CHAPTER – III

Human Relationships in the Early Novels of John Steinbeck
This chapter deals with the human relationships in the early novels of John Steinbeck. These novels were written under the shadow of Great Depression. There are different forms of human relationships in these novels. As Jackson J. Benson, a famous biographer of John Steinbeck, has pointed out in his book, The True Adventures of John Steinbeck:

While much of Steinbeck’s fiction deals with the family -- relations between husband and wife, parents and children -- much of it also deals with the transplanted family with those who move into California from the “East” and who confront a native awesome in its beauty, power and potential for wealth and disaster.1

The early novels of Steinbeck which were written in the 1930s like Tortilla Flat (1935), In Dubious Battle (1936), Of Mice and Men (1937), The Grapes of Wrath
(1939) etc. gain national and international recognitions. Human Relationships in these novels are analysed below:

**TORTILLA FLAT (1935)**

*Tortilla Flat* (1935) is the first full-scale novel of John Steinbeck, drawing on his contemporary Southern Californian environment, for character and event. This novel indicates a special concern for and interest in people who are socially and economically dispossessed. To a society embedded in the economic and political crisis of the Great Depression, *Tortilla Flat* (1935) and its comic tone and holiday spirit make an immediate appeal to the American readers.

Steinbeck had been compelled to write many novels for social improvement due to the dynamic pressures of modern society. In every writing of his novels, the common man had always been his subject. His love for the common man and his deep understanding of the motivations regarding the life-style and sufferings of the common man were the main reasons of his writings. The situations and the characters he highlighted have made his novels very popular in modern times.

In *Tortilla Flat*, Steinbeck can depict love, kindness, generosity, altruism, self-satisfaction, fraternity--- essential elements of spirit of humanism. By doing so, he can directly and indirectly criticize the various aspects of respectable society in America. The novel is a pleasant combination of light-heartedness and seriousness.
Steinbeck uses a unique method of integrating humor with tragedy and sympathy with disgust. In this context, before finding out some finer points of human relationships, it will be pertinent to discuss Steinbeck’s opening paragraph of his novel, *Tortilla Flat*:

This is the story of Danny and of Danny’s friends and of Danny’s House. It is a story of how these three became one thing, so that in Tortilla Flat if you speak of Danny’s house you do not mean a structure of wood flaked with old white wash,...No, when you speak of Danny’s house you are understood to mean a unit of which the parts are men, from which came sweetness and joy, philanthropy and, in the end, a mystic sorrow. For Danny’s house was not unlike the Round Table, and Danny’s friends were not unlike the knights of it. And this is the story of how that group came into being, of how it flourished and grew to be an organization beautiful and wise..... In the end, this story tells how the talisman was lost and how the group disintegrated.²

The story line can be said in a short and simple way. Danny coming home from the war, learnt that he had inherited two houses in Tortilla Flat from his deceased grandfather. Immediately the weight of the private property brought out a difficult problem to him. In a mournful tone, he said that he could no longer break windows now that he had windows of his own to be broken. He had rented one of the houses to his friend, Pilon who had no money for the rent. Pilon invited Pablo Sanchez and Jesus Maria Corcoran to live in the house of Danny but they also
never had money to pay rent. The relation of Danny with Pilon became strained when the house rented to Pilon was burnt down. Before this when Danny asked for the payment of rent, Pilon could say, “I will pay when Pablo pays”\textsuperscript{3}. In this way life went on in “Tortilla Flat.”\textsuperscript{4}

When one of the houses was burnt, the three friends moved in with Danny. Again they invited the Pirate, a mentally handicapped man who is followed by five dogs to stay at Danny’s house. The Pirate who brought a bag of money promised that if God would save his sick dog, he would buy a golden candlestick for St. Francis. Now the bag of money became a “symbolic centre of friendship”\textsuperscript{5}. Big Joe Portagee, soon after returning from jail, joined the group and stole the Pirate’s bag. The group of friends gave a sound beating to Joe and recovered most of the Pirate’s money. But the Pirate had already collected enough money to buy his candle. Danny and his friends did everything they could help the Pirate reach his goal. For the recovery of his dog, the Pirate eventually wished to buy his candlestick. But on Sunday in San Carlos church, the Pirate saw the candlestick before St. Francis. Before that the friends solaced a corporal coming with a baby to the house of Danny. Then they threw themselves to the aid of a distressed lady named Teresina Cortez. But gradually the good days of the group of friends were over and Danny deserted the group and ran wild. Even though he came back, he became restless and sadful. For restoring his previous happy life, his friends hoisted a big party in his honour, which was attended by all at Tortilla Flat. Danny exhibited his last uproarious activities, surpassing all his past activities of drinking, wenching
and fighting. When no one took up his challenge, Danny called: “I will go out to The One who can fight, I will find The Enemy who is worthy of Danny”⁶. At last Danny fell into a gulch and died. Danny’s friends honoured him in their way by holding the pain in their hearts and it was so unbearable that they could not stand by the procession any longer. The evening, after the funeral of Danny, the friends scattered. Before that, the friends used to hold together at the house of Danny. They made it their Round Table and the centre of their wild and feckless lives. After Danny’s specular death, the house, which was the foundation of the fellowship, was burnt down by his friends as they thought that the symbol of holy friendship should die as Danny died.

The characters in the fiction are “Paisanos”⁷ who are illiterate peasants of mixed Spanish, Indian, Mexican and other blood whose ancestors had lived in California for a long time. They spoke both English and Spanish with a unique Paisano accent. They are innocent people and free from complicated system of American economic and social life. Thus Frank William Watt commented on the “Paisanos” in the novel:

The Paisanos’ altruism, charity and loyalty are, in fact, usually as wedded to personal pleasure and interest as such values are in conventional society; though there is a greater propotion of gaiety, curiosity, and exuberant love of life in the Paisanos’ kind and friendly acts.⁸
In the novel, *Tortilla Flat*, Danny, leader of the group of the Paisanos plays the most important role. His action and relationship with his friends centre round the whole novel. In order to bring out the finer points of human relationships which we notice in *Tortilla Flat*, we may discuss the relationship between Danny and his friends. After the death of his grandfather Danny inherited two houses from him (grandfather). His house served as the symbol of the Round Table of King Arthur and his knights. In this connection, Steinbeck himself stated very clearly in 1934, while writing to his literary agents:

The form is that of the Malory version, the coming of Arthur and the mystic quality of owning a house, the forming of the round table, the adventures of the knights and finally, the mystic adventures of Danny.⁹

Danny acts as something of a true friend to his friends who are all economically and socially very backward. Danny is a person who is endowed with love, generosity, kindness and fraternity. He is a generous man who is capable of making deep and lasting friendship, which is why no less than five of his friends end up living at his house. They are all devoted to him.

Danny has a lot of friends who are all Paisanos. They are Pilon, Pablo, Jesus Maria Corcoran etc. It is these characters of Danny’s friends and their relationships with other characters that Steinbeck has presented different forms of human relationships in his novel, *Tortilla Flat*. Among the relationships in his novel, Danny’s relationship with Pilon is the most important and his relationship with
other characters in the novel is different from Danny’s relationship with other characters. Pilon is the first to join up in Danny’s house. He is a witty, cunning and resourceful man who always has a plan of action. Most of the initiative taken by the friends of Danny begins with Pilon. In fact, he possesses a strong personality and takes charge in difficult situations. His relationship with Danny was so close that everyone in the group shared everything they had. In the opening of the chapter of the book, Pilon ungrudgingly shared his brandy with Danny, even though brandy was the most rare of possible commodities in Tortilla Flat. When demanded by Danny, Pilon answered him sternly:

Danny, I do not mind sharing my brandy with you half and half. It is my duty to see you do not drink it all.\textsuperscript{10}

But Danny’s love for Pilon was not the less, and he always showed his generosity to Pilon. Danny rented one of his houses to Pilon, though he never asked for the rent and the latter never offered it. Danny said:

Pilon, I swear, what I have is thine. While I have a house thou has a house. Give me a drink.\textsuperscript{11}.

Pilon in turn rented out a portion of that house to Pablo, another friend knowing full well that Pablo would not be in a position to pay any rent. Feeling of self-satisfaction, love, fraternity etc. is beautifully expressed by Pilon. One morning, in the meantime, Pilon tells Pablo:

A mass is a mass. Where you get two bits is of no interest to the man who sells you a glass of wine. And where a
mass comes from is of no interest to God. He just likes them, the same as you like wine. Father Murphy used to go fishing all the time, and for months the Holy Sacrament tasted like mackerel, but that did not make it less holy. These things are for priests to explain. They are nothing for us to worry about.  

When one of the houses of Danny rented to Pilon was burnt down, Danny, instead of showing anger and sadness, said, “Now we can be free and happy again.” But Danny still was the owner of one house. As a house-owner he could no longer break windows willingly or destroy the property of the house jealously. He allowed his friends to move in with him. They drank the quart of grappa, and there were just enough to promote the sweetness of comradeship:

> It is good to have friends, said Danny. How lonely it is in the world if there are no friends to sit with one and to share one’s grappa.

This sense of supreme satisfaction is the hall-mark of the attitude of Danny and his friends towards life.

