CHAPTER III
Saroyan liked very much to spread the wings of freedom and fly high in the world. His temperament was that of the free wheeling Californian individualist. He hated that grime hid purity and he always thought that love was beautiful and universal. Though he lived and wrote at the time of depression, he didn’t in the least feel depressed. There was a loud proclamation of love, friendship, neighborliness and decency in his writings. He didn’t care very much for the prosperity that came from outside material prospects.

Saroyan felt that the real joy lay in sharing - sharing of food and sharing of feeling. That was the real joy of life. In the play *My Heart Is In The Highlands*,

Saroyan created one such superb situation. Ben Alexander and his son Johnny had great love and affection for the poor. Mac Gregor was a poor fellow. He was a bugle player wandering in the streets and begging alms. Ben
Alexander had a concern for the poor fellow and talked to him in entreating terms.

*How do you do? Won't you come in for a little rest? We should be honoured to have you at our table for a bite of supper.*

*(My Heart 9).*

Saroyan had an unbounded faith in the goodness of man and he had ability to overcome all evils. He was a serious playwright with a feeling for experimentation and a significant approach to life. He was a believer in dreams and myths but he was not bothered by most of the conflicting evils and problems that had frustrated most of the other writers. He played on emotion and he believed in honest sentiment.

It was quite obligatory that an artist in general should have awareness. It was indeed true that Saroyan had both in him. To quote the words of Louis Broussard:
It is true that social consciousness dominated the plays of this period. It is also true that an awareness of the spiritual side of life and a questioning of man and his values constituted a strong interest of the best playwrights of this period.

(Louis 325)

Saroyan’s concern for social awareness was quite explicit in the comment that he made in a prefatory credo to the play The Time of Your Life. He loudly proclaimed.

Live, Live; so that in	haat good time, there
shall be no ugliness

(The Time 344)

Saroyan advocated that it was the prime duty of the every man to explore the possibilities for finding good things in life. When it was found, people should bring it out of its hiding place. It was our duty to encourage virtue in whatever shape it came to them. We must not be inferior to anybody in the world. We must despise evil and ungodliness but not men of evil and
ungodliness. People, at no point of time should add to the misery and sorrow of the world; but they must smile to the infinite delight and mystery of it.

In this connection it is but apt to point out the words of Moseswolf.

As long as people enjoy the bliss of life, as long as they are hale and healthy and as long as they are not suppressed by social, economic, political or religious problems, they do not make any serious complaint about life. When the situation arises that there is problem for the very survival, they become disillusioned and disheartened. They become angry-angry with people, with family and friends and angry with the society itself. When they are not able to live happily, they wish that nobody else should live happily. They go to the extent of entertaining the idea of war, death and devastation.

(Mosewolf 253)

In the play Hello, out There we can find ample evidence for the feeling of robust optimism. The young man and the young girl were badly hurt and the goodness was destroyed by deceit. They were surrounded by dirt and death;
She cleaned the jail. He was charged as a victim of rape. There was practically no scope for them to have the feeling of joy. But they didn’t bother about the worst situation in which they were in. They forgot their suffering and talked of sharing their future together. She told him that she loved him so closely as no one else would ever love her.

He replied to her that on hearing her statement of love, a man could die and still be ahead of the game.

Allan Leis commented on the attitude of Saroyan to life in the following terms:

Saroyan does not close his eyes to ugliness and brutality, but he refuses to hate mankind. He is of the view that he being the member of the community, it goes against both nature and truth for him to hate it.

(Allan 77)

In the play The Cave Dwellers Saroyan added one more proof to his positive and optimistic outlook which paved way for the amelioration of life.
The play is peopled by more Saroyan people than one would have thought of. There were fay people, little people, lost people, brave people, but absolutely no bad people. Infact all the characters were angels dwelling in the human bodies.

Saroyan’s view of people around him could be known from the article The Lonesome Youngman from the Flying Trapez.

*It is important that this allegory informs to the audience certain important message. Its philosophy might be called sugared existentialism. We don’t know why we are here, we cannot comprehend the universe we are in, we shall never understand the great pattern, if pattern there be, of life.*

(The Lonsome 392-)

There is goodness there is love—even hate is love. We get up in the morning, go to bed at night, in between we play wondrously—and that is
enough. We require no more, for the spectacle is bright and even the dark is light enough.

For goodness and love have significance only where there is confrontation with pain and evil. Once can have no goodness or true love without a full awareness of the object which are the substance of life. The substance or material of life is always resistant and this resistance-the subject of drama-is what we have so much difficult in accepting. Saroyan tried non-calamity to eliminate life's negation.

