CHAPTER – V

Conclusion
American writer, John Steinbeck is a multi-dimensional novelist of rural and small town Californian origin, who rises to fame and fortune in the thirties of the twentieth century. Critics and reviewers placed varied and divided opinions on his writings. As a result he received no encouragement from many American critics and intellectuals for a long time. However he continued his writing as he pleased, and a large number of readers continued reading his writings with great interest. Through the varied range of moods, he presented-angry, gay tender, erotic, whimsical, sad and thoughtful. Foreign readers found a unique quality in his writings. One can say that with a native quest of understanding of life in general and the American life in general, his works celebrated goodness and innocence, along with a display of chaos, violence, corruption and decadence. With a voracious appetite for life, and with an energetic and versatile genius, he carved out a permanent place in the American literary tradition which brought him to the heights in the world of fiction.
The novels of Steinbeck which were written in the 1930s like *Tortilla Flat* (1935), *In Dubious Battle* (1936), *Of Mice and Men* (1937), and *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939) etc. gain national recognition. There novels were written under the shadow of the Great Depression. The later novels like *Cannery Row* (1945), *The Pearl* (1947), *The Wayward Bus* (1947) and *Sweet Thursday* (1945) etc. were written with the Second World War in the background. The social and political crisis of those periods gave rise to waves of social consciousness, and the important novels of Steinbeck have clearly expressed the failure with a deep sense of understanding and sympathy. After the death of Steinbeck in 1968, his later works began to gain some degree of critical appreciation. His works of the 1930s and 1940s represent the high points of a literary career that spanned nearly a third of the twenty century.

Everybody knows that Steinbeck has been more or less reticent about his personal life. Sometimes his writings are found to have drawn semi-autobiographical sketches, relating to the origin and intention of his works. So, it is pertinent to say that Steinbeck remains a regional novelist with a peculiar American, more precisely, Californian sensibility. Most of his important books are set in a geographical area, with the Salinas valley at the centre.

In this thesis the first chapter deals with John Steinbeck’s life and works. A brief historical account of the development of John Steinbeck’s life and his career is examined as it is necessary for a better understanding of the characters and settings in his novels.
In the second chapter of this thesis, a brief study of the social and literary background of the period in which John Steinbeck lived and worked has been studied. It has also analyzed deeply the impact of his family, friends, books and other major writers on Steinbeck and his response to them from his own personal experiences which are reflected in his works. Ernest Hemingway was one of his contemporaries. He influenced him on his prose which Steinbeck said he had been convinced that in many ways Hemingway was the first writer of their time. During the course of his life, John Steinbeck came to realize that the man who most influenced his thinking and writing was Edward F. Ricketts, a marine biologist.

In the third chapter, an analysis of the Human Relationships in the early novels of John Steinbeck has been made with reference to John Steinbeck’s novels having various forms of Human Relationships. His early novels, *Tortilla Flat* (1935), *In Dubious Battle* (1936), *Of Mice and Men* (1937), and *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939) have been studied.

*Tortilla Flat* (1935): *Tortilla Flat* is a full scale novel of John Steinbeck, drawing on his contemporary Southern Californian environment. It is the story about the life style of Danny and his friends who are all Paisanos. They are wonderful and pleasant rogues who never work until extreme circumstances compel them to it. They are contented with wine, food, love and friends. Despite spending time in an unnecessary way, they are warm-hearted and charitable to the needy persons. Danny, the leader of the group, inherited two houses in Tortilla Flat from his grandfather. Danny is a very generous person. He rents out one of the houses to his friend Pilon who later gives shelter all the economically backward friends. Thus life
is going on there. Danny has a thinking that private property and income will
damage human relationships. When the houses burnt down, Danny thinks that they
can lead a free and a happy life. At last Danny died. That evening after funeral of
Danny, the house which was once the centre of fellowship, was burnt down and his
friends were all scattered. Here Steinbeck has shown his interest in the life of
socially and economically disposed community. Using the carefree, gay and
irresponsible world of the ‘Paisanos,’ he has criticised certain aspects of the
respectable society of America.

_In Dubious Battle_ (1936): The novel deals with social and political problems
of the Great Depression. It is one of the most successful novels yet written in the
United States of America. In the novel two main strike leaders—Mac and Jim
organize a strike against the landowners and growers. Their main demands are for
higher wages and better living conditions. Before the launching of the strike, the
leaders mobilize many strikers, workers and sympathizers to join to the cause. The
strike begins. Situation of the strike grows worse and at last it collapses. The
struggle between the strikers and the growers is said to be ‘a dubious battle.’ Here in
the novel, John Steinbeck who is frequently identified as a proletarian or radical
writer of 1930s, has successfully presented his notion of relationships: friends to
friends, leaders and followers, organizers and strikers etc.