In the novel there are finer points of human relationships aroused by purely altruistic motives. When Jesus Maria, a humanitarian who lived in Danny’s house found that a Mexican Corporal was in trouble with the police, he promised to take care of his ‘little one’. Jesus Maria brought the corporal and his baby to the house where Danny and others lived. Here Danny and his friends looked after the sick infant. All their finer feelings were aroused when they heard how the corporal had
been robbed of his wife and they discovered that the corporal wanted his baby to
grow up to posses and enjoy all the nice things of life. But unluckily the baby died.
Danny and his friends were all sorry about the missing of the happy life the father
would lead. The Corporal said:

   I will go back to Mexico. I am a soldier in my heart. It
   may be, if I keep oiling my rifle, I myself may be an officer
   some day. Who can tell?  

This selfless love was something close to the hearts of Danny and his
friends. Looking admiringly at the Mexican Corporal, the friends, thus, elevated the
Corporal to the acme of their regard.

The next relationship which one can find in the novel is how Danny and his friends, Pilon and Pablo invited the Pirate, a half-witted man and his five dogs to stay at Danny’s house. The Pirate was the only Paisano who worked hard and saved the cash. When he came to Danny’s house, he brought a hoard of quarters. All the friends of Danny hoped to get the Pirate’s hoard of money. In opposition to their thinking, the Pirate helped them a lot. He brought Danny and the other friends food everyday. The friends were touched by his simplicity and sincerity. Thus there was close fellowship between the Pirate and Danny and their friends. The Pirate promised that if God would save his sick dog, he would buy a golden candlestick for St. Francis. The sickly dog recovered, though it was soon after ran over by a truck. The Pirate placed it in the safe-keeping of his friends, the latter
immediately realized that their ‘hope of diverting the money’ was gone. There was nothing in the world they could do about it. But very soon,

The bag of money had become the symbolic centre of the friendship, the point of trust about which the fraternity revolved. They were proud of the money, proud that they had never tampered with it. About the guardianship of the Pirate’s money there had ground a structure of self-respect and not a little complacency. It was a fine thing for a man to be trusted.\(^{16}\)

Pablo bought a candle for Saint Francis and used it wrongly. As a result, Danny’s second house was burnt down. Though that unfortunate incident took place, Danny never lost his love and relationship for his friends.

And another interesting episode took place when Danny and his friends heard that Teresina Cortez, a middle aged woman, was in grave trouble because of the failure of bean crop. They wanted with all their zeal to give aid. So the relationship between Teresina Cortez and Danny and his friends is not an ordinary relation, it is a kind of help giving relationship to the worried person:

Fish they collected. The vegetable patch of the Hotel Del Monte they raided. It was a glorious game. Theft robbed of the stigma of theft, crime altruistically committed---what is more gratifying?\(^{17}\)..... “Now food began to accumulate in the house of Teresina. Boxes of lettuce lay on her porch, spoiled mackerel filled the neighborhood with strong odor. And still the flame of charity burned in the friends.
They are selfish but are not without generosity; they fight but are not vicious, and they love as only vital people can love. As a sculptor has produced his models, Steinbeck expresses each sentence of the novel as an indication of love, care and innate human relationship.

Another aspect of relationship in the novel is that the woman characters, even though they form only a backdrop to the main action, are marked by a vitality of their own—the result of the loving care bestowed on them by Steinbeck. Cornelia Ruiz, Mrs. Morales, Tia Ignacia, and Dolers are the characters which have been described living and credible. They are all attractive in that they are people in love with life, indifferent to the values which our society takes so precious. Their ability to give play to instincts accounts for their contentment.

The relationship between Danny and his friends even up to the end of Danny was cordial, awesome and extra-ordinarily wonderful event. The monotony of the Paisanos’ way of life and the weight of property ownership began to wear on Danny. Here the writer said:

Always the weight of the house was upon him; always the responsibility of his friends.18

Danny frequently disappeared into the woods and went on months long crime spree. For his act of vandalism and fighting, the police swore that Danny would be arrested on sight. Even at this stage, his friends set out to find Danny. At last they found Danny dead. Danny’s funeral was a public debacle of fine clothes,
stolen flowers, and military splendour. The Paisanos could not attend, however, for if they entered the proceedings in their poor clothes it would be a disgrace to Danny’s memory. Instead, they watched from afar until they could not stand the sorrow any longer and burst into tears. That night, they drank more wine and talked fondly of Danny’s memory. They sang songs that he liked and smoked cigars provided by Tito Ralph. As Pilon attempted to relight one of the cigars, the match fluttered out of his hand and ignite a newspaper in the corner. At first, they all got up to stamp the fire out, but they changed their minds. They thought:

Some stranger will own the house, some joyless relative of Danny’s. Better that this symbol of holy friendship, this good house of parties and fights of love and comfort, should die as Danny died.¹⁹

These activities show that the paisanos have very close relationship with their leader, Danny.

The greatness of John Steinbeck as a true humanist cannot be doubted. He is successful in depicting love, generosity, kindness, altruism and human relationship of the common men most forcefully. Within the framework of humanistic thinking which pervades the novel of John Steinbeck, it may be mentioned that Steinbeck’s humanistic concerns seem to be influenced by the Great Depression in America which has been deeply hurt by the intense suffering, torture and inhumanity that the common men have been subjected to through many years.
OF MICE AND MEN (1937)

John Steinbeck’s novel Of Mice and Men appeared in February 1937 at a time when the United States was in the grip of the greatest economic depression it had ever known. There was mass unemployment throughout the land, mass unrest, and the solutions proposed by some were remedy through mass action. This new novel carried Steinbeck to a higher level of national popularity, even surpassing that of Tortilla Flat (1935). The novel had derived its title from the large-hearted Robert Burn’s poem, "To a Mouse, or Turning Up in Her nest with the Plow" Nov. 1785:

The best-laid schemes O’ Mice an’ Men,

Gang afta – gley
An’ lea’e us sought but grief an’ pain
For promis ‘d joy!

Steinbeck’s own ideas about the book were quite serious and sensible. Steinbeck wrote that it was “a thin, brittle book, and an experiment, but at least it was an honest experiment.” Steinbeck intended to write “Of Mice and Men” in what he called the ‘play novelette’ form, in other words a novel that can be acted as a play with very little re-writing. It was successful a experiment. In 1937, the year the book was published, the play was produced in New York and in 1940 it was made into as a powerful film. It was an aim at writing a novel in the six chapters in the novel as the scenes of a three- act play, treating the descriptive passage as an extended stage –diction----- thoughts, recollections, dreams and problems of place
and time are restricted. Much of the novel consists of dialogue. In fact there are many reasons in the novel to be called as a play-novelette.

The story of the novel revolves around the characters of the men working on a large grain-producing farm. The farm was solely managed by an owner who hired hands at fifty dollars a month. During the Great Depression period, in California, two migrant field workers --- George Milton and Lennie Small came to a ranch near Soledad (Southwest of Salinas, California) to “work up to stake.” The novel tells the story of these two drifting ranch hands who were restless and who dreamt of owning a piece of land of their own. The relationship between George and Lennie is indicated by the order of their appearance:

The first man was small and quick, dark of face, with restless eyes and sharp, strong features. Every part of him was defined: small, strong hands, slender arms, a thin and bony nose. Behind him walked his opposite, a huge man, shapeless of face, with large, pale eyes, with wide, sloping shoulders…21

This shows that Lennie was in everyway the opposite of George, who was obviously the leader. He was a man of large stature and immense strength but limited mental activities. George always felt worried that Lennie might unknowingly and innocently misuse his powerful strength in a harmful way. But the two were bound together by the dream they shared. Lennie always accompanied George whenever he went everywhere and did anything what George asked him to do. Lennie’s part of the dream was merely to touch soft animals like mice and rabbits on the farm. But his strength was great that when he lovingly stroke them, he
unintentionally killed them. In Weed, just before the beginning of the story, Lennie one attracted a girl’s red dress. He instinctively put his hands on the garment “Just” wanted to feel that girl’s dress --- jus’ wanted to pet it was a mouse” but the girl misunderstood his intention and accused him of attempting rape, and then began to scream. Her loud cry frightened Lennie, who held on to the dress of the young girl until George compelled him to release it. Then George and Lennie had to flee and hide from the angered people of Weed. This was how they arrived at the farm. This shows that the two are close friends and George is Lennie’s protector.

George and Lennie were not migratory from choice. Circumstances forced them to move. In the meantime, they shared a dream of independence, of settling on their own piece of land. This dream being Lennie’s favourite stories, George constantly retold that they were going to have a little house and a couple of acres, because some kind of ritual, which Lennie was very eagerly to hear it again and again. But they were not in a position to save money and the dream remained a dream till they arrived at the ranch near Soledad. At the ranch, George always protected Lennie from the other hands in situations which might cause his real destructive nature. At the ranch there was a menacing and dangerous situation, especially when the pair were confronted by Curley who was the boss’s small – statured aggressive son with an inferiority complex, and who disliked larger men like the gentle giant Lennie. Later George and Lennie also met Slim, the kind, intelligent and intuitive skinner who is the leader of the farm. It was he who agreed to give Lennie one of the puppies his dog had recently given birth to, and another
to a thick bodied ranch man named Carlson. Then an unfortunate incident took place on the ranch. Curley, the scrappy young man made the mistake of picking on Lennie, who finally crushed Curley’s hands in his huge and powerful paws. The plan of George and Lennie of owning a piece of land was supported by Candy, an aged and one-handed ranch –man, who had saved some money and the three of them could possibly collect cash in the near future to translate the dream into action. For sometime, the trio were ecstatic. George felt more relaxed because the dream seemed just within their grasp. He even left behind Lennie on the ranch for going into the town with other ranch hands. In the meantime, Lennie wandered into the stable and chatted with Crooks, the biter, yet educated stable buck, who got his name from his crooked back. He was isolated from other workers because he was black. Candy found them discussing their plans for the farm with Crooks. Despite scoring the possibility of achieving their dream, Crooks asked them if he could hoe a garden patch on the farm. But their plan was shattered because Curley’s wife, a stupid young woman who had a bad relationship with her husband appeared there. She became interested in Lennie who had crushed her husband’s hands when Curley made the mistake of picking on Lennie. One Sunday evening, she invited Lennie to feel her soft hair when she found him sitting alone in the barn looking at his puppy unhappily. A tragic development happened because once started Lennie could not stop. She became frightened and started to shout. He also became frightened in turn. He hanged on to her hair and gave her a shake which broke her neck. The woman died immediately. Lennie knew he had done “another bad thing”
and left the barn to a thicket of willows and sycamores by the river, where George had told him to hide and asked him if he happened to get in trouble.