The King, the Queen and the Duke were important characters of the Play. They were not able to command any kind of sophisticated life. They were not living in big palaces and spacious bungalows. They did not have even the advantage of helpmates.

They were living only in the caves like any other uncivilized people. They lived in an abandoned theatre in the midst of a slum-cleaning project with the sounds of demolition in the background. A young girl joined them to share their poverty. She was welcomed into their special world, for she too had fled
from the community. With what they begged on the street, they survived sharing food and warmth. Though they knew well that their temporary home would soon be destroyed, they were happy.

A man accompanied by his wife and a black bear begged admittance on a cold winter night. The frightened occupants of the stage hesitated to let them in. They had three beds for four people. Rags for cloths. No food. No fire. They could be of help to others. The King had a positive way of life. Penury didn’t press him down. He said

*There a whole world out there, full of fortunate people in their own homes.*

(The Cave 216)

The queen was also full of warmth for the newcomers. She was ready to welcome them into their fold. To her, they were her friends and they were like members of their family. They derived a great joy in sharing what title they had with them.
Get Away, Old Man, is yet another play which propounded the theory of ecstasy and exuberance. Jonah was the main character in that play. To him life was a miracle and every minute was filled with beauty. What is important in man was not body but the spirit. The awakening of the spirit could eliminate the stress and fear in the mind. Even if there was no food, shelter and clothes, we need not bother. We have to work for the elevation of the soul.

In the play Across the Board on Tomorrow Morning, Harry spoke about the necessity of adhering to sensible way of life. He was a hater of war. He believed that it would create a kind of derangement in the society. He remarked,

*The world we know in amack*

*The realm of all reality,*

*therefore, is also amack*

*The world has been uninhabitable’*

*(Across 251)*
Harry foresaw that imminent collapse was inevitable. If there was no transformation of consciousness, there would surely be a wipe-out of civilization. Harry repeatedly warned people to be aware of the problems. It is better that they tried to be human while there was time. While Harry had had been experiencing the dark night of the soul which was the concomitant of spiritual evolution, the people around him remained dead – in-life. If people chose to change their views and begin to follow a new path of life, there would surely be a change and life would become a happier one and society would be a healthier one.

In The Beautiful People the dramatist depicted a poignant family situation defined by the pathos and yearning of a human heart. He depicted the impoverished and poetic Webster family. Throughout the play there was a pervading spirit of melancholy.

Webster was a young boy fifteen years. He was a great lover of music. He was always playing on his piano. The omnipresence of music throughout the play signalled Saroyan’s mood of sweet remembering of times suspension and affirmed the warmth of human community.
Webster's dialogue with the old lady was really thought provoking. He preached his passionate gospel of freedom and spontaneity to her. He was against the idea of work. He believed that the world would not collapse if they didn’t work. He radiated a healthy contempt for convention and conformity. He was a dreamer inhabiting his solitary kingdom of imagination.

Saroyan's primary emphasis had always been on the quest for individual identity, purpose and meaning and ultimately he saw the brotherhood of man, the spiritual relationship of all humanity. His work attempted to define man's state of spiritual exile and fragmentation, to record his anguished yearning for completion and inner fulfilment.

He did not seek to escape from reality and its harshness; on the contrary, he fully realized that we lived in a real world, a hard world, a mean world, an anxious, lonely, frightened and angry world. But this state of affairs must be understood, accepted and transcended through an affirmation of the miraculous nature.
We must never stop being amazed by human beings. We must find out religion in all things. This religion was of course not to be identified with conventional Christianity, or any orthodox theological system. Rather, Saroyan placed his faith in the religion of life, in that force which tied all creation together into unity.

Saroyan affirmed the pantheistic tradition of Whitman—a mystical, all-embracing acceptance of the universe. For him, as for Whitman, there was an unknown tremendous meaning in our experience, a metaphysical dimension to existence which was implicit in actual life as it might be lived. These meanings and values could not be imposed by some external philosophical or religious system.

He thus celebrated characters who throw off restraints and came out with a healthy outlook of life. He sided with all the people who worked for the revitalization of themselves and the transformation of the society.

For Saroyan, the self was not static and rigid; it could never remain the same; rather it was an entity in continuous transition, a growing thing whose
stages of growth always went unnoticed, a fluid and flawed thing. Not to grow and change was to die, because as William A Gordon has observed.

Life is a process in which man is constantly born. The refusal to be born is the acceptance of death.