_Of Mice and Men_ (1937): It was the first play-novelette which was written
by John Steinbeck in the year 1937 at a time when the United States held firmly the
attention of the greatest economic depression it had ever known. 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.’ They dreamt of owning a piece of land of their own. George, who is intelligent and self-conscious always felt worried that Lennie, the dumb and the powerful giant with the mind of a child might unknowingly and innocently misuse his powerful strength in a harmful way. Despite strict warming for not use his strength in a wrong way, Lennie misused it. At last to avoid punishment from the pursuers, Lennie was lovingly killed by George.

*The Grapes of Wrath* (1939): Steinbeck’s *The Grapes of Wrath* is a realistic American novel, setting against the background of the Great Depression. It is the story which focuses on the Joads, a poor family sharecroppers driven from the Oklahoma home by drought, economic hardship and changes in financial and agricultural industries. Being trapped in the *Dust Bowl*, the Joads set out for California along with thousands of other migrants of Oklahoma. They went everywhere in search of jobs, land, dignity and a good fortune. This novel is regarded as an example of proletarian or radical novel which deals with the life of working classes or with social or industrial problems from the point of view of labourers.

The fourth chapter is devoted to the analysis of the Human Relationships in the later novels of John Steinbeck. The later novels are *Cannery Row* (1945), *The Pearl* (1947), *The Wayward Bus* (1947) and *Sweet Thursday* (1954).

*Cannery Row* (1945): It is a post World War II novel written with a combination of humour and sadness about the lives of the people of Cannery Row, a
street in Monterey, California. The novel has shown Steinbeck’s reaction to a world where many changes took place drastically in social values after the severe economic depression, soon followed by the massive aggression and destruction of the World War. The novel deals with about the adventures of Mack and the boys, a group of unemployed men. They want to do something nice for Doc, who is the proprietor of a biological supply house on the Row. Doc is a person who used to do something for the welfare of the people of the Row. So the people of this area admire him much. For him, they successfully organize a second party after the first party failed.

The Pearl (1947): The Pearl is a simple and touching novella written by Steinbeck and first published in book form in 1947. It is the story of a Young Pearl diver named Kino and a great pearl. In his routine diving in the sea, Kino finds a great pearl. Being a poor man, he cannot keep it as a family wealth. He carries it to sell to many brokers who are trying to cheat him. He cannot sell it more because the brokers are only the many hands of one head. In this novel, Kino’s wife Juana warns Kino by saying that the pearl is evil and will destroy the family. In order to become a free man, Kino throws away the pearl as far as he can into the channel. Kino’s brother, Juan Tomas supports Kino in all of his endeavours. The novella shows a revulsion against modern industrial and commercial society, and it embodies a strong critical attack on the ways and values of American society.

The Wayward Bus (1947): It is Steinbeck’s first novel after the World War II. In the story of the novel, a representative group of characters makes a bus trip from Rebel Corners to San Juan de la Cruz. During the trip, the passengers are
isolated. During the isolation period they interact with each other, revealing their characters. Illusion and reality, success and failure, frustration and fulfillment, and sex or masculinity and femininity are basically shown in the novel. The novel depicts the self-knowledge of the passengers, providing critical moments for all so that they may reveal the strength of their honesty or their hypocrisy and self-deception.

*Sweet Thursday* (1954): This novel is published in 1954. It is a sequel to *Cannery Row* and set in the years after the end of the World War II. In the story of the novel, Doc returns from the war to the failed Western Biological laboratory to the changed Cannery Row. He finds everything changed there. He finds that Mac and the boys are still living in the Palace Flophouse. He finds that Lee Chong has sold his store. Dora’s local brothel is run by Dora’s old sister, Fauna. Doc tries to rebuild his neglected business but Suzy, an admirer of Doc is causing trouble. With the astrological prediction of Fauna, with Hazel’s fighting destiny and with the help of Mac and the boys, Doc and Suzy are brought together as a couple.

Steinbeck believed as Thomas Keirman paraphrases him that:

People only learn about themselves. The only effective revelation was self-revelation. Great fiction provided people with the opportunity to experience themselves through their identification with characters and events.¹

In an over-all analysis of Steinbeck’s novels, it has been found that his plots are constructed with simple to complex human relationships among the various
characters of the novels, and that they have become universal because of his themes of universal importance. It also registers the importance of the works of John Steinbeck in the development of modernism in literature. His novels of common people and the troubles that beset them have earned him the fame and reputation as one of America’s greatest writers. He has employed various forms from novella to great novels depicting the contemporary realities. His sympathetic portrayal of the proletariat attracts Steinbeck to readers not only for his time but for every generation. Here F.W. Watt states:

The growth and methods of radical ideology, in the nature of the war between the haves and have-nots, and in the half-articulate yearnings of the dispossessed for the kind of stable and fruitful life rooted in the land.²

Steinbeck is successful in presenting various kinds of human relationships in most of his novels. However, there is still enough avenues for researchers to carry out further research in the works of John Steinbeck in future particularly the various un-explored areas like triumphant spirit of John Steinbeck’s characters, communism in John Steinbeck’s novels, background of Great Depression in John Steinbeck’s novels etc.
Notes