Candy found the girl’s body and went to inform George. George didn’t want Lennie hurt, but Curley was determined to shoot him. Slim, the leader of the ranch pointed to George that even if Curley could not find Lennie, the latter would eventually be locked up in an institution. Meanwhile anger of Carlson, a big and powerful ranch hand was discovered to be missing and Curley thought Lennie had taken it. Soon George found Lennie on the riverbank before the rest men got them. George entertained him for the last time with a recital of their dream. Then he shot him with a fellow–worker’s pistol at the base of the brain, to prevent lynching by the mob or life imprisonment.

In *Of Mice and Men*, different forms of human relationships such as friend and friend, husband and wife, boss and workers, father and son, master and servants, etc. are explored with a closer scrutiny. It is in the characters of George and Lennie and their relationship with other characters that Steinbeck had presented different forms of human relationships. Among the human relationships found in this novel, George’s relationship with Lennie is the most important and his relationship with other characters in the novel is different from Lennie’s relationship with other characters.

George’s relationship with Lennie is the most important unique relationship. Their close relationship between them dominates the whole novel.
Even if Lennie’s Aunt Clara has taken care of him for sometimes, George’s care for Lennie may be said to be more valuable than that of hers. Since George loves Lennie truly, he always tries to lead Lennie to good ways. The speech of George with Lennie at their first meeting is remarkable. As he says:

Lennie! Lennie, for God’s sakes

don’t drink so much. You gonna be sick like you was last night. \(^{23}\)

On the other hand, Lennie also always remembers to show his love and respect for George to him. The moment Lennie feels unhappy, George tries to make him happy by telling him that he may be happy: As he says,

we’re gona have a little house and a couple of acres....... An live off the fatta the lan. \(^{24}\)

This kind of ritual which Lennie wanted to hear again and again was repeatedly told by George to Lennie. If Lennie has to face any difficulty, he will go to George to take for help. In fact, Lennie can’t live without George who is in anyway the role of a guardian.

When Lennie molests Curley’s wife in the barn of the ranch, Curley and his companions want to kill Lennie. This intention is known to George very closely so George wants to save Lennie from the cruel oppression of Curley and his fellows. In order to save Lennie from any kind of difficulty, George takes help even from old Candy. The moment George lets Lennie hide in a place near the Salinas River. Curley come there to kill Lennie--George told him to hide “if you just happen to get
in trouble” 25. George knows that Curley will kill Lennie in a brutal manner. But he wants Lennie not to be hurt at any cost. Here George says:

You…..an’ me. Ever’body gonna be nice to you. Ain’t gonna be no more trouble. Nobody gonna hurt nor steal from em. 26

In order not to let Curley kill Lennie in a brutal manner, George has shot Lennie before Curley and his companions shoot him. Even if he shoots Lennie, he never loses his love for him:

George shivered and looked at the gun, and then he threw it from him, back up on the bank, near the pile of old ashes. 27

Here, Frank William Watt remarks that:

It is the reciprocal nature of the relationship between Lennie and George that rescues it from sentimentality and makes it convincing. 28

We may conclude by saying that Lennie and George’s relationship is a rare one.

In the novel the relationship between Curley and his wife is not a remarkable one. Curley is an unpleasant, belligerent young man. Being the spoiled son of the Boss, he always tries to pick fights which he can easily win. And his young, foolish, pretty wife always tends to brag about men who have tried to make her a Hollywood star. Her dreams contrast sharply with monotonous life on the
ranch, So, she tries to spend her life happily by neglecting her husband. Curley does not take much care of his wife. Instead of trying to develop a respectable relationship between his wife and him, he spends much of his time in manipulating the people in the society.

Since the husband and the wife don’t have a close relationship between them, each of them can spend his or her own life separately. One careful reader of this novel can assume that Curley’s reasons of marrying may have included a certain affection; but even in this relationship Curley’s temperament allows him to act only in such a way as to provoke the woman’s confidence to Lennie. It shows that Curley is a mean-minded person. In the relationship between Curley and his wife, there is a common streak of real viciousness and cruelty. Since Curley’s wife is not afraid of her husband, she can enjoy herself in the barn of the ranch. But Curley expresses his love for his wife when Lennie molestes her in the barn of the firm. We may conclude by saying that Curley’s wife might have not been molested by Lennie in case Curley always takes care of his wife and keeps her under his control.

In the novel, the relationship of Curley’s wife with Crooks, Lennie, and the other men on the ranch is quite different from the relationship of George with Lennie and the other men. The relationship of the latter is also another important relationship found in the novel. At first, Curley’s wife seemed to appear a relatively minor character with regard to the male characters in the novel and also to the development of the whole theme. But after a close study of her character, it is
realized that she is not only a major influence in the novel, but also a well more
developed character in her own position. Though she is married to Curley, she still
remains as a virgin girl. It is she who always suffers from the intense loneliness and
the desperate need for companionship, That is why she frequently comes to the
men around the bunk house as playful and seductive. She uses her usual excuse:

   If I catch anyone man, and he’s alone, I get along fine
   him... Sat’ I day night, Ever’body out doin’ som’pin’.
   Ever’body! An’ What ain I doin’? 29

One example indicating the degree of her loneliness and her great need for
human relationship is that Curley’s wife attempts to befriend and to keep relation
with Crooks, the negro stable buck, who is also a lonely man on the ranch. In fact
she tries to make the farm hands understand her situation:

   Sure I gotta husband’..... he don’t like nobody.Think I’m
gonna stay in that two-by-four house. 30

In the light of the above lines, it is understood that Curley’s wife is a person
who is totally isolated on the farm. On the otherhand, she has no female
companionship and her husband provides little company as well. Then she confides
in Lennie about her true feelings for her husband and about the plans of leading a
glamorous life. As Lennie has a dream of getting the promise land, she has also her
dream of becoming a famous movie star in Hollywood. In this context, Sandra
Beatty has opined that “It is sadly ironic that Curley’s wife’s understanding of
Lennie’s ‘passion for touching soft things and her final gesture of allowing him the
pleasure of stroking her hair, leads to the simultaneous destruction of both their dreams”.

Slim, whom we find in the novel was a tough, wise and kind person. His relationship among the other men on the ranch is very cordial and acceptable. All the men silently accept Slim as their leader, because, among other things, Slim is the only hand who appears to have a self-confident direction. Actually, it is not so much his sense of purpose which makes Slim radiate leadership, as it is his comfortable acceptance of the moment. On the other hand, Slim has a reputation as a craftsman. And the fact that he does not throw his superiority into his colleagues’ faces gains him respect and difference. Significantly, he is the only character to fully understand the bond between George and Lennie. It is only he who realizes that George kills Lennie out of love.

The boss, Curley’s father, the owner of the ranch only appears briefly and has an arrogant, confident manner that most of the men who work for him lack. He appears briefly at the beginning of the novel to meet George and Lennie when they report for work. He is not mean as his son. He finds it hard to accept the fact that George does the talking both for himself and Lennie and does not disguise his suspicion that George is trying to put something over on him. He accepts them as workers, but warns George that “I got my eye on you”.

The relationship, Candy, an old ranch hand with George and Lennie is understandable and friendly. He is a lonely man who is willing to pledge all his
saving to the purchase of George and Lennie’s dream ranch. It is he who discovers Curley’s wife’s body, and communicates the discovery to everyone else. Because of his communication, George was able to kill Lennie before Lennie was lynched or killed by the mob. Crooks’ relationship with Lennie is universal but short-lived. Crooks, an intelligent, sharp-witted, black stable hand, who takes his name from his crooked back, led a lonely life. He was isolated from the other men because of the colour of his skin and his crooked back. Despite himself, he became fond of Lennie. Though he derisively claimed to have seen countless men following empty dreams of buying their own land, he asked Lennie if he could go with them and hoe in the garden. When Curley’s wife entered the room, this idea of brotherhood began to fade and darken. Thus Crooks’ hope for fraternal living is short-lived ----- sinking back in his loneliness.

The most important issue highlighted in the novel is the unique relationship between George and Lennie. Even though George had acted as Lennie’s Guardian, a close examination of their relationship shows that George gained from Lennie as much as Lennie gained from George. George is not entirely altruistic. He profits from the relationship in several ways. He has in Lennie the physical protection of great strength and a companion of unquestioning loyalty. More than that Lennie is a constant boost to his own ego, a reminder of his own superiority and even an excuse for his own failure. Without Lennie George shows little interest in sustaining their dream. At the end of the novel George shoots Lennie dead with a fellow worker’s pistol in the back of the head to prevent lynching by the mob or life
imprisonment. Such a killing makes them fail in owning their promise land. In this context, Peter Lisca has argued that “the ending of the story is.... neither nor brutal, but simply a part of the pattern of events.”

