Introduction

The term American Dream was coined by James Truslow Adams in his book *Epic of America* (1931) but it was not a new concept. It was the promise of happiness, prosperity and success through hard work which unveiled America as a land of opportunity to the first settlers. The first settlement of New England and tobacco farming in Virginia ensued a gold-rush to America which never seized. *The Audacity of Hope: Thoughts of Reclaiming the American Dream* is also a book that Obama wrote before 2008 Presidential Elections. The book gives an account of the interpretation of the American Dream in contemporary America and the positive hope that the ideology has instilled among the masses from the times after the discovery of this great continent. Many such attempts have been made to define the American Dream which has become one of the deeply engrained ideologies, determining the very existence of the Americans. It started as the quest for upward mobility later to bring into its circumference luxurious life and home ownership.

Karl Marx believed in the interpretation of all texts in terms of class struggle or class conflict. According to the Marxist theory of literature, the base stands for the primary social and economic structure which is reflected by the superstructure ie. Literature, arts and music. This is called the “reflection theory”. When the superstructure gives critical analyses of the base, it is called “critiquing theory”. The first wave of Marxism, better known as “Vulgar Marxism” was replaced by ideology. From the 1960s onwards there is a departure from traditional Marxism which always relied on a single source for examining social phenomenon. This new Marxism is called “Revisionist Marxism.” (Nagarajan 229) Louis Althusser made significant contributions to
it. He treats literature as governed by the “state apparatus” and an Ideology which is imposed on the society to control it.

Louis Althusser made use of ISA, Ideological State Apparatus which could be further understood as state apparatuses inclusive of schools, hospitals etc. and Repressive Ideological State Apparatus which consists of political forces, police and army. Thus, the ideology of the American Dream was popularised by the political superstructure or the Repressive Ideological State Apparatus which wanted the American masses to believe that they could accomplish happiness, prosperity and success through hard work. This meant that everyone who worked hard could become successful and henceforth realize the American Dream, which is apparent from the following definition of Althusser:

Workers and the reproduction of the ability to manipulate the ruling ideology correctly for the agents of exploitation and repression, so that they, too, will provide for the domination of the ruling class ‘in words’. . . In other words, the school (but also other state institutions like the church, or other apparatuses like the army) teaches ‘know-how’, but in forms which ensure subjection to the ruling ideology or the mastery of its ‘practice’. All the agents of production, exploitation and repression not to speak of, the professionals of ideology (Marx), must in one way or another, be steeped in this ideology in order to perform their tasks conscientiously. . . the tasks of the exploited (the proletarians), of the exploiters (the capitalists), of the exploiter’s auxiliaries (the managers), or of the high priests of the ruling ideology (it’s functionaries etc.) . . .the reproduction of labour power thus reveals as its sine qua non not only the reproduction of its subjection to the ruling ideology or the ‘practice’ of that ideology, with the proviso that it is not enough to say ‘not only but also’, for it is clear that it is in the forms and under the forms of ideological subjection that provision is made for the reproduction of skills of labour power. (Althusser 132/133)

Thus, we can easily deduce from the aforesaid discussion that the American Dream was a ruling ideology used by the political base i.e. the rulers as well as by the Repressive State Apparatus, namely, the army and the police, and at times by the religious base, the church, to dupe the poor
masses or the proletariat (working classes) to believe that even an ordinary man could become rich by following the success mantra of the American Dream. The Declaration for Independence speaks of all men as equal and so they had equal rights in pursuit of happiness and success.

For evaluating the basis of exploitation in the United States after the Civil War—Marxist theory seems to be the most appropriate one. Even though the wages went up, there was an increase in the exploitation of the masses. More capital was generated than was paid as wages to the employees. This difference created a surplus which helped the United States to amass immense wealth and a position in the global economy. However, the workers were exploited in this whole phenomenon. Thus, there was an increasing gap between the rising surplus and the wages which were paid to the workers. At the same time, U.S. Capitalism experienced rising standards of consumption for workers. The country had an overcrowded population of exploited workers who were now enjoying the rising standards of consumption. This helped in curbing trade unions, communist opposition and criticism against the capitalist culture.

This culture of mass consumption and capitalism drew money from all parts of the world to the United States. However, this rise in capitalism came at a very huge social cost that the country had to pay. The people of the United States were overworked— they were in a state of mental stress, which led to psychological depression, isolation, loneliness which in turn led to broken families. All these conditions are exhibited in Arthur Miller’s Death of a Salesman, in which Willy Loman, the protagonist suffers from all these circumstances which finally led to his suicide. Capitalism induces hopes in the individuals that they could avail of all the benefits of the rising economy and consume all the fruits of it. They did not realize the gap between the capitalists and the proletariat. Thus, Willy Loman requested his employer, Howard to consider
Willy did not have an insight into understanding the difference between the working class and the capitalist class. This was the main reason for the feeling of isolation, depression and loneliness of the common man who knew little to realize that all these problems arose due to his mindset or ideology. This ideology, according to Louis Althusser, was the guiding factor in creating an imaginary consciousness in the common man, that he could be a part of the phenomenon of success promised by the American Dream. This consciousness was created in him through the ISA (Ideological State Apparatus) which included schools and all other institutions which were responsible for developing the ideology of Individual and RSA (Repressive State Apparatus), which included the police, the governing institutions and the rulers. Both ISA and RSA were together responsible in helping the workers realize or imagine their relationship to the society.

