CHAPTER V

SOCIAL PROTEST
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“Let us rise up tonight with a greater readiness. Let us stand with a greater determination. And let us move on in these powerful days, these days of challenge to make America what it ought to be. We have an opportunity to make America a better nation.”

-Martin Luther King, Jr.

The definition of "protest literature" is fluid having different connotations for different people. According to the deconstructionists all literary writing is ultimately a form of protest. For the social and historical critics literary protests must contain a specific political aim, such as changing a law while for a marxist literary protest should disturb the social order in terms of the relationship between social classes. A feminist critic might argue that protest does or does not promote a gender bias and a psychologist might see literary protest as a manifestation of the subconscious. Social protest may take an altogether new form for a traditional literary critic who might argue that the moral relationship between aesthetics and the political message is the content of protest literature.

Protest Literature has existed in different forms throughout literary history. Some of the greatest writers in history have employed their talents toward awakening the public to injustices locally and world-wide. It has in its gamut some of the most stirring, thought-provoking and incisive writings on the struggle of humanity against social injustice ever written. In other words protest
literature is literature that focuses on revealing society's ills and literature that either advocates or opposes certain types of social or political reform.

German writer Ludolf Wienbarg commenting upon the nineteenth-century protest writers, envisioned the role and the purpose of their works when he declared that prose is a weapon, which should be sharpened by it. Literature has always proved to be a beneficial and potent weapon that could jolt society awake and ensure that it evolves with time, change and improve. Many writers have taken their literary vocation seriously keeping social reformation as their purpose. Writers like Charles Dickens have infused social criticism into their writings, thereby reflecting the political and social controversies of the day. Amongst the well known works of social protest is Victor Hugo's *Les Misérables* (1862) which remains one of the most powerful depictions of corruption and depravity in literature. The best known of the Realists, Émile Zola, also published numerous protest works; most notably *Germinal* (1885), an indictment of industrialism and the political structures that foster social inequality. One of the foremost works of social protest is by the Russian writer Fyodor Dostoevsky whose *Crime and Punishment* (1866) critiques Russian society while depicting members of the radicalized younger generation. In his depiction of the character Raskolnikov, Dostoevsky showed radicalism to be misguided as well as dangerous.

Americans have protested aspects of their society which they have found disagreeable in a wide variety of ways throughout the nation's history. The most prominent of these issues were slavery, women's equality, corruption within the
government, and the distribution of wealth. One such form has been literary and has come to be known as 'social protest literature'. While European protest writers often focused on philosophical questions of individuality and the dynamics of social structures, American reformist literature commonly emphasized political issues. Harriet Beecher Stowe's *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1852) is a perfect example of a book that transcended its place in the literary world to help radically reconfigure the country's political and social landscapes. It is a highly effective, sentimental abolitionist novel that reached many hearts in response to its portrayal of the Fugitive Slave. In the history of slavery in the United States, a fugitive slave was a slave who had escaped his or her enslaver often with the intention of traveling to a place where the state of his or her enslavement was either illegal or not enforced.

Another writer considered to be one of the key American promulgators of literary social protest is Mark Twain, largely due to his novel *Huckleberry Finn* (1885). In it he achieves a skillful blend of protest and literary craftsmanship by highlighting the flaws and hypocrisies of American society. Edward Bellamy used a different technique to advocate social change in *Looking Backward* (1888), a utopian novel metaphorically portraying a socialistic form of government. While scorning the competitive social and economic system developing in America, the novel depicts a society in which citizens are equal on all levels. In his works, George Washington Cable encouraged equality through civil rights, a view most powerfully stated in his
novel *The Grandissimes* (1880), in which he portrays a South still suffering from the legacy of slavery.

Several American writers have worked on the significant theme of social protest in their writings. Many of Steinbeck’s predecessors and contemporaries have chalked out the path of social relevance of literature as a means of social protest and reformation which the novelist has successfully continued in his various novels.

John Steinbeck’s greatness as a writer lies in his empathy for common people—their loneliness, joy, anger and strength, their connection to places and their craving for land. In his own person and fortune, Steinbeck felt the misery of his times. He exposed the drawbacks in the American way of life and laid it all bare with frankness in his stories. Considered the foremost novelist of the Great Depression of the 1930s, Steinbeck’s own life contains insights into the development of his sympathy for the dispossessed, the downtrodden and the migrant workers as evidenced in his novels. These novels reflect his concern with the struggles of common laborers; of which he had firsthand knowledge through his observations and work as a laborer, a seaman, surveyor and migratory worker among other jobs. He believed that one of the main functions of a writer was to serve as the watch-dog of society and attack its injustices so as to stigmatize its faults and transform it for the better.

Steinbeck’s early dedication to writing social protest may have come from his family’s belief system. His county-treasurer father and schoolteacher mother narrated the lore of rural California to him. But if his mother’s anecdotes and
love of literature didn't inspire him enough, his own privileged circumstances may have. Steinbeck lived a life of middle-class comfort amidst the hard and often tragic lives of farmers, migrants, and ranchers in his native Salinas Valley.

Steinbeck was an eyewitness to poverty. He had real-life subjects for his attention and compassion. Steinbeck's heart went out to these humble people. But he didn't pity them; he empathized. Steinbeck actually knew hard work. Boyhood jobs—fruit picker, ranch hand, bricklayer, and delivery boy—gave him a genuine appreciation for labour. As an adult, Steinbeck traveled extensively through the West from Oklahoma to California, experiencing first-hand the sad and frightening conditions of migrant workers. He lived in their camps, listened to their authentic stories and collected material for his writing.