In Dubious Battle (1936)

In Dubious Battle (1936) is the fifth novel of John Steinbeck in chronological order. It is the most successful novel yet written in the United States of America. The novel deals with the depiction of the problems of the proletariat. Although the story springs directly from the clash of social and economic forces during the early part of the Depression decade, it remains considerably more than a propaganda piece. When In Dubious Battle was published in 1936, Steinbeck was surprised that this novel, which he had thought most readers would find objectively grim and controversial, reached the best-seller lists.

Many positive and negative views were there at the time of the publication of the novel. Regarding the novel, The Washington Post dubbed it “primarily a work of craftsmanship and secondly a strong proletarian outcry.” One of the earliest reviews by Fred T. March of the New York Times proclaimed In Dubious Battle to be “one of the most courageous and desperately honest books that has appeared in a long time. It is also, both dramatically and realistically, the best strike and labour novel to come out of our contemporary economic and social unrest.” And most of the negative criticism In Dubious Battle came from detractors with leftist
sympathizers who believed Steinbeck failed to realistically portray the true motives and spirit of labour organizers. Mary Mc Carthy denounced *In Dubious Battle* for what she saw as ineffective philosophical generalizations, which overshadowed the “legitimately dramatic incidents of the strike.”

In response to both the positive and the negative criticism of the novel’s realism, Steinbeck admitted that he was more interested in the philosophical underpinnings of the work than the action and did not intend for *In Dubious Battle* to be a propaganda piece of Communists. In a letter to his friend George Albee, he explained:

> I don’t know how much I have got over, but I have used a small strike in an orchard valley as the symbol of man’s eternal, bitter warfare with himself. I’m not interested in strike as a means of raising men’s wages, and I’m not interested in ranting about justice or oppression, mere outcropping which indicate the condition. But man hates something in himself. He has been able to defeat every natural obstacle but himself he cannot win over unless he kills every individual. And this self-hate which goes so closely in hand with self-love is what I wrote about.

The title of the novel is adapted from Milton’s *Paradise Lost*, where “the dubious battle” is Satan’s revolt against God and his means. The similarity between both battles is not that their outcomes are uncertain but that the confrontation is unnecessary and unjustified in the first place. Milton justifies the ways of God to man by pointing out the futility of any resistance to his power:
Innumerable force of Spirits armed,
That durst dislike his reign, and, me preferring,
His utmost power with adverse power opposed
In Dubious Battle on the plains of Heaven
And shook his throne. What though the field be lost?
All is not lost—the unconquerable will,
And study of revenge, immortal hate,
And courage never to submit or yield:
And what is else not to be overcome? 38

Steinbeck, on the other hand, shows the struggle over how the profits from cultivating fruits of the earth must be shared among the participants. In that sense, Steinbeck’s novel can be read as a propaganda for social equality. However, the title itself foreshadows that the battle is purposeless.

_In Dubious Battle_ is considered to be one of Steinbeck’s best novels, while his depiction of the labour organizers’ motives have been questioned, the compelling, realistic action of the storyline has been nearly universally praised attesting to Steinbeck’s mastery of artful story telling very early in his career. In fact he is a master at portraying the common man and keeping the book excited even when one can guess how it will play out.

Before a thorough examination of the various human relationships of the novel, it will be pertinent to know the basic structure of its plot. The novel begins with Jim Nolan, a serious and disenchanted young man packing up his few belongings and leaving his rented room. Jim, who is a young man without a family
and recently released from jail, is cut off from his past life. He meets a Communist recruiter, Harry Nilson to whom he tells his past and the reasons why he likes to join the Communist Party. Then he repeats “I feel dead. I thought I might get alive again.” This idea of coming alive of Jim provides a structural device for the action of the novel. Jim is then introduced to Mac, an experienced field organizer who spends his time travelling around migrant camps encouraging workers to organize and strike.

Mac and Jim leave for ‘Torgas Valley,’ where Grower’s Association has just announced a pay cut at the beginning of apple picking season. On the way Mac begins teaching Jim for his new role as a Party organizer. He advises Jim to take every possible opportunity to gain the trust and acceptance of the workers. Even smoking which may not be enjoyable personally must be started. Besides they should use whatever materials they get or whatever chance comes in order to reach their goal. Mac soon creates this opportunity after learning that Lisa, the daughter-in-law of London, is giving birth without any medical assistance. London is the natural leader of the fruit pickers. Here Mac successfully delivers Lisa’s baby for which word of his accomplishment spread throughout the area. Later he admits to Jim that he never actually worked in a hospital nor had any medical training. Mac and Jim begin picking apples to gauge the workers’ opinions about the wage cut and their feelings about the strike. They persuaded the fruit pickers to organize and to strike for higher wages and better living conditions. Mac, Jim and London meet Dakin, a friend of London to organize a strike along with the men in London’s
camp. For building up supporting machinery, Mac and Jim enlist the aid of Al Anderson, a generous and soft-hearted dinner owner whose father lends the strikers five acres of plow land for camping. Mac sends Dick, a handsome and boisterous Party worker who specializes in raising money and food from party ‘sympathizers’. When the men organize and begin the strike, Doc Burton, a dedicated volunteer who was not a Party member also arrives to set up a sanitary camp to look after the health requirements of the strikers.

As usual, the orchard owners have made necessary arrangements to subdue any kind of strikes. Forces like Vigilantes, deputies, troops and strike-breakers are utilized to fight against the strikers. Although the police have assembled in force, they seem afraid of the strikers. Before all the workers coming from the various orchards settle down, five motorcycle policemen park themselves on the side of the road to observe the action, further illustrating the power of the Torgas Valley Growers’ Association. On the otherhand, the strikers learn the extent of the power ranged against them and decide to organize the strike without guns by building up some kind of a human machine. But the strikers are harassed by officials, assaulted and killed by vigilantes, maligned in newspaper editorials, denied the medical care of the county. The Growers’ Association cuts off the aid coming from the supporters and sympathizers. During the strike, Joy, an old and crippled comrade who is a friend of Mac and Jim, is killed by a sniper’s bullet. Then Mac, the leader of the strike, convinces London to take Joy’s dead body to the Anderson’s camp to motivate the men on strike. Mac characteristically delivers a stirring speech about
Joy’s life and commitment to the cause. This action proves to be the best of all possible spurs to bring the workers together and the strikers are aroused to carry on the struggle even more fiercely. After the funeral of Joy, the newly elected president of the Growers’ Association, Mr. Bolter shows up at the camp demanding to speak with London, and he offers a five cent wage increase and nothing else. When London vehemently refuses the offer, Bolter threatens to send out troops to shut down the camp if the strikers do not stop their strike immediately. Later, London asks Mac and Jim about their involvement with the party. The two men tell London that they are ‘reds’ and describe their work to London.

Conditions of the strike grow worse. The strikers have practically no money and no food. Dick finally manages to get some food, but it suffices for few days only. Meanwhile, Doc Burton has vanished. Without his help, the sick and the wounded cannot be attended to, and the situation of the camp grows progressively worse. One night someone sets Anderson’s barn on fire and destroys his entire apple crop. In retaliation, Sam, a friend of London sets out to burn Hunter’s barn. The strike seems lost as the spirit of the strikers is at a very low ebb.

One interesting thing is that Mac and Jim, in the midst of the brutality and violences, remain strangely separated from the anger and suffering of the strikers. Their motive is that they have successfully organized a huge “group animal” which has a great momentum and power of its own. But, being detached from natural human emotion, they accept the death of members of their group without
pity and as a calculated loss. For example, they see Anderson’s barn ablaze and the destruction of his entire apple crop. They think it is an insignificantly product of an essentially prize-worthy venture. At the end of the novel, Jim has been shot to death in a vigilante ambush, and Mac solemnly props up Jim’s body on a stage of the strikers’ camp for all of the men to see. He begins a speech, similar to the one he gave at Joy’s funeral to rally the men for the cause.

In the novel, In Dubious Battle, various kinds of human relationships are dealt with but Steinbeck presents Jim’s relationship with Mac, an experienced field organizer as the most important relationship. The novel is actually a portrait of the maturing of a young person, Jim Nolan. The whole novel is centered around his character starting from his despair and decision to join the Communists and tracking his transformation from a silent loyal follower into an inspiring leader of the masses. The aura of Jim’s relationship with Mac shines brighter than the other relationship and it dominates the plot throughout the novel.

The first part of the novel begins with Jim Nolan applying to join the Communist party. He has lost everything ---Jim had a father killed in a riot, a mother who died, and a sister who was missing. Even he has lost his will to live. His recruiter, Harry Nilson, a communist party member, conducts an interview and warns Jim about the commitment required of a Party man. Jim says that while he was in jail for vagrancy he met some Party men:
They talked to me, Everything’s been a mess, all my life.
Their lives weren’t messes. They were working toward something. I want to work toward something. I feel dead. I thought I might get alive again. ⁴³

He sees a great purpose in the Communist Party, so something he can devote himself to. He often says that he just wants to be used by them. Jim is then introduced to the other local members Dick, Joy and Mac. Dick is a handsome comrade who uses his charms on women in order to get food for the strikers. Joy is an older veteran known for his many clashes with the authorities and is somewhat mentally unstable after years of beatings and fights with cops and stints in jail.