The ISA consists of schools, family, mass media and church (religious institutions). It was not governed by politics but it was governed by ideology. This ideology helped the people in the society to understand their place within the social framework and their relationship to it. However, the RSA as well as the ISA were both operated by the capitalists. According to Althusser, ISA worked through the process of “Interpellation”. It is imperative to know who a subject is before learning the literary theory of interpellation. The child is a subject even before he is born because he cannot change his identity. Once a person is rendered a specific identity, it is obligatory on him to be “interpellated” by the norms of the society to which people of the likes of his identity conform. Just as people of different religious identities form beliefs according to their religion and their own scriptures, people belonging to different schools of learning are trained in Ideology, so much so, that they start believing that, that respective thought or ideology is their own.
Let me summarize what we have discovered about ideology in general. The duplicate mirror structure of ideology ensures simultaneously: 1. The interpretation of individuals as subjects; 2. Their subjection to the subject; 3. The mutual recognition of subjects and subject, the subjects’ recognition of himself; 4. The absolute guarantee that everything really is so and that on condition that the subjects recognize what they are and behave accordingly, everything will be all right: Amen- ‘So be it.’ . . . Result: caught in this quadruple system of interpellation as subjects, of subjection to the Subject, of universal recognition and of absolute guarantee, the subjects 'work', they 'work by themselves' in the vast majority of cases, with the exception of the 'bad subjects' who on occasion provoke the intervention of one of the detachments of the (repressive) State apparatus. But the vast majority of (good) subjects work all right 'all by themselves', i.e. by ideology (whose concrete forms are realized in the Ideological State Apparatuses). (Althusser 180, 181)

The “good subjects” work according to the workings of the Ideological State Apparatus (ISA) but the “bad subjects” need to undergo further controls by the Repressive State Apparatus (RSA). Thus, interpellation is the process of forming the ideology of the people by forming their basic ideas which are a part of their existence. For instance, a boy child is made to believe from his initial years that men don’t cry or girls are made to believe that they should play with dolls and similar ideologies such as, pink is a girlish colour. These ideologies become a part of the very existence of boys and girls, to the extent that they start believing that these are their own ideas. They are unable to comprehend that they are being “interpellated” to think in a particular way by the Ideological State Apparatus. According to this theory, schools, families, church and mass media influenced individuals in particular ways to form their identity and relationship in the social scenario. According to Althusser, the individual in the capitalistic society were interpellated by ISA so that they could “freely accept subjection”. He also goes on to explain that the subjectivity of an individual arises from his own understanding of the established relationship in the society. Thus, he became aware of the “hegemony” and subjectivity which is talked of by Antonio Gramsci. Althusser’s intention was to attack the workings of the ISA which, in turn, was
sustaining the capitalist culture. His intention was to start a Marxist programme which would have an agenda of studying cultures which would become a hindrance in the preachings of ISA which wanted to frame the ideology of the masses according to the needs of the capitalists and ruling classes.

Althusser felt that culture was the foundation stone of class formation. Thus, class and culture were, according to him, inter-dependent and all the other aspects of the society were determined by both class and culture. The contradiction that arose in this relationship can only be sorted out through a Marxist programme that Althusser proposed, which would be against the workings of the ISA which wanted to preach the ideology of only the ruling classes. These contradictory interpellations formed a focus of Althusser’s literary theory of ideology.

The pilgrims did not understand the idea of the America Dream at that time because no such ideology had existed at that time. They came to America for the sake of opportunity. Even the immigrants understood what their pursuit was in coming to this nation which offered them progress, without knowing the actual terminology for upward mobility. Thus, understanding of the American Dream in the 1800s continues to be felt in a similar way even so now, by the turn of the 21st century. American Dream has become a metaphor for success, happiness and prosperity for one and all.

There were many versions of the American Dream which existed from the day the first settlers came up to present day America. Whenever the American society is viewed from the point of view of a slave or a person craving for independence, he views the American Dream is seen as the vision for freedom, as portrayed in Mark Twain’s *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*. It can be viewed as a prologue to the American Dream. The setting of the book is based on
Mississippi river, on which a lot of time is spent. Huck narrates how he and Jim travel down the river on a raft, in search for the true meaning of freedom in their native land. It is a social document that is reared on the ethos of socio-religious practices in America. It is based on the moral norms in the mid-nineteenth century America. It gives a picture of the historical, political and economic conditions through which the American nation was making its way for its future. It is a journey through the forces of nature which showed them the way to the new world. It is the enactment of the struggle of a nation in the making. As Mark Twain was a novelist and not a historian, we cannot expect him to give us a chronological arrangement of all the events but he gives us a complete record of the disjointed events of frontier life. The focus that he provides gives one a penetrating insight into the ultimate truths of the 1800s which even a historian is incapable of providing.

With a juxtaposition of irony, humour and paradox Mark Twain explodes the evils prevailing in the society. In his humorous way, he exposes the contemporary values which are admired and cherished by the men in the antebellum frontier society. *Huckleberry Finn* thus sums up the social and moral, and what is, even spiritual and greater human truths, which sustain the very fabric of human existence. The value-judgments in this novel are too apparent. He uses irony and contrast with a skilful but devastating effect. Behind the reactions, attitudes, responses and protests of the adolescent hero we discover the disturbed mind of the novelist who sees the essential values being tragically buried under the thick layers of civilization. The angles from which Mark Twain studies the contemporary society are moral, economic, social and human. These parameters help us judge the society from a multi-dimensional perspective. The novelist gives us a magical presentation of events which, when linked together, give us the very fabric of developing American society.
The southwestern American society was in a state of transition and represented a nation which was on the move towards its goal. However the society was following some fixed codes of conduct which were a hurdle in its progression. Thus, the rules had become well established and allowed little or no changes to the inhabitants. It was a society which was progressing forward but was retrograde in thinking. The biggest drawback of the society was its class structure. There was a hierarchy in the entire nation. In which were many classes and the values of each class were different from that of another. The highest of the classes being the landed aristocracy, were governed by their own strict norms and codes. Next to them were the small land owners who followed almost the same values as the landed aristocracy. The third class was formed by the peasants and farmers as well as the idlers, who would vile away their time. The fourth class was free from any code of conduct or moral obligations. In the same set up, last came the slaves, who were owned by the whites for their entire life. The slaves were not educated and remained ignorant.