(William 146).

The shape of human experience was amorphous, and unpredictable. Therefore those who attempted through repression and confirmation to deny the necessity of continual becoming and expansion were always outsiders in the Saroyan universe.

Saroyan had antipathy towards authority, repression, and the faltering of the human spirit. Saroyan loved to write about the “Beautiful people” and did not like to preach war.

Saroyan was in fact a rich complex, sensitive and original writer who saw at the beginning of his career that humanity was entering a new age; he also saw in the great struggle of twentieth century man was to slough off the
old conscious and embraced a new world of psychic liberation. His early short stories focused on an America paralyzed by the Depression and recorded faithfully the spiritual hunger and injustices of the thirties. During the war years, his plays consistently reflected his pacifistic beliefs and affirmed the individual struggle against death and monism.

Following the war, his novels emerged a mood of brooding middle aged melancholy, recording the disintegration of his family under the pressures of an unhappy marriage. And, finally his works of autobiography, memoir and journal attempted to uncover the secret springs of his past. His literary development thus recalls that of the American writers, such as Henry Miller, who did excellent work early in their careers, sustained steady achievement through their middle years, and spent their last phase in reminiscence.

Saroyan’s struggle throughout his career had been to achieve a state of balance, of harmony between the warring opposites of life- a sense of well being in life’s gay and melancholy flux.
As Erich Fromm defines it,

Well-being is the ability to be creative, to be aware, and to respond; to be independent and fully active, and by this very fact to be one with the world. To be concerned with being and not with having: to experience joy in the very act of living and to consider living creativity as the only meaning of life.

(Fromm 148)

Saroyan also celebrated vitality, the life force, and admired quickness, intensity and energetic engagement with the experience of the moment. This and only this was creative living and pointed out the way towards oneness with self and world.

For Saroyan, the truly important things were intangible, deep in man’s miracle, and not available for computation or scientific disintegration for the purpose for examination. He felt that literature, like music, must suggest the subtle, unseen and mysterious significance of human experience which
remained for ever elusive and hidden. Saroyan was never interested in obvious, or in the details one takes for granted; everybody seemed to be addict to the obvious and for ever harping about the details which Saroyan had long ago discarded as irrelevant and useless. His wisdom was visual and as swift as vision Sarooyan always knew what he was after—that nameless, awful and beautiful mystery at the heart of life His genius lay in his ability to evoke and celebrate it successfully through art.

Such a situation provided the playwright with a great opportunity of one partial kind since it permitted him to become an intellectual force brought directly to bear upon the thinking, even possibly the legislation, of his time. It enabled him become a prophet not only in the large sense that all great poets were prophets, but in the more limited sense that he won a body of earnest disciples, Saroyan, indeed, carefully stage-managed his appearance in such a role and loved to emphasize the contention that his choice of the dramatic form as the vehicle for his messages was merely an accident.

Saroyan gained an initial advantage from two crucial controversies which reached the peak of turbulence during the early 1930's. The rear-guard
struggle of the neo-humanists on behalf of traditional standards steadily gave way before the increasingly vocal advocates of invocation and aesthetic rebellion. The growing reaction against gentility and restraint was strengthened from many sources.

Sinclair Lewis in his celebrated Stockholm address of December 1930 said America's Literary future was in the hands of those who had the power to go on their own way. With the growing social and political tensions of the depression era, however, the most characteristic critical controversy turned inevitably to the relationship of literature to economics.

Brooke Atkinson observes

Don't expect a plot or emulsion from Mr. Saroyan but expect more humour, grace, innocence and improvisation that he has put in one piece Although food is scarce and cold is congealing. Mr. Saroyan's characters have glowing spirits and wonderful memories of their triumphant days

(Atkinson 135)
Saroyan tried nonchalantly to eliminate life's negation. He waved pain away. Goodness and love had significance only where there was confrontation with pain and evil. We could have no goodness of true love without a full awareness of the objects which were the substances of life. The substances or material of life was always resistant and this resistance was what we accepted with so much of difficulty.

Saroyan's writings continued to appear in unabashed abundance, often eliciting wry comments to the effect that he performed with the greatest ease. Though much of this criticism was justifiable, it must be recognized that Saroyan worked hard to make his work look easy—always like a fun.

*In the words of Floam Howard*

> The surest sign of his professional competence has been his ability to retain this air of unrehearsed spontaneity while concentrating on problems of his craft

*(Howard 7)*
Over the years his voice had been inimitable and consistently authentic. At his best he had spoken to us meaningfully of things hitherto unexpressed in literature. His characters did stay alive; many were inwardly violent and bewildered, it was because their inner life depended on the sweet shudder of response felt from another human heart.