Jim is then introduced to Mac, an experienced field organizer of the Party:

This is Jim Nolan, Harry explained “Remember? His name came up the other night. Jim, this is Mac. He knows more about field work than anybody in the state. ⁴⁴

Shortly after joining the Party Jim is sent with to organize a strike among apple pickers in a near-by valley. As Mac outlines the situation, Jim is so excited that he is unable to eat his supper:

Here’s the layout. Torgas is a little valley, and it’s mostly apple orchards. Most of it’s owned by a few men. Of course there’s some little places, but there’s not very many of them. Now when the apples are ripe the crop tramps come in and pick them. And from there they go on over the ridge and south, and pick the cotton. If we can start the fun in the apples, maybe it will just naturally
spread over into the cotton. Now these few guys that own most of the Torgas Valley waited until most of the crop tramps were already there. They spent most of their money getting there, of course. They also do. And then the owners announced their price cut. Suppose the tramps are mad? What can they do? The’ve got to work picking apples to get out even.45

Mac becomes the teacher of Jim and trains Jim everything a Party man needs. Under the tutelage of Mac, Jim learns everything, the importance of remaining committed and exercising patient dedication, even in the face of certain defeat. Mac reminds Jim several times, “We got to take the long view.”46 Because Party members take the ‘Long view’. The ends always justify the means especially for Mac. Mac utilizes any event, good or bad, to further the Party agenda. He tells Jim, ”We use everything we can get hold of.”47

Jim loves Mac very much as Mac does. Most of the time Jim is with Mac in various activities. In short, the two together represent the Party. But each of them has a double nature: a true self and a Party persona. The relation between these two natures is very important. It is an interesting internal drama which is just opposite to the external drama of social forces clashing with each other. In the beginning Jim’s life is desperate and miserable, but after joining the Party, he finds new life and happiness. He loses his human and friendly self. Soon he becomes a tough and dedicated Party man. Mac is a thoroughly dedicated Party worker. He possesses a special personality of judging every person, object, and event in terms
of advantage of the Party. By doing so he has deliberately suppressed his true self. However, gradually his true self shows up when his love for Jim becomes more and more evident. In some way Mac wants to save Jim, and the change in Jim frightens him. He says:

I’m getting scared of you. I’ve seen men like you before.
I’m scared of ’em.⁴⁸

At the time of organizing the fruit pickers’ strike against the wage-cut, Jim becomes anxious because he wants to play a more active role. A time comes when Jim feels that he is being underutilized by Mac. Though Jim is always tortured by Mac in field work, Mac finally grants Jim superiority as a Party man. Towards the end of the novel, Jim begins to show strong leadership skills because Jim is not afraid of sacrificing his life for the cause. While the strike is in a critical condition, Mac does not want Jim to risk being caught and killed because he is too valuable to the Party. Mac and Jim are then accosted by a boy who tells them he found a doctor who has been hurt. Mac and Jim start to run, thinking they will find Doc Burton, a sanitation doctor of their camp. Realising they have been duped, Mac stops and tells Jim to duck. Shots are fired. When Mac stands up and calls for Jim, he sees Jim lay inert on the ground. As Mac walks closer, Mac sees that Jim’s face has been shot off. Mac solemnly props up Jim’s body for all the men to see. He begins a speech. His voice was high and monotonous:

This guy didn’t want nothing for himself – Comrades! He didn’t want nothing for himself—⁴⁹
Next, the relationship between London, the natural leader of the migrant workers with Mac and Jim is very important for drawing confidence of the workers to organize and strike. As Mac and Jim enter town and make their way towards a migrant camp, Mac tells Jim they need to find any opportunity possible to gain the trust and confidence of the workers. When they arrive at a make-shift campsite, they learn that Lisa, the daughter-in-law of London, is giving birth without any medical assistance. The act of delivering Lisa’s child on his first night in the Torgas Valley is a symbol which radiates out into many aspects of the novel. Not only is the birth itself symbolic events to come, but on a small scale, group-man is born that night in the comparative effort of the men who boil water and collect and sterilize cloths to be used in the birth. Mac plainly tells Jim, the unification of the men is their most important and crucial job:

Every man who gave part of his clothes felt that the work was his own. They all feel responsible for that baby. It’s theirs, because something from them went to it. To give back the cloth would cut them out. There’s no better way to make men part of a movement than to have them give something to it. I bet they all feel fine right now.\(^5\)

Mac convinces everyone there that he worked in hospitals and helped deliver babies before. Mac successfully delivers Lisa’s baby and then later admits to Jim:

I never learned till now. I never saw one before. The only thing I knew was that it was a good idea to be clean. God, I
was lucky it came through all right. If anything’d happened, we’d’ve been sunk. That old woman knew lots more than I did. I think she knew it, too.51

Mac reiterates to Jim the importance of taking advantage of any opportunity which is to be used to advance the cause (promotion) of the Party. Mac says:

I’m all in, but I feel good. With one night’s work we’ve got the confidence of the men and the confidence of London. And more than that, we made the men work for themselves, in their own defense, as a group. That’s what we’re out here for anyway, to teach them to fight in a bunch. Raising wages isn’t all we’re after. You know all that.52

Now London becomes visibly upset about the wage cut and the bond system of orchard owners. At first he, like Mac, denies being a leader. However, when put into a formal leadership role, he decides to do something for the cause. London along with Mac and Jim visits his friend Dakin, who is working at a nearly orchard, London’s relationship with Dakin is very important in the future course of the strike. London talks to Dakin about getting the men in his camp to organize a strike along with the men in his (London’s) camp. Dakin is also a kind person who is proud of possessing a nice truck and considers himself a capitalist. At first he is reluctant to join the strike but goes along with it for the higher wages. He said:
If I owned three thousand acres of apples, d’ you know what I’d do? I’d get behind a bush an’ when You went by I’d blow your God damn head off. It’d save lots of trouble. But I don’t own nothing but a light truck and some camp stuff.  

Jim and Mac put Dakin into a leadership position as they see Dakin as more level-headed than London, who is prone to brutal anger. Dakin ultimately loses control when his truck is set on fire by vigilantes. As a result, he assaults a police officer and ends up in jail.

The relationship between the strike leaders and the sympathizers of the strike is also an important aspect of the novel. Among them, Mac relationship with Al Aderson, a generous and soft hearted proprietor of Als Lunch Wagon and a Party sympathizer may be mentioned. Al aids Mac and Jim by feeding them and introducing them to his father, Mr. Anderson, who is the owner of a private five-acre of plow land. Arranging a deal with Mr. Anderson, Mac offers him free labour to pick his apple orchard and to protect his property if he allows the men to camp on his land during the strike. At first, Anderson is reluctant. Then, Mac argues that:

...... Now suppose You got a crop out with no labor charges; suppose you sold it on a rising market? Could you clear out your paper? 

At last Anderson accepts the deal. During the strike, Al Anderson, the son of Mr. Anderson is assaulted and Anderson’s barn is burned to the ground by vigilantes. At last Al Anderson decides to join the Party.
Besides, the relationship among the strike workers plays an important role in the novel. There is the relationship of Joy, an old and crippled comrade with his friends, Mac and Jim. Joy is very committed to the Party cause. He has been beaten down for most of his life and has been jailed many times for voicing his beliefs about the Party. The others believe head injuries resulting from any beatings he has taken in jail, often hands of authorities, are responsible for his erratic behaviour:

Poor Joy, Jim said, He was a good little fellow. He’ been beaten so much. He reminded man, always made.  

When Joy arrives in the Torgas Valley with a trainload of scabs, he is ultimately shot and killed by a sniper’s bullet. Mac, the leader of the strikers uses Joy’s funeral to rally the strikers’ spirits. Here Mac said:

We can send some guys in to see that he gets back here.  
Let ‘em picket the morgue till they get the body back. 
Those damn vigilantes made a mistake; an’ they know it by now.  

In the novel the relationship of Dick with Mac and the other Party members is also very important. Dick is described as a pretty boy and is teased by Mac about his flirtations ways with women. He is gifted with blending into mainstream society and uses his good looks and charm on women in order to raise money and supplies for the cause from Party sympathizers. Without the gifted personality of Dick, the organization of the strike, which naturally needs and demands in large amount of
money, will not be possible. So his role in different activities of the strike is noteworthy.

Among the varieties of human relationships found in the novel, the relationship of Doc Burton, a philosopher and sceptic with the men who camped out on Anderson’s property and the men on strike is very important. This relationship is also a unique one. As a medical doctor, Doc wants to oversee the safety and sanitation of the strikers’ camp to ensure that the authorities cannot shut it down for public health reasons. Doc introduces the idea of the ‘Group-man’ and is more interested in observing the behaviours of the group than the cause itself. It is Doc, however, with his interest in non-teleological thinking, who focuses attention on the appearance of ‘Group-man’ in the Torgas Valley and who offers an analytic evaluation of its nature and power. He says:

I want to watch these group-man, for they seem to me to be a new individual not at all like single men. A man in a group isn’t himself at all, he is a cell in an organism and isn’t like any more than the cells in your body are like you. I want to watch the group, and see what it’s like.... It might be worth while to know more about group-men, to know his nature, his ends, his desires. They are not the same as ours. 57

It is essential to analyze the character of Doc Burton thoroughly, to understand the novel’s motive. Joseph Fontenrose regards Dr. Burton as the spokesman of the philosophy of non-teleology presented in the novel. Burton
wants to deal with social disorders like diseases in the human body. When asked by Mac if he does not think the cause is good. Doc replies:

I don’t want to put on the blinders of ‘good’ and ‘bad’, and limit my vision. If I used the term ‘good’ on a thing I’d lose my license to inspect it because there might be bad unit. Don’t you see? I want to be able look at the whole thing.\textsuperscript{58}

Though Doc’s sympathy inclines towards the strikers he sees them as an ailing group organism. One may think that Doc Burton would enquire into the social and economic causes as a means of seeing the whole thing. But he does not do it because non-teleology rejects cause thinking.\textsuperscript{59} In another way Doc Burton’s attitude may be regarded as the intellectual posture of a contemplative man. Doc views the whole struggle from a biologist’s point of view. For him social injustice is not different from physiological injustice--- the injustice of tetanus, of dysentery. Just as germs get in a wound and cause injection, strikes cause infection in group-men. Group-man is essentially unpredictable.