It is a formidable task for the novelist to cover all these classes in one literary work. Thus, he does not assume a fixed position but rather chooses to move, and to that end he conforms to the idea of a journey along the great river which flowed across the continent. The idea of undertaking a journey for freedom is just like the idea of the pilgrimage which Chaucer chose in the Canterbury Tales. The pilgrimage was for a cause but here the journey for freedom is undertaken as the cause for the purpose of attaining freedom.

The novel is a satire on the institution of slavery. The slaves were owned by their masters, just like animals which are sold in the market. The people had no regard for their emotions as human beings. Jim represents the class of slaves. He is owned by Miss Watson whom he serves with all devotion but when she is offered a good price by the slave trader, she
just could not resist the offer. It is then that Jim escapes as he did not want to be separated from his family members. Mark Twain reflects on the values of loyalty and faithfulness which were lacking amongst the white community at large. Jim longs for his family, on the other hand, he wants to reach the free states to earn money in order to get back his children who had been sold. The desire for money is deeply entrenched in the Frontier people. People forget all their values and moral obligations in a quest for earning money. This is apparent in the nineteenth as well as the twentieth century which followed. Miss Watson could not forgo the ‘eight hundred dollars’ and she completely forgets the loyal services Jim has extended to her.

Puritanism was the religion of the people which formed a background to the capitalist society. The people attended the prayer services and listened to the preaching of the priests but could not follow much in practice. There was a wide gap between what was preached and what was actually followed. There are some examples from the novel that prove the religious inclinations of the people. The Shepherdson episode reveals that people went to the churches with their guns loaded. There is an instance of a camp meeting for preaching religion and good moral practices but it becomes the meeting place for courters.

Mark Twain exposes the need for realism in literature by the episode of the wreckage of Walter Scott which has been used in a symbolic way in the novel to show that the wreck of the steamboat could not survive the reality and thus, it is a subtle attack on a need of replacement of romantic literature by realist trends in writing, of which, he was a precursor. Twain does not build any episode without the need to instruct. The biggest instance from the rule book is that of a class-less society, culminated by a friendship between a white boy and a negro which is based on love and regard of human values.
The increasing desire for prosperity in order to achieve the American dream is increasingly seen in *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, though it is not the main theme of the novel. Man’s obsession to earn more and the symbols of material wealth forms one of the major themes that the novel suggests. The consideration for money plays a significant part in the novel and sometimes it becomes the governing factor behind major decisions. When Huck comes in possession of ‘six thousand dollars’, he becomes an important figure in the eyes of the civilization. Twain hints at the corrupting influence that money exercises on the senses of human beings. He discusses that an adoration of money in his age had led to a steep decline of moral values.

Huck knows that the possession of ‘six thousand dollars’ had made him the centre of attraction. Though, he has no greed for money and he subsequently gives up the money to acquire his freedom. Widow Douglas has adopted Huck to civilize him but this had only lead to his confinement. He renounced this money in order to gain freedom from St. Petersburg and start his education. Huck truly realizes that he was getting added attention from everyone because of his money which leads to his social upgradation. The changed scenario confirms the belief that money can wash all sins and can change perceptions about people.

Huck’s moral conscience is superior when compared to the average conscience of the rest of the lot. The novel deals with the behavior of the major characters and how they behave in the roles that are given to them as a part of the society. Just like Charles Dickens, Mark Twain exposes the corrupting influence of money on man as it makes him lose his moral values. Huck preferred a free life on the Mississippi which is a complete contradiction of Linda Loman’s craving for a house with no dues in the play, *Death of a Salesman*. Both are in pursuit of the American Dream, which holds a different connotation for each one of them. In the essay “The
Dream of Possession: Frost’s Paradoxical Gift” by Jeffery Gray, we see the changing definition of the American Dream over the years:

The earliest promises of America were based on the idea of fresh opportunity—to escape from the oppression of history to a virgin land where one could make oneself anew. By the time the term the “American Dream” was actually coined (by James Truslow Adams in 1931), it had come to mean prosperity and possession of land. After World War 2, the American Dream became more specifically identified as the citizen’s possession of a free-standing home. Thus the postwar move to the suburbs is central to the definition we retain today of this term, even when it is used cynically. By the time of Kennedy inauguration, that later meaning of the dream had been fulfilled by white middle-class Americans. (Gray 59)

Hence, the American Dream held a different definition and varied values to a variety of people who inhabited or came to inhabit the land of opportunity.