Absent from Saroyan's work were the rich symbolic and ironic textures so highly prized by the new critics. He was not an allusive, learned writer in the manner of T.S Eliot; he was not interested in exploring the intricate psychological labyrinths that Henry James was fond of; he was not a brilliant medieval, mystic scholastic with a passion for complexity like James Joyce.

Another complaint commonly voiced by critics was Saroyan's tendency towards escapism; linked to this charge of escapism was the fact that Saroyan was not fashionably political; he supported no 'ism' and there was an acute lacking or social conscience. This attitude put him out of favour with the proletarian writers of the thirties who were anxious to enlist him in their cause. Yet Saroyan would take no political stand other than that affirming the brotherhood of man; he recognized no authorities, no leaders, no programmers
the brotherhood of man; he recognized no authorities, no leaders, no programmes to save the world. For Saroyn, no political plan of action could be successful, for the revolution had to take place within the human heart.

Many critics often dismissed Saroyan for not being what they wanted him to be. Of these, perhaps the most outrageous was the charge that he was a simple minded, sentimental romantic whose native optimism did not reflect the terrible realities of the age.

Saroyan's affirmations were not unearned, his bridge of faith was carefully and consciously built over a turbulent ocean of doubt and despair. The angst of the twentieth century pervaded all through his work, we can see his brooding depression not only in the later work but also in an earlier play The Time of Your Life. Saroyan’s lovely and pathetic characters sensed the oncoming fury of the Second World War and they had knowledge that life was poised precariously at the rim of disaster. This darker despairing existential side of Saroyan’s work had almost been completely ignored by the commentators.
The alienation and melancholy that characterized Saroyan's work were of course, typical of twentieth century literature. Yet Saroyan was a special case, for the feeling of rootlessness which pervaded his imagination found an important source in the historical reality of the Armenian People. In 1896, twelve years before Saroyan's birth, 2,00,000 Armenians were massacred by the Turks. In 1915, the Turks deported the Armenian population of 2,50,000 to Syria and Mesopotamia. more than a million and a half Armenians were killed during this process.

In America, however, the problem of the Armenians were not yet over. Although California was idyllic and splendid, the racial conflicts that had driven the Armenians to their new foundland continued. Saroyan remarked,

*The Armenians were considered inferior, they were pushed around, they were hated, and I was an American. I refused to forget it then, I refuse to forget it now, but not because being an Armenian had has any particular significance.*

(Here Comes 38)
Saroyan felt sorry to note that the Armenians were not really absorbed into the fabric of American life. They remained alienated often yearning to return to their native land. They were isolated within their own communities, out of step with mainstream American culture.

Saroyan returned obsessively throughout his career to this theme of madness to a consideration of the possible reasons for the intensity of his sorrow and psychic dislocation. He brought to reveal a kind of race melancholy which underlined the Armenian temperament. The Arab in The Time of Your Life expresses the pain of the alien, the exile, by his refrain that there was no foundation anywhere in the world.

It is primarily the duty of the artist to create nobility. He must press back against the world's chaos to create a livable sphere of existence. The function of the artist is to resolve, through the imagination, the conflicts of his own life, as well as the eternal oppositions of human existence.
For Saroyan, art is a way towards health, towards reconciliation and towards psychic regeneration. He once observed that he needed to write because he hated to believe he was sick or half-dead; because he wanted to get better: because writing was his therapy. Deeply aware of the fragmentation and spiritual anarchy of life in the modern world, he exhibits a driving impulse towards joy, self realization and psychic integration. He remarked that

*The imperative requirement of our time is to restore faith to the mass and integrity to the individual. The integration of man is still far from being realized. In a single age this integration can be immeasurably improved, but it is impossible and useless to seek to image its full achievement.*

*(The Real 8)*

Achieving this state of balance was by definition a continuing struggle, for the self was located in a world of ceaseless change, flux and instability. Yet for Saroyan it was the quest for self-realization which gave life its ultimate purpose and meaning.
Saroyan’s work was an attempt to integrate the divided self. Affirmation and despair, comedy and tragedy, inner harmony and inner fragmentation, order and chaos, art and reality, home and exile, life and death—all these polarities existed in a state of dynamic tension.