When the strike is going on in full swing, Doc disappears. Mac and Jim consider Doc’s role very important for to keep the striker’s camp in good sanitary condition. So, they run out in search of Doc. Mac and the others think Doc was kidnapped by the vigilantes.

The central irony of \textit{In Dubious Battle} is that Mac and Jim use people as much as the landowners and the growers do. In some way the focus of the novel
may be regarded as a study of how one uses humanity. That is why the struggle between the strikers and the growers is said to be “a dubious battle”\textsuperscript{60}

In this novel, John Steinbeck has successfully delineated various kinds of human relationships that make the novel one of the most popular novels ever written by the novelist. Here, John Steinbeck has most successfully presented his notion of relationships: friends to friends, leaders and followers, organizers and strikers etc.

\textit{The Grapes of Wrath} (1939)

\textit{The Grapes of Wrath} is a realist novel published in 1939. For this novel Steinbeck won the annual \textit{National Book Award} and \textit{Pulitzer prize} for novels. The novel was cited prominently and widely when Steinbeck won the \textit{Nobel prize}, for literature in 1962 for his realistic and imaginative writing.\textsuperscript{61} Setting against the background of the \textit{Great Depression}, the novel focuses on the Joads, a poor family of sharecroppers driven from the Oklahoma home by drought, economic hardship, and changes in financial and agricultural industries. Due to their nearly hopeless situation and in part because they were trapped in the \textit{Dust Bowl}, the Joads set out for California along with thousands of other migrant workers of Oklahoma, they sought jobs, land, dignity, and a future. In this connection, Louis Owens has observed: “We can and should read \textit{The Grapes of Wrath} as a testament to a historical and sociological phenomenon - the Dust Bowl - perhaps the greatest
combined ecological and social catastrophe in American history....Steinbeck brilliantly documents the suffering of a people in flight, the tragic loss of homeland, and the discovery that in the land of plenty there isn’t enough to go around.”

With its first publication, the novel, *The Grapes of Wrath* is frequently read in American educational literature classes because of its historical context and enduring legacy, and the book is also taken as text for economic, social, or political preachments.

*The Grapes of Wrath* by John Steinbeck is a classic novel noted for its descriptive quality and fascinating writing techniques. Its seemingly historical theme is mainly designed to promote socialistic theories. In the novel, Steinbeck uses the experience of migrant workers to share an important message with his readers. In presenting such an event, he shows that life is a mixture of both cruel and beautiful things. Throughout the novel, he tries to show that good can still exist among evil. In displaying this message, he uses in one chapter of the book to share his socialistic views with the readers:

> And the great owners, who must lose their land in an upheaval, the great owners with access to history and to know the great fact: when property accumulates in too few hands it is taken away. And that companion fact: when the majority of the people are hungry and cold they will take by force what they need. And the little screaming fact that sounds through all history: repression works only to strengthen and knit the repressed.
Steinbeck openly advocates Marxist proletarian revolt to unjust economic conditions, which, he goes on to explain are directly caused by capitalism. Here Steinbeck wants to give a message which says that socialistic revolt is the way to solve economic problems. But some say that Steinbeck’s fundamental theory is incorrect because it is based on Marxism, which is fundamentally incorrect. Naturally a socialist system only works well during weak economic periods when a few people have an abundance, but the majority has nothing. Therefore Steinbeck’s socialistic message must understandably be considered with a grain of salt.

*The Grapes of Wrath* generated heated controversy at the time of its publication. Association of farmers in California called for a statewide ban against the novel that was partially successful. Several sources, including *Collier’s Magazine*, treated the novel as communist propaganda. In Congress, Representative Lyle Boren of Oklahoma denounced the book as a “lying filthy manuscript” that unjustly portrayed Oklahomans as shiftless. However, the novel was popularly perceived as having inspired widespread interest and compassion towards the oppressed people, and was often linked with other powerful works that helped to induce social change.

After publication of this novel, many people review the book thoroughly throughout the country to large and curious audiences. It may be mentioned that
renowned critic Peter Lisca, in his recent study of John Steinbeck’s work, ends an introductory paragraph on *The Grapes of Wrath* as follows:

Although thus associated with this class of social-protest fiction *The Grapes of Wrath* continues to be read, not as a piece of literary or social history, but with a sense of emotional involvement and aesthetic discovery. More than any other American novel, it successfully embodies a contemporary social problem of national scope in an artistically viable expression. It is unquestionably John Steinbeck’s finest achievement, a work of literary genius.65

Steinbeck wrote this novel at his home, 16250 Greenwood lane, which is now called Monte Sereno at California. While writing it he had unusual difficulty devising a title “The Grapes of Wrath”, suggested by his wife, Carol Steinbeck. The title has a reference to lyrics from “The Battle Hymn of the Republic,” which was written during the Civil war 1861 by Julia Ward Howe:

Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord:
He is trampling out the vintage where the grapes of wrath are stored: He had loosed the fateful lightening of His terrible swift sword: His truth is marching on.66

Steinbeck uses the title in the book, at the end of the chapter 25, talking about the starving people watching food being destroyed because it won’t turn a profit:
.....and in the eyes of the hungry there is a growing wrath.
In the souls of the people the grapes of wrath. are filling
and growing heavy, growing heavy for the vintage.67

It is expected that the image of the title serves as a crucial symbol in the
development of both the plot and the novel’s greater thematic concerns; from the
terrible condition of Dust Bowl oppression to terrible wrath, but also the
deliverance of workers through their co-operation, which is indicated in the novel
but does not materialize within the novel.

In The Grapes of Wrath, different forms of human relationships such as:
mother and son, mother and daughter, friend and friend, husband and wife and
preacher and worshipper etc. have been analysed.

Before finding out different forms of human relationships in The Grapes of
Wrath, it is pertinent to note a brief summary of the novel.

John Steinbeck’s novel The Grapes of Wrath tells the specific story of the
Joad family in order to illustrate the hardship and oppression suffered by migrant
labourers during the Great Depression. The novel begins with the description of the
condition in Dust Bowl Oklahoma that ruined the crops and instigated massive
foreclosures on farmland.

As the story begins, Tom Joad, a young man of about thirty years has just
been released from McAlester Prison, on parole, after serving four years of a seven
years’ sentence for homicide. On his return to his parents’ farm near Sallisaw,
Oklahoma, he meets former preacher, Jim Casy whom he remembers his childhood, and the two travel together. When they reach his childhood farm house, they find it deserted, the house falling down and cotton planted in the dooryard. Disconcerted and confused, he and Casy meet their old neighbour, Muley Graves, who tells them that Tom’s family is boarding at his Uncle John Joad’s home nearby. The neighbour goes on to tell them that the banks have kicked all the farmers off their land. Muley’s own family has left to find work in California, but he decides to stay himself.

Next day at Uncle John’s house, John finds members of his family staying with Uncle John, a morose man prone to depression after the death of his wife with several years before. Ma Joad, his mother is a strong, study woman who is the moral centre of family life. His brother, Noah, may have been brain damage during childbirth, while his sister, Rose of Sharon (called Rosasharn by the family) is recently married and pregnant. Her husband, Connie Rivers, has dreams of studying radios. Tom’s younger brother, Al, is only sixteen and has the concerns befitting that age. Besides, the old members of the family Grampa Joad and Granma Joad are there. There Tom finds his family loading a converted Hudson truck with what remains of their possessions. As the crops were destroyed in the Dust Bowl, the family had to default on their loans.

The Joad family plans to go to California based on flyers they found advertising work in the fields there. These flyers are fraudulent advertisements
meant to draw more workers than necessary and drive down wages. Jim Casy asks to accompany the Joads to California so that he can work with people in the fields rather than preach at them. While they are going west on Route 66, the Joad family discovers that the road is full of many families making the same trek, entrapped by the same promise. In makeshift camps, they hear many stories from others, some coming back from California, and are compelled to face the possibility that their prospects may not be what they hoped. Along the road Grampa dies of a stroke and is buried in the camp. The Wilson family helps the Joads when Grampa dies, and the two families decide to make the journey to California together. Next Granma dies close to the California state line, both Noah, the eldest Joad son and Connie, the husband of the pregnant Joad, Rose of Sharon split from the family; the remaining members, led by Ma, realize they have no choice but to go on, as there is nothing remaining for them in Oklahoma.