Edward Albee’s *The American Dream* is an example of nada, nothingness, meaninglessness and absurdity in American way of living. The play is a metaphorical representation of the American Dream which looks attractive from a distance but does not have any real meaning behind it as there is an emptiness in modern living. Thus, Canady observes Daddy as a fatalist and Mommy as person who tries to dominate others for her own good. Grandma adjusts to the nothingness in her life by seeing the dream in a positive perspective as an artist can enjoy any experience. *The American Dream* is an existential drama which belongs to the theatre of the absurd. At the end of the play, a young man enters the stage. He is handsome in his outward appearance but lacks substance just like the American Dream. Edward Albee mocks at the complacency of modern living in which the characters exist more in an existential vacuum. Daddy has a fatal attitude in the beginning of the play. Both Daddy and Mommy are waiting for the arrival of either Mrs. Barker, the Van man or any other thing. They are late in their arrival and so Daddy gives up whereas Mommy continuously complains about it. Daddy
enlists the repairs which need to be made in the house, right from the icebox to the toilet as well as the doorbell. He complains about it but does not actually intend to do anything about it practically. Daddy has forgotten his past completely which means nothing to him. He even forgot the name of his adopted son. He has completely resigned to his life because of the nothingness prevailing in it. He is troubled constantly by a dominating wife and therefore, his best alternative is to recoil into his empty life. Thus, *The American Dream* is a satire by Edward Albee on the meaninglessness of American life to reveal the hollowness of the dream which exists in a society which is sick in its ideals.

*The Autobiography of Benjamin Franklin* seeks to reveal not only the history behind Franklin’s financial rise but also other success stories of the nineteenth century America and the definition of American Dream as a standard criterion for the rise of individuals from rags to riches. The book had a popular appeal as it portrays an individual’s progress from a life of dependence to a life of power. The American Dream is the dream of individualism for Benjamin Franklin. As America even today, believes in the merit of an individual. There are varied possibilities of success with varied people as they have varied talents. Franklin sees the American Dream as the hope for a new world which would be devoid of the evils of the old world. Franklin has mentioned his early life of poverty which can be contrasted with his later life of power and richness, lending reality to the rags-to-riches theory of the American Dream. There is optimism, hope and individualism, which forms backdrop to Franklin’s philosophy in life, which helps him to achieve the American Dream.

The poems of Langston Hughes deal with the concept of the American Dream so as to define it as the promise of liberty and justice as enshrined in the constitution of America and
contrast it with the situation of the Afro-Americans who have been excluded from the mainframe of the American Dream and for whom the dream was more of a myth than a reality. “Children Rhymes” by Langston Hughes gives us a brief account of black children playing on the American streets who sing out their experiences which is different from those of their white folks. Thus, we see that certain communities were marginalized from the American Dream such as the Afro-Americans and the women. There was, therefore, a differentiation between the American Dream of the whites and that of the Afro-Americans.

Sandra Cisneros’s *The House on Mango Street* gives autobiographical account through the narrator Esperanza not only about her own ambitions but also of those surrounding her. The protagonist has two dreams, one of making her own identity as a writer and the other of home ownership. Owning one’s own house was also one of the major accomplishments which formed a part of achieving the American Dream. It means upward mobility for a person who would have a career reaffirming his self identity and a house of his own. Esperanza’s dream to have her own house is a representation of the American Dream. Having her own career would add to her liberation as a woman. Sandra Cisneros is a poet born in Chicago. She wrote *The House on Mango Street* in the form of memoirs by a young girl. There are forty-four episodes which are loosely linked to one another, which reflect on her struggle to make her own identity. She feels alienated because of her Mexican identity. Being a Mexican she stays in Chicago and she belongs to the female creed, which leads to her double marginalization. Her family has no permanent house and they always dream of owning their own house in the land of opportunity. They finally come to the house on Mango Street, a house which they can call their own. However, they realize that they were not in their land of dreams and that they had to move on further in order to secure their dream house. However, the narrator does not stop dreaming and
ultimately learns that the house that she was yearning for was her own self because the body serves as a house for the spirit.

Upton Sinclair’s *The Jungle* is a story of the sham behind the American Dream of immigration. Everyone wanted to come to the land of opportunity where each individual would get equal justice. It is a critique of the American Dream in which Sinclair gives the example of a Lithuanian emigrant family. In the year 1880, five thousand Russians migrated to United States which increased manifold in the 1900s when *The Jungle* was published. There was a dream of socialism which was a promise to the emigrant society to get equal rights. The work is based on the life of Jurgis who decides to go to America after getting married. The American land offered itself as a place about which people dreamed because of the freedom and equal opportunity it offered. However, the emigrants lose their original identity linked to their family religion and culture just for an opportunity to get economic success. The promise of equal economic elevation, because of which they lose their old values turns out to be a farce. In the 1900s, a work for which a native American would earn a hundred dollars, an Italian born would get only eighty-four dollars and a Hungarian would get sixty-eight, while the other Europeans would just get fifty-four dollars. (Yoder 99). Thus, the American society followed the law of the jungle in a highly competitive capitalist atmosphere, in which only the fittest survived. Switching from one odd job to another, Jurgis joins the smalltime hotel which is owned by a socialist. Finally, he becomes a socialist too and joins the wider socialist movement in America which guarantees a life of equality through equal distribution of wealth.

