veritable wasteland for him to dwell in. This state is certainly deplorable, degrading and diabolic; a veritable inferno. It is a world from where fertility of the land disappears (*To a God Unknown*) and it becomes a dust-bowl from where people must migrate (*The Grapes of Wrath*) and a land where pearl buyers chase like hounds and a world where the dreams are stifled (*Of Mice and Men*) and a world where gold becomes the God and an honest soul is contaminated to be forced to think of suicide (*The Winter of Our Discontent*) and a world in which a brother kills his own brother and the story of Cain-Abel is re-enacted (*East of Eden*) and a society in which moral, chaos, sexual perversity, economic exploitation and business ethics create the environments of hell (*The Wayward Bus*). To be emancipated
from such a degrading predicament, it is necessary to work for one’s salvation and the way lies through renunciation, selfishness and love.

Steinbeck has traced parallels in *Sea of Cortez* while watching the yellow-green fish. He writes:

It is interesting to see how areas are sometimes dominated by one or two species... It is difficult, while watching the little beast, not to trace human parallels... But parallels are amusing if they are not taken too seriously as regards the animal in question, and are down right valuable as regards humans. The routine of changing domination is a case in point. One can think the attached and dominant human who has captured the place, the property and the security. He dominates his area... But in his fight for dominance he has pushed out others of his species who were not so fit to dominate, and these have become wanderers, improperly clothed, ill-fed, having no security and no fixed base. These should really perish but the reverse seems true. The dominant human, in his security, grows soft and fearful... so that one day the dominant man is eliminated and his strong and hungry wanderer takes his place. And the routine is repeated.\(^{31}\)

The phenomenon is common to both men and animals. So in this respect, in spite of glory and material success, man is hardly following a noble and enduring pattern of values.

Thus, man in his thinking or reverie status admires the progression towards extinction... Man might be described fairly adequately, if simply as a two-legged paradox. He has never become accustomed to the tragic miracle of consciousness.\(^{32}\)

Steinbeck’s woman characters consitute a different and controversial subject. They occupy an important place in his novels, yet instead of filling the place of major character, they perform functions of characters important in their relationship to men. Whereas Steinbeck’s male characters are engaged in pursuits...
of salvation, knowledge and other physical or spiritual goals, most of women characters have only the Hobson’s choice-to choose home-keeping failing which there is only whoredom for them. With the exception of Elizabeth in _TO a God Unknown_, Liza Hamilton in _East of Eden_, Ma Joad in _The Grapes of Wrath_ and Juana in _The Pearl_, no other woman character seems to transcend the limitations of sexual relationship. The majority of his women characters remain confined to the ordinary level of living, at most defining or adjusting their relationship with men in various ways.

Steinbeck does not glorify womanhood. In spite of his generous and humanistic outlook, he never romanticizes women. In this respect he is intensely realistic, realistic to the extent of being a naked and stark observer of the traits of women in general, and specially in America. In _Cup Of Gold_, he states:

> All girls and women hoarded something they never spoke of... Another life went on inside of women... ran parallel to their outward lives and yet never crossed them.33

He finds women to be incapable of developing those traits which make men successful in different spheres of life—business, war, agriculture, strikes, politics and economics. At most they can be found fit to run a brothel or striptease show. The other field in which they make use of their inborn talents is the home. It is at home that they develop maternal love and sense of responsibility. But even at home, if they happen either to have no children at all or to have grown up children, they are prone to exploit sexual relationship. Some of them exploit their sex to the extent of destroying themselves and those connected with them. In this respect Steinbeck conforms to no conventional morality Gladstein observes:
Their (women’s) optimistic significance lies, not in their individual, spiritual triumph, but their function as perpetrators and nurturers of the species.  

Since most critical work on Steinbeck has tended to stress his wide variety of techniques and subject matter, the present study becomes particularly important in illustrating how a system of ideas exists beneath the surface diversities. These ideas may be seen to reside in three thematic patterns that recur consistently, though with unequal emphasis throughout Steinbeck’s works. The first of these patterns indicates that man is a religious creature and that each man creates a good head to satisfy his personal religious need. The second pattern suggests that mankind may also be viewed biologically as a “group animal” composed of individual (“cells”) but having a will and intelligence of its own, distinct from any one of its parts. However, outside the groups is another kind of individual, analogous to the biologist himself, who in the role of Steinbeck’s constant hero, observes and comments upon the “animal”. The final pattern in the thematic scheme illustrates the “non-teleological” concepts that man lives without knowledge of the cause of his existence; nevertheless, the very mystery of life spurs his search for human values.

Typical of John Steinbeck’s fictional characters is their yearning for religious fulfillment. Critics, attempting to define and interpret the characteristic religious tendency, have come to widely differing conclusions. One critic, for example, believes that Steinbeck ultimately reduces man’s devoutness to animalism that Steinbeck “presents man as a captive…of instinct and appetites only, blindly desiring and striving, not reasoning, judging, choosing but automatically responding to impulse and attractions”35. Another, however, finds “
a contemporary adaptation of the Christ image” and indications of “some Christian meaning.”