When they reach California, they find little hope of making a decent wage, instead, there is an oversupply of labourers and a lack of rights, and the big corporal farmers are in collusion, while smaller farmers are suffering from collapsing prices. But a light of hope appears at Weedpatch Camp, one of the clean, utility- supplied camps operated and looked after by the Resettlement Administration, a New Deal agency that has been established to help migrants. But there is not enough money and space to care for all of the needy. As a Federal facility, the camp is also off-limits to California deputies who constantly harras and provoke the new comers.
All the labourers coming from the different corners can’t remain silent to the repeated harassment and provocation of the California deputies. In response to the exploitation, there are people who attempt for the workers to join unions including Casy, who had gone to jail after taking the blame for attacking a range deputy. The remaining Joads work as strike breakers on a peach orchard where Casy is involved in a strike that eventually turns violent. Tom Joad witnesses the killing of Casy and kills the attacker, becoming a fugitive. They later leave the orchard for a cotton farm where Tom is at risk of being identified for the murder he committed. He decides to leave the family, and bids farewell to his mother. He promises that he is determined to fight for the cause for which Casy died, and will be a tireless advocate for the oppressed.

After Tom left the family, suddenly there came rainy season thereby causing massive flooding. The Joads are caught in a dangerous condition. They cannot escape the flooding because Rose of Sharon suddenly goes into labour. While other families leave the camp near the rapidly rising creek, the Joads remain and attempt to stop the flood waters. Without the help of others, the Joads are unsuccessful, and they are forced to seek refuge on the top of their car. Rose of Sharon delivers a stillborn child that Uncle John sends in a box down the creek. The family eventually reaches higher place and finds a barn for shelter. Inside the barn, there is a starving man along with his young son. The story of the novel ends with Rose of Sharon, barely recovered from the delivery, breastfeeding the dying man to nurse him back to health.
It is in the characters of Ma Joad and Tom Joad and their relationship with other characters that Steinbeck had presented different forms of human relationships. Among the human relationships found in the novel, Ma Joad’s relationship with Tom Joad is the most important and this relationship of mother with her son dominates the whole novel. Tom Joad is the protagonist of the novel, who is the favourite son of Ma and Pa Joad. He is a good-natured and thoughtful person. Even though he killed a man in his self-defence and has been separated from his family for four years, he does not waste his time with regrets. He lives fully for the present moment enabling him to be a great source for the Joad family. On the other hand, Ma Joad whose maiden name is Hazlet, is the mother of Joad family. Ma is introduced as a woman who knowingly and gladly fulfils her role as ‘the citadal of the family.’ Paul McCarthy writes,

Ma Joad, the central figure, is very likely the most memorable in Steinbeck’s fiction. A person of common sense, stamina and compassion, Ma symbolizes both the family’s strength and the eternal qualities of motherhood.68

She is the healer of the family ills and the arbiter of its arguments. So her ability to perform these tasks grows as the novel progresses. Ma Joad has a strong intuition because she’s experienced too much in her life. Tom notices something in his mother’s eyes when he is reunited with her:

Her hazel eyes seemed to have experienced all possible tragedy and to have mounted pain and suffering like steps into a high calm and super-human understanding.69
In fact Ma is the backbone of the family:

She seemed to know, to accept, to welcome her position, the citadel of the family, the strong place that could not be taken. And since old Tom and the children could not know hurt or fear unless she acknowledged hurt and fear, she had practiced denying them herself. And since, when a joyful thing happened, they looked to see whether joy was on her, it was her habit to build up laughter out of inadequate materials. But better than joy was calm. Imperturbability could be depended upon. And from her great and humble position in the family she had taken dignity and a clean calm beauty. From her position as healer, her hands had grown sure and cool and quiet; from her position as arbiter she had become as remote and faultless in judgment as a goddess. She seemed to know that if she swayed the family shook, and if she ever really deeply wavered or despaired the family would fall, the family will to function would be gone.  

Because of compelling circumstances, Ma has to perform many duties for her family. She begins to doubt the idea of going to California before anyone else does. She has a dream of having a little white house surrounded by orange trees, and of reaching out and grabbing as many oranges as her hands can carry, but also tells his beloved son, Tom:

I’m scared of stuff so nice. I ain’t got faith. I’m scared somepin ain’t so nice about it.
Tom and his mother have a special relationship and the two can communicate without many words. A stage comes when Ma is very optimistic about going to California. Although Tom is actually not allowed to leave the state of Oklahoma, it is clear that he wants to join his family on their way to the west. He is not afraid of getting into trouble although his fears that he could be sent back into prison. Whenever his mother, who is normally a strong character, is afraid of the future, he manages to calm her down and give her back to hope.

During their journey to California, when Wilson’s car breaks down and at this, Tom suggests that they continue travelling on separately, Ma refuses to allow this. It is Ma who devotes herself to protecting the unity of the family and retaining its spirit. She realizes that in their migrant way of life, the family is the only thing that is important and valuable:

All we got in the family unbroke. Like a bunch a cows, when the lobos are ranging, stick all together. I ain’t scared while we’re all here, all that’s alive, but I ain’t gonna see us bust up. The Wilsons here is with us, an’ the preacher is with us. I can’t say nothin’ if they want to go, but I’m a-goin’ cat-wild with this here piece a bar-arn if my own folks busts up. 72

When Tom Joad witnesses how the preacher, Jim Casy is killed, he loses temper and kills the man who kills the preacher. Tom thinks that it would be best for the family if he left so that he does not endanger them. Ma Joad, his mother does not want him to go and so he stays for some time. When his hiding place is
exposed, the situation becomes too dangerous and at last Tom decides to leave for the good of the family. Then, Tom quiets Ma’s fear that he, like Casy, will lose his life in the workers’ movement. Tom assures her that regardless of whether he lives or dies, his spirit will continue on in the triumphs and turmoil of the world. As the Joads are torn apart, Tom’s words offer the promise of a deep, lasting relation that no tragedy can break.

Before leaving, Tom says good-bye to his mother and gives his famous speech:

Then it don’ matter. Then I’ll be aroun’ in the dark. I’ll be ever’where—wherever you look. Wherever they’s a fight so hungry people can eat, I’ll be there. Wherever they’s a cop beatin’ up a guy, I’ll be there. If Casy knowed, why, I’ll be in the way guys yell when they’re mad an’—I’ll be in the way kids laugh when they ‘re hungry an’ they know supper’s ready. An’ when our folks eat the stuff they raise an’live in the houses they build—why, I’ll be there. See? God, I’m talkin’ like Casy. Comes of thinkin’ about him so much. Seems like I can see him sometimes. 

There is no bound for Ma Joad’s love for Tom. There is close human relationship between them. They always looked out for one and other during the hard times, it was the helping hand of the other that made them survive:

She crawled close to his voice. I wanta touch ya again, Tom. It’s like I’m blin’, It’s so dark. I wanta remember, even if it’s on’y my fingers that remember.
Indeed, the relationship between Ma Joad and her beloved son, Tom is more than just family love; during the trip their connection grew to dependence and need.

Another important human relationship in *The Grapes of Wrath* is the relationship of Jim Casy, an ex-preacher with Tom Joad, a former worshipper and the rest of the Joads. In this novel, these two characters – Tom and Casy are alike in the fact that of how they view of the world, and the journey they are going on. They form a close relationship because of the time and cause they spend together. Tom Joad, the protagonist of the novel is a character who devotes himself to the present moment, the future, which is out of reach, does not concern him at all. With Casy, the preacher, he finds his family and makes the trek to California in search of work. Jim Casy is a character who had given up his ministry out of the belief that all human experience is holy. Regarding his giving up of preaching, he explains to Tom Joad: ‘There ain’t no sin and there ain’t no virtue. There’s just stuff people do.’ His new ideas about spirituality are also expressed when the Joad family asks him to say grace. Casy says:

> I got thinkin’ how we was holy when we was one thing, an’ mankin’ was holy when it was one thing. An’ it on’y got unholy when one mis’able little fella got the bit in his teeth an’ run off his own way, kickin’ an’ fightin’. Fella like that bust the holiness. But when they’re all workin’ together, not one fella for another felle, but one fella kind
of harnessed to the whole shebang—that’s right, that’s holy.  

When the Joad family arrives at California and Tom Joad has an altercation with a cop, it is Jim Casy who sacrifices himself to take the blame for attacking a cop, in order to keep Tom Joad and his family out of trouble, and also wants to help and support them.

After release from jail, Jim Casy, along with some other men, is protesting to try to raise wages. Unfortunately he is killed by a deputy while he is trying to convince the men who come to break up the strike that what they are doing to the migrants is wrong. “Listen,” he said, “You fellas don’ know what you’re doing You’re helpin’ to starve kids.” The incidence occurs in Tom’s presence. Tom, in revenge, kills the deputy but suffers injuries on the head in the fight. Jim Casy is said to be John Steinbeck’s symbolic figure of Jesus Christ. He realizes that his mission in life is to organize the migrant farm workers into unions so as to improve their living conditions. He already knows that by organizing such a strive he is possibly endangering his own life. He fulfills Steinbeck’s overall purpose by demonstrating the shifts ‘I’ to ‘We’ and by leaving the reader with hope for the future of the migrants.