All the novels of John Steinbeck deal with issues in relation to the marginalized sections of the American society against the privileged ones. Just like F. Scott Fitzgerald, Theodore
Dreiser, Arthur Miller and Bernard Malamud, Steinbeck tries to expose the myth behind the 
American Dream as pointed out by Noble in the following analyses:

Steinbeck’s revolution certainly was not an aesthetic one. During a period 
of American literary history best remembered for urgent challenges to 
notions of propriety and style, Steinbeck’s voluminous oeuvre offers a 
folksy, earnest, at times old-fashioned optimism. Even then, his spare, 
workmanlike prose rarely bettered contemporaries such as Ernest 
Hemingway or Willa Cather, who shared a similarly direct style. Instead, 
Steinbeck’s legacy was his expansive vision—his willingness to take the 
world in whole where lesser spirits (such as his fictional disciple Sullivan) 
had blushed. His best works celebrate the democratic resolve of the 
masses. They imagine communities forged through radical gestures of 
empathy rather than the accident of geography. They are celebrations of 
America’s discarded and dispossessed, swamper and fishermen, 
“bindlestiffs” and paisanos, bedraggled wanderers searching for a day’s 
pay, and immigrants misshapen for the American Dream. (Noble 16)

In The Grapes of Wrath and Of Mice and Men, Steinbeck reveals the plight of the labourers and 
small farmers. The Pastures of Heaven is about the problems of the middle-class. Similarly he 
talks of the lure of contemporary lifestyle in To a God Unknown and Sweet Thursday. In all his 
works, he describes the American society as a place not so suitable for the weaker and 
impoverished sections of the society. Most of the themes of Steinbeck’s fiction come from his 
own experience----being born in the twentieth century to an Irish family. His father was a farmer 
and he himself took up small-time jobs such as that of a driver, a labourer and finally an editor 
with a daily newspaper.

Steinbeck also served as a war correspondent for the government of America during 
World War 1. Based on his experiences during the war, he wrote, Once there was a War. He 
depicts the true state of the small farm labourers in the changing world of capitalist farming in 
The Grapes of Wrath and In Dubious Battle. He also gives a vivid account of the not so
fortunate, marginalized people living in the region around California in *Tortilla Flat, The Pastures of Heaven* and *To a God Unknown*. The story of two ranch labourers, facing the tough realities of life and still hoping to achieve the American Dream is narrated in *Of Mice and Men*:

It tells the story of George Milton and Lennie Small, migrant ranch workers during the Depression who dream of making enough money to buy their own land and realize the Jeffersonian ideal of having a small ranch of their own. The book, which became emblematic of the American quest for independence and ownership, concludes with the desecration of the American Dream when the mentally challenged Lennie accidentally kills his employer’s son’s wife, ending any chance of the new life he has planned with George. To spare Lennie the fury of a lynch mob, George shoots him. The book’s tragic tone gives voice to the economic powerlessness of workers of the era. (Noble 48)

*Of Mice and Men* helps us to take a keen look at America, which was the promising land of dreams. A place where those belonging to the lower strata of the society could dream of a better future. It also portrays the sufferings of those who believe in the dream.

In most of these works, Steinbeck deals with ordinary people grappling with the harsh realities of life in the promising land. Most of these works were written in the time period of the Wall Street Crash known as The Great Depression (1929) which brought about a slump in the American economy. He had come to realize that the promises of liberty, equality, fraternity and pursuit of happiness were empty slogans and that they would in no way help the common people to achieve any good. Steinbeck tried to highlight the issues of misleading the common folk by the ruling class in order to achieve their own short term and long term goals. The impoverished and deprived sections of society were exploited so that the rulers could fulfill their profit motive. There was a collaboration between the government and the capitalist class who together framed the guiding ideology of the people according to the requirements of the rulers. Thus, we develop an insight into the working of the American state by reading the novels of Steinbeck.
A literary history of American Dream literature is incomplete without the experience of African Americans. Afro-American literature was mostly from the slave narratives and the Harlem Renaissance was instrumental in highlighting the concerns of the Afro-Americans in the same context. The poems of Langston Hughes gives an account of a movement which is inconclusive of the marginalization and victimization of Afro-Americans. In his poem, “Democracy”, Langston Hughes believes that democracy will not come through compromise and fear, he feels that Afro-Americans have equal rights just as the native Americans and stand on their own feet and own their land. Hughes believes in a Marxist and Socialist ideology and expects justice and equality should be given to African Americans. The literature written by his community occupies a large part of American literature. Their creed of people was brought to America to work as plantation laborers in the plantations of New England, in the capacity of slaves. However, Abraham Lincoln led the anti-slavery movement which was instrumental in the abolition of slavery in 1863. The First major movement which brought their concerns to the forefront was the Harlem Renaissance in the 1920s. In the 20th century, the Afro-Americans became conscious of their rights and asserted their individual identity which had been undermined by racial discrimination. The early poems of Langston Hughes illustrate racial prejudice in America.

In Willa Cather’s My Antonia, the material success promised by the American Dream is attained by Jim Burden, who is the protagonist of the novel. Still he looks back upon time which he spent on the prairies thinking about all he had lost in his quest for achieving happiness, success and prosperity. Jim Burden is just like Jay Gatsby of The Great Gatsby where he has a sense of loss and incompleteness even after achieving all the material success in life. Therefore, in My Antonia, material success does not bring about the real attainment of the American Dream.
Anybody who ventures on this pursuit of material prosperity, does not find solace even after acquiring worldly success. The novel, *My Antonia* is the novel of success as attained by Jim Burden. It exemplifies anybody’s rise to privileged position by migrating to the west. This rise in position, however, does not guarantee happiness and fulfillment. Jim Burden loses the sense of achieving the American dream inspite of accomplishing it. In the same way, Jay Gatsby in the *The Great Gatsby* loses his sense of achievement even after acquiring material wealth. The attainment of the dream by Gatsby eventually leads to his death. Thus, we can link Jim Burden’s experience to the humdrum experiences of the majority of Americans who look forward to fulfilling the American dream.