In his last work Obituaries he wrote that his real work was his being. His work as an artist is the activity of writing; but his more profound task as a human being was to live life fully. Art’s function was simultaneously to exposit the fragmentation of our experience and to reveal the possibility of the true being. With Matthew Arnold, Saroyan believed that the greatest triumph of life was making contact with our only true, deep buried selves.

The deep yearning for unity, for profound communion with soul and universe was the primary theme of American literature from Walt Whitman and Thoreau to Jack Kerouae and Henry Miller. The celebratory impulse in Saroyan’s writings could be traced back to Whitman’s singing of the self in Leaves of Grass; his affirmation of the inner journey found his root in Thoreau’s transcendentalism; Saroyan sought the experience of being; he wanted to go straight to the core of things-energetically immediately and
passionately. He wanted to feel the world directly and intuitively like D.H. Lawrence, "with the blood". His emotional impulses were fundamentally rooted in the romantic tradition; he affirmed the possibilities of the self to achieve realization through the powers of love, imagination and creativity.

Saroyan’s work was thus a great deal more complex and multivalent than many commentators had acknowledged. His writing was blend of the affirmative and mystical with profound sadness which found its matrix in the tragic history of the Armenian people. He was thoroughly American in his persistent expansiveness, verve and spontaneity.

His writing was autobiographical, the dominant mode employed by such representative American authors as Whitman, Thomas Wolfe and Henry Miller. Yet he was also the Armenian with his heart in the highlands, grieving for his lost homeland speaking for those lost in an alien culture. He moved outward towards the world in extrovert fashion and held closely inward to himself the loneliness of the poet.
Precisely this sense of man's essential aloneness linked Saroyan's work directly to the main currents of the modern philosophical thought and to the major modernist writers. The existential strain in Saroyan was distinctly discernible. His work might be seen as the record of the search for meaning within the self. Saroyan's existentialism and romanticism stood as complementary aspects of the quest for true being. The difficulty of this search had also been emphasized by William Fisher who argued that

*Saroyan's novels and dramas became strange battle grounds where belief struggled with skepticism.* (10)

Saroyan's concern as an artist has been unfolding of humanity's deepest spiritual aspirations; typically his work focused directly on the Individual struggling to live life with grace and meaning. In his plays, he repeatedly found a cluster of themes which stood in the relation of art to reality, love and loneliness, the exile in search of home, the world of childhood and the family and the autobiographical quest. The dramatic conflict in each saroyan's best works was the same. Characters confronted on essential chaos in the world which divided their being and impelled towards the search for
identity. In his first play *My Heart is in The Highlands* the boy Johnny said at the end.

*I am not mentioning any names, pa, but, something is wrong somewhere.*

(My Heart 63)

Yet for Saroyan there was also something right somewhere, and was this dialectical tension between despair and joy which gave his work its strength and lasting worth. Sweetness, benevolence and affection for the human race could be perilous commodities in the drama. But Saroyan did not conform to such negative attitude. He happily had a quality that turned his love affair with mankind into a beautiful romance instead of a vulgar lesson. He had an ability to make his fondness for battered humanity real and joyful.

The flippancy and ambiguity vanish in the closing passages in which Saroyan speaks of the distinguishing marks of the earnest writer. Brief though they are, these comments help to identify a distinctive aspect of the authentic
Voice of Saroyan: his constant awareness that life is lived in the presence of death.

Born and reared among the Americans of the San Joaquin valley, emigrants from a country that had many times faced extinction and had known almost endless hardships, Saroyan soon learned the harsh conditions under which life was often given to man. Suffering and death were unalterable facts to which one had to become reconciled. To Saroyan the inevitability of death implied, despite all feeling to the contrary, that it was as natural as birth and therefore not in itself a matter of tragedy. Indeed, its very closeness heightened for him the sense of preciousness of one’s moment of life. Saroyan’s awareness of death and an intensified responsiveness to life was very much appreciable. It made possible the incongruous but enormously effective metaphor of his title and it imparted an indefinable charm. The preface closes with the assertion that one must learn to breathe deeply, to taste, and even to sleep with much zest and responsiveness as one’s capacities permit. Saroyan advocated the view that one must always try to be alive; it is
matter of surety that he will be dead soon enough. For those who knew the privations of the depression, this plea to make the most of life's simple joys struck a responsive note, and they welcomed this new writer as one who seemed to possess a poet's instinct to express what they themselves had come to feel.

The desire of Saroyan's characters to establish communion as contemporary writing in any other form had succeeded in interpreting it, it was not that they all wanted to write any particular kind of play but they all wanted to create a serious American Drama which could take its place as part of American literature.