Still others have seen various of Steinbeck’s characters as pagans, pantheists, transcendentalists, and animists. The revealing fact in all this critical diversity is that the particular arguments hold up rather well; a roll-call of Steinbeck’s characters would indeed muster an army of separate creeds. I contend that this very variety of religious direction in his characters constitutes one of the important thematic patterns in Steinbeck’s novels. That there is an organic relationship between Steinbeck’s concept of man and his fiction is obvious from the analysis of his work. From *Cup of Gold* (1929) through *The Winter of Our Discontent* (1961) man struggles to attain dignity by imposing order on his dual existence as an individual and as a group animal. In his efforts to become a successful individual and a successful group animal, man often does not succeed. In Steinbeck’s first three novels man fails due to his inability to rise above an individuality which prevents him from becoming a group animal; man in these early novels is self-centered. This indulgence of self or self centeredness makes the protagonists either cruel or extremely lonely. Henry Morgan in *Cup of Gold* is cruel, and Joseph Wayne in *To a God Unknown* is desperate; the characters in *The Pastures of Heaven* are lonely.

However, sometimes man fails not so much because of his indulgence of self but because of the cruelty of other men who have become a mob and destroy individuals. Failure of man due to other men is depicted in Steinbeck’s such works as *Tortilla Flat, In Dubious Battle,* and *Of Mice and Men.* That the protagonists of these novels are not self-centered is obvious from the fact that in
the beginning they have meaningful relationship with other men. Danny in *Tortilla Flat* has his paisano friends who respect each other’s individuality. As a group member Danny lives a meaningful life. In *In Dubious Battle*, Jim Nolan feels alive when he works for the party; and in *Of Mice and Men*, Lennie and George together are able to have a dream. But destruction occurs when a group of man, called “group man” by Steinbeck, challenges the right of these protagonists to live their lives. Angered by the challenge, the protagonists of these novels fail to be a part of any group. Danny, due to his anger, separates himself from the paisanos, and Jim Nolan alienates himself from the Party: both are killed. Destruction occurs in *Of Mice and Men* too, when George and Lennie are not together.

But man’s struggle to attain dignity is not always abortive. In Steinbeck’s novels such as *The Red Pony*, *The Grapes Of Wrath*, *East Of Eden*, *The Winter of Our Discontent*, the nature of man’s struggle is even more complex than before, but man is ultimately triumphant. Instrumental in man’s triumph is his willingness to accept reality no matter how painful, and his ability to adjust to the world. Jody, for example, had a self sufficient world at the beginning of *The Red Pony*; this world is shattered by disappointment and sorrow, but Jody does not hide behind bitterness or make-believe. Instead, he accepts his role in the kind of world he really is, and becomes responsible. This adjustment in no way diminishes his individuality. In feeling sorry for his grandfather he has created a “bridge of contact” that gives a man “the whole world,” according to Steinbeck. Jim Casy and Tom Joad in *The Grapes of Wrath*, Adam and Caleb Trask in *East of Eden*, Ellen and Ethan Hawley in *The Winter of Our Discontent*, Kino and Juana in *The
Pearl, Doc, Mac and the boys in Cannery Row, all have successfully built bridges of contact with other men, all have achieved individuality or their ideal selves.

But whenever the struggling man fails in Steinbeck’s fictional world, the failure is no condemnation of him. If man fails due to his inability to rise above self, Steinbeck does not despise him; and if man fails due to the cruel combative nature of group-man, Steinbeck is not guilty of pity or snobbery. This lack of condemnation or pity creates an awareness of the love and infinite sympathy that Steinbeck has for man. Since man is part animal and part god, he is acceptable in all his diverse states of being. In other words, Steinbeck’s concept of man and his love for man are inextricably related, owing to his “love and understanding of instant acceptance,” Steinbeck has been able to create a wide and varied fictional world of men and women. Steinbeck’s fiction depicts all forms of life until the image of man is unfurled completely with all its flaws and glory.

Through his works Steinbeck envisages an image of man which provides illuminating vistas into the manifold drives and potentialities of human beings. At the lowest level, it is closely allied to the animal world. It is not infra dig to acknowledge this relational bond. The egocentric individuals with designs on his fellows are repudiated as abnormal. Man’s participation through group existence is recognized as a necessary first step to the development of personality. After rejecting the group animal, he projects the family as the basic dynamic unit. Finally he emphasises the ethical and moral basis of good life and presumes that a moral and spiritual bias is the hallmark of a developing consciousness. As John S. Kennedy has suggested, “Steinbeck’s preoccupation with life and living is perhaps the main reason for his popularity and influence.”38
He pictures with genuine love the daily life and habits of the American people. A period in American history from the westward migrations for the latter half of the 19th century to the Dust Bowl tragedy of the Twentieth is what he delineates through his major novels. This was the most formative period in the history of the nation. By recreating fictionally that crucial epoch, Steinbeck succeeded in isolating major trends and tendencies. He was seriously disturbed by the injustice and false morality of commercial Civilisation. Some of the problems identified by him are still relevant—that explains his growing popularity with the youth of to-day.

Steinbeck's forte is his well thought out image of man. His cryptic comment about his writing provides the best insight into his work: "A man's writing is himself. A kind man writes kindly—a mean man writes meanly. A sick man writes sickly. And a wise man writes wisely." In all his writings, Steinbeck is a kind man. Whether he is wise depends partly on our idea of wisdom. But he is never mean nor does his soul appear ever to have been sick. Among the masters of world fiction, his place is as one who loved only too well and provided an image of man abounding in vitality, depth, comprehensiveness and exaltation.
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4- *Modern Fiction Studies*, (John Steinbeck special Number), XI, No. 1 (Spring 1965), 4.


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30-Ibid., p. 148.

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32-Ibid., p. 156.


39-John Steinbeck, “Critics from a Writer’s Point of View,” *Steinbeck and His Critics*, p. 49.