There were many who left their homes to become successful. Similar is the theme of *Love Medicine* by Louise Erdrich. It is a novel on the Chippewa Indians, mainly concentrating on the lives of two families: The Lamartines and Kashpaws. The Chippewas are lured by the promises of the American Dream as most of them leave their homes but at the same time lose their sense of belongingness. They leave their native land in pursuit of upward mobility. One of the characters, Albertine runs away twice from her homeland but doesn’t get economic success. The characters realize ultimately that their feeling of fulfillment rests at home, however, they go after the attraction of the American Dream as they are proud to be owners of the symbols of material wealth:

The characters in *Love Medicine* (Lipsha and June included) are well aware of the attractions of the American Dream, and do sometimes chase it. They’re especially proud of their cars, those major symbols of American achievement. Henry Lamartine, for example, whose spirit was devastated by his service as a U.S. Marine in Vietnam, is almost revived by his interest in his brother Lyman’s car—the first convertible on the reservation, a Red olds. When Henry drowns in the river, Lyman heads that car towards the water, and watches it go under. Without his brother,
even a Red olds means nothing; that prime, proud sign of the American Dream is suddenly paltry and meaningless. Similarly, King Kashpaw loves his brand new sports car; but even it can’t overcome his sense of failure, any more than his unhappy marriage to Lynette can. . . Beverly Lamartine also unhappily married to a white woman, “a natural blond” whose family admires Beverly’s “perfect tan”, one of the more superficial signs of the “white man’s American Dream”. He chases the American Dream in the Twin Cities, where “there were great relocation opportunities for Indians with a certain amount of natural stick-to-it-iveness and pride”. (Downes 126)

The American masses were lost in the celebration of the new spirit. It was a market of mass consumption where all that mattered was acquisition of items of luxury such as expensive clothes, costly cars and lavish houses. People believed that if they owned a car, a big house and a luxurious lifestyle---they would have the insignia of success. Man had become shallow in his thinking as he could not comprehend life beyond these material aspects. The ones who climbed the ladder of prosperity realized that there was nothing on the other side. They could not even reclaim sometimes, all that they had lost in the process of upward mobility. For example, Jay Gatsby lost everything, including a career of respect in F. Scott Fitzgerald’s *The Great Gatsby*. He is an ex-army man who later becomes a bootlegger in order to be affluent and win the love of the girl of his dreams, Daisy. Not in a position to understand anything, Gatsby goes beyond this point to lose the most precious gift of God—his life, as he was shot dead by Myrtle’s husband, Wilson. The American Dream turned to be a nightmare for him and many others who were blindly lured by it without understanding the repercussions of blindly following the path to accomplish it.

*A Raisin in the Sun* is the first play by an Afro-American woman to be produced on Broadway. Imamu Amiri Baraka called it “the quintessential civil rights play”. It is an account of the challenges which the African-American workers experienced in Chicago before the mid-
twentieth century. There was a discrimination in housing facilities for the marginalized population which has been portrayed through the experience of the Younger family. The African-American family, the Youngers, had a doubtful future at Clybourne Park, where they live now among a white community. As blacks were not too welcome there, their settlement there was questionable. It was very difficult for the Youngers to adjust with the white community as the latter would resist and they would be socially unacceptable to them. They would be treated as aliens and it would be difficult for them to climb up the economic ladder.

All the characters have their own dreams which they try to achieve with their individual effort. All of them try to realize the American Dream. Some meet success while the others taste defeat. Walter wanted to make a profit from the liquor business, Beneatha wanted to become a doctor whereas Mama wanted to earn through tuitions and her dream was to buy her own house. She did not want Walter to get into the alcohol business due to her religious beliefs. To sum up their aspirations, the Youngers wanted to earn money, own their own house and become more acceptable in the white society by becoming rich. Beneatha and Walter were siblings, the former wanted to be a doctor while the latter wanted to trade liquor by owning a liquor store. Walter wanted to get into the liquor business because he wanted a short cut to financial success. It was difficult for him to imagine earning money through righteous means which would be a long drawn process. However, Walter’s dream to invest the money given to him by Mama ends up terribly. He is duped of the money fraudulently and his dream of success meets only failure. Mama ultimately achieves her own dream by investing the insurance money in the house and lives in the white community inspite of all odds for Afro-Americans.
The American Dream carries the promise of a perfect paradise which existed even before the time of the American Puritans when the idea had not evolved into an ideology. This promise of Utopia that America offered, propagated by the founding fathers turned into a spiritual vacuum as presented in the *Waste land* (1922) by T.S. Eliot. The same post-war vacuum is visible in Norman Mailer’s *An American Dream* in which the protagonist, Stephen Richards Rojack is a successful man when evaluated by economic parameters but suffers from an unhappy married life. Rojack established a matrimonial alliance to climb up the social ladder. Though he was an ex-army man and a Professor of Existential Philosophy, he hosts a talk show on the television and also has a successful writing career, becoming almost an incarnation of the American dream hero. However, his marriage to Deborah Kelly does not work out for him as he had thought. Deborah soon occupies the centre stage, pushing Rojack aside from his earlier prime position. This marginalization is too much for him and he tries to commit suicide twice, in which he fails. This ultimately led to accidental murder—the homicide was not pre-meditated by him but it just happened in the act of violence which was motivated by his claiming of his masculine identity. He had been sidelined by Deborah, who was the daughter of a business tycoon. She had seemed attractive at first for the financial gain the marriage alliance promised.