Tom always thinks over the philosophical ideas Casy has discussed with him, and adopts them as his own. He decides to translate them into action. He also decides to transform himself into a social activist and a man of the people. Indeed, Casy’s death completes the transformation of Tom into a man who is ready to take
on the responsibility for the future. Now Tom no longer focuses his energies only on the present moment. Instead, realizing his responsibility to his fellow human beings, he starts on a path bettering the future, helping generations of workers yet to come. Tom assures Ma that no matter whether he lives or dies his spirit will continue on in the triumphs and turmoil of the world:

Says one time he went out in the wilderness to find his own soul, an’ he foun’ he didn’t have no soul that was his’n. Says he foun’ he jus’ got a little piece of a great big soul. Says a wilderness ain’t no good, ‘cause his little piece of a soul wasn’t no good’ less it was with the rest, an’ was whole.79

Tom’s statement testifies his own transformation of his character. He follows the footsteps taken by Jim Casy. So Tom and Jim Casy are similar in many ways and have affected each other in what they do and the relationship they form.

Next, the relationship between the Joads and the Wilsons to aid each other on the way to California is a significant aspect of the plot of the novel, for it is in collective interests that these two families find their strength in the face of difficulties and in the hour of peril. This relationship is the first building block in a collectivist scheme that the writer, John Steinbeck tends to support in which working class people come together for their collective interests. This story of the novel tells that the Wilson couple—Ivy Wilson and his wife, Sairy Wilson are trying to travel from Kanas to California in an antiquated Dodge. The couple are the first people that the Joads encounter on their journey to California. The Joads came
next to them on the first night on the road, and in a remarkable short time, the two families merge into one, sharing one another’s hardships and committing to one another’s survival. This merging takes place among the migrant community in general as well:

twenty families became one family, the children were the children of all. The lost of home become one loss, and the golden time in the West was our dream.  

The sense of fellowship can be shown by the following episode. Sairy Wilson instantly offers to let Grampa Joad, the oldest honourary head of the Joad family rest in her tent and on her cot. When Grampa Joad dies of a stroke on this same cot soon after, the Wilsons help Joads bury Grampa’s dead body, while the men dig his grave. They also write a verse from Scripture on the note on his grave. From then on, the Joads and the Wilsons unite and travel together in their two cars. When Sairy becomes too sick after crossing the California border to press on, Ivy tells the Joads to leave without them. The Joads do not like the idea of this telling them that they are like family now and they won’t desert them, but Ivy insists them to go on to their journey. At this critical situation, Ma leaves money and food for the Wilsons, which Ivy will not immediately accept, knowing how great a sacrifice such money and food are. Here the writer wants to show that in the face of adversity, unity, co-operation and close-relationship are indispensable for the livelihood of the migrant people.
Caring and helping for someone in the hour of need and peril can develop a compassionate friendship and close relationship. A person who cares about other person could be someone the other person has known for a long time or could be someone who just wants to help. But there are very few persons in this world who are known to have such a privilege. In this novel, the relationship between Jim Casy and Sairy Wilson is said to be developed by such virtues. Casy, the former preacher is a special person and a great friend to Sairy Wilson. He has kept a friendly relationship with Sairy Wilson. He has done some remarkable things for her and others as well. They have somewhat of a secret friendship; no one knew how much they helped one and other out. One may understand their compassionate fellowship from the following remarks:

You got a God. Don’t make no difference if you don’ know what he looks like. That’ what I needed. Somebody close enough- to pray.81

What Sairy wanted was a prayer for her soul for someone close enough to God so it would be heard. She was lucky to have someone who cared like Casy, even if he could have said a better prayer; she was lucky to have a friend like Casy.

Among the various kind of relationships dealt with in this novel, there are also many husband-wife relationships. They are:

(i). Grampa’s relationship with Granma:
Grampa and Granma are vividly depicted in the novel. Their relationship as husband and wife is very interesting. Grampa is the grandfather of the Joad family. Once a wrath-filled man, he is now an elderly being, capable of wrath only by tongue. He served as comic relief to the family. He has a strong affection for his wife, Granma who is the grandmother of the Joad family, but he glorifies himself in provoking her. But one interesting thing is that they both continually fight like animals. While alive, Grampa says he plans to eat grapes in California, but when it comes time to leave, he refuses to go. The family is forced to drug Grampa to get him to leave and it succeeds in carrying off the farm, but he dies of a stroke on the way, and so he is buried alongside the road in Oklahoma. His wife, Granma is a pious Christian, who loves casting hellfire and damnation in her husband’s direction:

She has held her own with a shrill, ferocious religiosity that was as lecherous and as savage as anything Grampa could offer. 

Granma is fervent in her beliefs. She asks Casy to say grace before breakfast and orders him to pray when Grampa is dying. Her life loses meaning with the death of Grampa. After her husband’s death, she dies just after the family reaches California. 

(ii). Relationship between Ma Joad and Pa Joad:
In the novel, husband-wife relationship between Pa Joad and Ma Joad is very unique and interesting. After the death of Grampa Joad, Pa Joad becomes the male head of the family. Though Pa Joad is the titular head of the family, he has neither the wisdom nor the strength that his wife, Ma Joad has. Because of his weak personality, he does not adapt to the new migrant way of life. He is the helpless victim of an indifferent environment. He relinquishes his nominal authority over the family and looks to Ma for direction in making decisions. So he reluctantly defers to Ma Joad’s judgment in one serious matter after another. He sadly remarks:

"Funny! Woman takin over the family. Woman sayin’ we’ll do this here, an’ we’ll go there. An’ I don’ ever case."  

Ma Joad represents “the citadel of the family, the strong place that could not be taken”. She becomes the guiding force behind the family. She always understands the individual needs of each member of the family. She knows that if Pa is even defeated completely, the family will collapse. So at times, she keeps Pa into near frenzy, knowing that his anger will make him stronger by strengthening his resolve. Pa Joad who was earlier offended by Ma’s authority, at the end of the novel, humbly obeys every decision that Ma Joad takes.

Throughout the novel, Ma Joad devotes herself to protecting the unity of the family and retaining its spirit. As long as the family or some part of the family is together, Ma will see to it that they survive. She feels instinctively that they are the people, that they are the ones who will endure and populate the world. Though
she speaks rarely, Ma expresses one of the most comprehensive morals of the novel:

If you’re in trouble or trust or need—go to poor people.
They’re the only ones that’ll help—the only ones.84

(iii) Relationship between Rose of Sharon and her husband, Connie Rivers:

This is also a relation between the husband and wife. Connie Rivers who is the husband of Rose of Sharon accompanies the Joad family to California. He is a person who never does much of the work, complains often, and plans rather vaguely to set out on his own and learn to be a radio repairman. Rose of Sharon, a sixteen year old lady is the older of the Joad daughters and the wife of nineteen-year old Connie. As the name suggests, she is searching for romance and beauty in life. When the trek to California begins, Connie and Rose of Sharon seem enchanted with each other and very pleased with the prospect of having their first child. They have a grand notion of making a happy life for themselves in a city. However, all that they do hard to achieve their dream becomes more and more difficult, and Rose of Sharon begins to make demands upon Connie, he seems to be frightened away by the whole idea of parenthood. Because of harsh realities of migrant life, Connie at last abandons his wife. Sharon’s child is also born death. They cannot unite again and have gone their own ways of life. Here it may be mentioned that once a gay, carefree, somewhat boisterous girl, Rose of Sharon has now lost her dream of leading a happy life soon after her husband abandons her. Thus becomes the end of their relationship. In fact, John Steinbeck can successfully
present the man-woman relationship in the characters of Grampa and Granma, Ma Joad and Pa Joad and Connie and Rose of Sharon.

The last and the important human relationship in the novel is the relationship between Ma Joad and her obedient daughter, Rose of Sharon. It is a relationship between mother and daughter. It is through their relationship, the Joads stand together in familial love and they can have a meaningful and worthwhile life. Rose of Sharon is the wife of Connie and the oldest daughter of Joad’s family. An impractical, impatient and romantic young woman, she begins the journey to California pregnant with her first child. She and Connie have grand notions of making a happy life for themselves in a city. It is Ma Joad who understands that her daughter, Rose of Sharon is worried about her pregnancy. She also realizes that she must give comfort to her daughter when she is depressed. Because of harsh realities of migrant life, Connie abandons his wife, and Sharon’s child is born death. By the end of the novel, Rose of Sharon matures considerably and possesses something of her mother’s indomitable spirit and grace. Once delivered of her stillborn child, Rose of Sharon seems more to appreciate and try to help the sufferings of others. On the other hand, Ma Joad who repeatedly stresses the importance of family bonds, besides she welcomes other migrant workers and families and feeds hungry children at a migrant camp even though she has barely enough food for her own family. It is Ma Joad who sets greatly influences her daughter, Rose of Sharon, who at the end of the novel, nurses a starving man with
her breast milk at a time when Rose of Sharon barely recovered from the delivery.

Rose of Sharon obeys her mother’s instruction instantly:

Rose of Sharon loosened one side of the blanket and bared her breast. “You got to,” she said. She squirmed closer and pulled his head close. “There!” she said. “There.” Her hand moved behind his head and supported it. Her fingers moved gently in his hair. She looked up and across the barn, and her lips came together and smiled mysteriously.85

Here Peter Lisca remarks:

The specific acts addressed to this principle of survival, Steinbeck saves the most powerful for the novel’s concluding scene. In Rosasharn’s feeding of a stranger with the milk from her own breast is reenacted the primal act of human nourishment and the most intimate expression of human kinship.86
Notes


20 John Steinbeck (Gannett, Lewis) “Introduction”, *The Portable Steinbeck* (New York: The Viking Press, 1943) XXIII.


64 Collier’s an editorial note on “The Grapes of Wrath,” Vol., 104, No. 10, September, 2 (1939) 54.