All that which had attracted Rojack to Deborah earlier, later becomes his point of hatred for her. Deborah’s wealth and power, her strong-headedness, her arrogance and her disloyalties towards him all made him strangulate her one day, which was an act, not premeditated but immediate. Even after killing Deborah, he had no remorse in him because he felt justified in killing a violent wife who charged him like a bull, aiming her head towards his stomach. He was tired of her excessive pride due to her financially advantageous position and hence her accidental murder did not instill any pity in him. He started to wonder how he would come out of the accusations of
murder just because of the fear of getting caught for the crime. At last he decided to throw her
dead body out of the window to show that it was a case of suicide. As no substantial proof could
be produced that he committed the murder, he was able to escape from the interrogation of
detectives, police and his powerful and wealthy father-in-law. Rojack escapes the punishment
but at the same time is surrounded by a dreadful feeling of being caught at any instance. Rojack’s
story cannot be considered as that of a successful man. Even though, he had become rich by
marrying Deborah, he killed his own wife whom he had used to acquire success. Thus, the title,
An American Dream, reveals the dark side of many such dreams which appear as dreams only on
the surface. Deep inside, there is a great plight behind every person who is in actual pursuit of
the American Dream.

Jack Kerouac’s On the Road is written about the ideology in United States after the
Second World War. It gained momentum at the time of Cold War. Between 1940 to 1960 there
was a bohemian culture when the Beat Generation, of which Jack Kerouac was a part, flourished.
This culture persisted till the 1960s. It was these unrestricted cultural and social values and
practices form the American mainframe. Kerouac’s novel describes the events starting from
1947 and going up to 1949. The main characters of the novel are Sal Paradise (Jack Kerouac)
and his friend Dean Moriarty (Neal Cassidy) who travel across the United States and expose the
underbelly of America. There are multiple dreams in the writer’s imagination. There are many
heroes in the novel including thieves, prostitutes, Jazz musicians and drifters. All these people
are those who form a major population of America. In fact, the novel is a celebration of diversity
in America. Sal meets two different groups of characters while he is on his journey. There is one
group which believes in grabbing, taking, giving and dying. These people do not conform to the
rules of the society. Sal meets them on his way from San Francisco to New York.
On his journey to Denver he meets a different group of people ranging from truck drivers, cowboys, farm boys to young painters and editors. Sal discovers a unique culture being followed by these people whose existence was determined by their hopes and aspirations. It was a first time venture of writing in which the dreams of the marginalized population were respectfully narrated. However, the American Dream that Sal saw from the point of view of the common people was different as these people struggled for their daily survival. It was not easy for everybody to get material success and *On the Road* is about a common man’s dream which rested more on the idea of subsistence and survival instead of success and prosperity.

*Walden* was an experiment, a book by Henry David Thoreau, a noted Transcendentalist in which he reflected upon a simple life in natural habitat. It is a philosophical treatise of nature in which he makes a personal declaration of an experiment about the society, with a quest for spiritual discovery and he wanted it to be a basis for self-reliant individuals. It was the result of his two years long experience at a house he made near Walden Pond, located in a forest owned by his friend Ralph Waldo Emerson in Massachusetts. Thoreau wanted to conduct this experiment in order to understand the nature of society more closely through personal experience and musings. He felt that nature and society were interconnected. Thus, it was directly connected to the state of society at that time which was busy in the fulfillment of the American dream. According to Walden, any dream could result positively as well as negatively. There is a complete overlapping of saintly life and nature’s abundance at Walden.

Thoreau tries to change the focus of the American dream from material gains to the realities of life. He declares all the material comforts being chased by man as “superfluous”. His theory of the American Dream is quite contrary to James Truslow Adam’s definition: “that
dream of a land in which life should be better and richer and fuller for every man, with opportunity for each according to his ability or achievement.” (Adams 404)

Walden tries to explore the thin margin of difference between success and failure which is possible as a conclusion to any endeavour. Thoreau’s sermon is an encouragement to any man despite his difficult circumstances— he is liable to make any effort to achieve whatever he is capable of—be it success or failure. It was the Walden experiment through which Thoreau pointed out the inequalities prevailing in the nineteenth century American society such as slavery, poverty of farmers, as well as, confinement of females, which was in opposition to the promise of equality by ideology of the American Dream.

The experiment at Walden Pond was influenced by Ralph Waldo Emerson’s essay which he had written four years back, titled, “Self-Reliance”. However, Thoreau talks of both kinds of “Self-Reliance”—financial and social. He relies on his own hard work in order to gain financial freedom. The chapter on “economy” in Walden helps one to come to terms with one’s financial condition. He suggests that one can reduce one’s desires according to his financial status or make an effort to start earning more. It is the latter alternative that the American capitalist economy resorted to. People wanted to gain more economically by fair and foul means rather than cutting short their own needs and desires. In his personal life Thoreau finds more solace in forests rather than in club houses and marketplace.

As a result of his two years stint at Walden Pond, Thoreau wants to suggest to Americans not to spend most of their time in doing excessive labour so as to earn luxuries. On the other hand, he suggests them to cut down their expenses so that they can survive on less labour. Instead of laboring very hard by increasing ones needs they should decrease their needs and
thereby reduce the amount of labour they need to invest for their subsistence. By working too hard or more than required, their workplaces would turn into prison houses. His experiment helped many to realize that more than required labour spiritual oppression and extra worries along with physical tiredness were the reasons for inaction. According to Thoreau, no man requires more than the basic necessities of life, which include, “food, shelter and clothing” and a fourth, “fuel”, most of which nature abundantly offers, hence, man has to strive very less in order to fill the gap.

The American Dream was more of a creation of a new ego psychology which came out from a need of the ruling classes so that people in the society had similar dreams and aspirations. Such a like-minded society was easier for them to control:

Lincoln won the four-man race with less than 40 percent of the electorate, virtually all of it in the North. The American Dream of Upward Mobility seemed to have been realized in its purest form: a poor boy born in a log cabin had been elected the president of the United States. But his very election seemed to portend the end of those United States, and with it the dream of the boy. The South would not abide the results, and the war came. The Civil War was a huge personal and political vortex for Lincoln, in which he was forced to consider all kinds of matters—notably military strategy—that had never previously concerned him. Yet despite the burdens and distractions that preoccupied him, he never lost sight of his American Dream. (Cullen 94)

Thus, the rulers maintained their position of greatness by controlling the thought process of the masses. The people who were at a high ruling and privileged position behaved as fathers thereby creating an illusionary centre which became the guiding point of the entire system. If the masses wanted, they could not reach the position at the centre because the centre did not exist at all. It is non-existent and can be equated with the phallus.
It is a society in which the masses chose their representative who would in turn rule and guide them. Thus, the masses enter the symbolic order just as the child wants to become the centre of attraction of the mother which is the phallus according to the Freudian theory of Oedipus complex. It is a situation in which the child wants to become the centre of attraction of his mother but his position is already occupied by his father due to possession of a phallus. Freud means to refer to the male sexual organ when he talks of the phallus, which is also the centre. So according to Lacan, the phallus is an empty signifier because when there is nothing signified, the signifier loses it’s importance completely. Thus, according to this rule of Lacan—when the phallus did not exist at all—as it was the imaginary centre of the whole system. Hence, in turn, on condition of non-existence of the phallus, the system also does not exist. Thereby, the idea behind the American dream was a farce—it was the centre of the main ideology created by the ruling fathers but because the centre did not exist i.e., the American dream itself did not exist, therefore, the whole system around it was also living with a misnomer—something with an imaginary centre would be with no identity as the signifier and the signified are interdependent and one cannot exist without the other. It was a false ideology which created “false consciousness”. The law of the father at the unconscious level of the subject which can be equated to the masses who felt that they could enter the symbolic order if they owned the qualities of the centre. They spent their lives trying to acquire these qualities. Most of the literary works studied here show the protagonist’s unfruitful struggle in the existing order.

The year 1939 was significant in the history of America as it saw the beginning of the Second World War. The period before and after the war forms one of the most important times in American history. The novels—*The Great Gatsby* (1925) and *Sister Carrie* (1900) were precursors to the World War whereas *Death of a Salesman* (1949) and *The Assistant* (1957)
came as an aftermath, thereby, discussing the social circumstances before and after the Second World War. The United States of America had a political ambition to become a world superpower so as to govern the other countries, especially after the Second World War.

A Cold War ensued between the two power blocs; inclusive of the United States of America and the Soviet Union, who vied for supremacy. The political aim of the United States to become a world power needed the mobilization of the masses in order to fulfill its ambition. Throughout the nineteenth and twentieth century, the process of mobilization of the masses continued. The ruling power used the Ideological State Apparatus to make this machinery work: The State Apparatus, which defines the state as a force of repressive execution and intervention ‘in the interest of the ruling classes’ in the class struggle conducted by the bourgeoisie and its allies against the proletariat, is quite certainly the state, and quite certainly defines its basic ‘function’.

The capitalist economy of the nineteenth century America could give their working classes no more than dissatisfaction which came from their long working hours and underemployment, as well as, unemployment. Unless they controlled the masses with a ruling ideology, a revolution would be in the offing. This they tried to prevent by controlling the masses with their ideology. The rulers used the Ideological State Apparatus to create the myth that America was the land of dreams where anybody could realize his dream of success, prosperity and happiness by hard work. They used the educational system to mould the tender minds of the younger population so that the ideology would remain engrained in their psyche all throughout their lives. The people developed such a faith in the myth which was further strengthened by the
mass media, so that they believed failure was possible only due to their personal drawbacks and shortcomings. Hence, the State remained free of all responsibility.

The tradition of literary realism came about gradually, as an after effect of the Civil War and subsequently after the First World War. People were tired of the notions of Romanticism. They wanted some real fodder for subsistence and the advent of realism sustained this desire. *Sister Carrie* (1900) by Theodore Dreiser belonged to the tradition of realism. It depicts the natural state of affairs, as they existed in industrialist America which included the misery of the common folk, the proletariat or the working classes. Their condition was characterized by poor working conditions, low wages and unemployment, being laid off and sometimes frequently switching jobs without any economic certainty. Thus, arose the possibility of exposition of the sham behind the great myth of the American dream.

The process started with the first novelist of the realist tradition, Mark Twain and was continued by other writers such as Dreiser, who were staunch naturalists. It was the agenda of the realists to expose the reality of the social situation in America which appeared to be very lucrative, when seen from the angle of rulers. The daily musings and struggle of the ordinary man were portrayed in the writings of realists. This tradition was carried forward by a bandwagon of American authors including Mark Twain aka Samuel Clemens, Stephen Craine, William Dean Howells, Horatio Alger Jr. and other writers such as John Steinbeck, Frank Norris, Theodore Dreiser, Upton Sinclair, Henry James, Edith Wharton etc.

A study of the sociology of literature is of utmost importance while exploring the ideology of the American Dream. This gathered momentum from the movements of Romanticism and Naturalism, as well as Modernism. These forces made a major contribution in
rethinking literary relations in terms of sociological institutions. The main grounds for studying sociology in American Literature of the twentieth century is provided by the Marxist analysis of the society that grounded literature in economic and ideological structures which had a direct impact on Literature.