Steinbeck's social conscience, his awareness of the desperate plight of others did not emerge in isolation. The author lived through the Great Depression of the 1930s. His best books were inspired by the social struggles of migrant farm workers during the Great Depression. The economic collapse grew severest in the center of the country after a prolonged drought turned Oklahoma into a ‘Dust Bowl’. Images of starving farmers and migrant workers desperately searching for work were emblazoned in to the hearts of Americans. The poverty and desperation inspired an era of soul-searching that Steinbeck was happy to encourage. Against the setting of California, that symbol of infinite promise and dreams. Steinbeck contrasted the botched efforts of men and women to live in peace and dignity.
During the 30's, Steinbeck wrote what most consider his two enduring works: *Of Mice and Men* and *The Grapes of Wrath*. These novels are more than works of imagination; they are heartfelt revelations of the loneliness and desperation that many Americans felt. Steinbeck insisted that this pervasive hopelessness was a 'crime here that goes beyond denunciation.' He meant for his fiction to sound the alarm and provoke action.

The theme of social protest has however been predominant in Steinbeck's fiction starting from an indirect reference to it in his early works like *Tortilla Flat* to his later development of it as a major theme in *The Grapes of Wrath*. In fact his, "narrative enacts its own kind of oppression, and, by arousing in its readers a desire to fight this sense of inevitability, it works strategically to arouse us toward action to change the status quo." (Railton 32)

Steinbeck studied firsthand the struggles of the migrant workers; he celebrates their labour in ritualistic terms and illustrated the downtrodden overcoming their many adversities through courage and dignity, and through their compassion for fellow sufferers. The social protest represented in Steinbeck's fiction is based mainly on the struggle for survival and existence. The changing economic scenario of America that puts more emphasis on material gains than spirituality or morality fills the heart of the author with anger and frustration. The losing values of humanity and compassion find an angry voice in his many novels through his stories and his characters in their efforts to survive in the face of exploitation, poverty and misery. Steinbeck's interest in the plight of farmers in the face of rapidly encroaching agribusiness and his
sympathy for union organizers became important themes in the novel, along with the struggles of the average person against big business.

A significant theme of Steinbeck, social protest has developed through his career as a novelist. In his early rendition of the theme it comes across in a subtle manner in Tortilla Flat. In the novel Steinbeck showed his affinity for colourful outcasts, such as the Paisanos of the Monterey area. The novel is a tale of the life of the Paisanos which contrasts the simple life of the ethnic community to that of the commercialized materialistic American society. The narrative is a protest against the pressures of the aggressive commercialized economy that shatters and destroys such simple people of goodness and laughter. Describing the Paisanos, Steinbeck says, “The paisanos are clean of commercialism, free of the complicated systems of American business, and, having nothing that can be stolen, exploited or mortgaged, that system has not attacked them very vigorously.” (TF 374)

The life at Tortilla Flat was static and unchanging, and so was the life of the Paisanos especially in the house of Danny. They live contrary to the rule of life which is evolution. The changing world of possessions and gains do not let the friends survive and breaks their circle of friendship; their identity as Paisanos is at threat and, “In the end, this story tells how the talisman was lost and how the group disintegrated.” (TF 373)

Steinbeck’s first major protest novel was In Dubious Battle, a strike novel that represented the inhuman exploitation of labour and the resultant simmering discontent. The apple pickers come together in the novel for a strike but here the
group that they represent has neither will of its own nor a sense of direction where they are headed. In fact like Dostoevsky, Steinbeck presents the danger of radicalism and the associated violence. Though his sympathy is always with the downtrodden and the exploited but in the novel he does not take sides. He depicts the brutalities of the parties, the owners as well as the striking workers especially the leaders of the Party organizing the strike.

Most of Steinbeck's novels source their stories from the personal experience of the author. In this case also he worked upon his own experience of the strike of 1936 that led to violence and ultimately destroyed the union.

The basic purpose of Steinbeck's social protest in almost all his has been based upon the theme of survival. In the novel it is the survival of all the workers that is at stake; roughly nine hundred apple pickers. The men are exploited by the big landowners and finance companies; they cut their wages and force them to live in poverty. The anger at injustice finds a voice in the words of an old apple picker Dan when he says:

"It's anger," the old man cried. "That's what it is. You know when you're about to get fightin', crazy mad, you get a hot, sick, weak feelin' in your guts? Well, that's what it is. Only it ain't just in one man. It's like the whole bunch, millions and millions was one man, and he's been beat and starved, and he's getting' that sick feelin' in his guts. (HDB 581-2)
It is this sick feeling that organizes the men into a group and unleashes its terror with mindless violence. This anger is not only the anger of the workers but also of the author at the abuse of men and their labour.

The strike is a consequence of the exploitation of the fruit pickers who were oppressed by the owners and the vigilantes appointed by them. Headed by Mac and the principles of communism, the strike is undertaken with the purpose of the workers’ welfare and Mac truly as the leader is totally devoted to the cause. “It’s a revolution against hunger and cold. The three guys that own this valley are going to raise hell to keep the land, and to keep dumping the apples to raise the price.” (IDB 747). Yet he is a person who feels that everything and everyone is expendable for the cause. Employing any means available he commands full confidence and support of the workers. He doesn’t even hesitate to manipulate situations for the cause of the Party which in fact becomes an embodiment of his ‘self’. The group is subsumed to the individual who holds complete control and directs it as per his views. When he finds the group losing momentum, he uses whatever at hand, either food or blood to infuse them further with intensity and purpose. When Joy is killed Mac says, “We’ve got to use him to step our guys up, to keep ‘em together. This’ll stick ‘em together, this’ll make ‘em fight.” (IDB 655). Even when Jim his friend and protégé is killed at the end of the novel he does not hesitate to use him for furthering the cause. He uses his dead body and addresses the men to evoke emotion in them, to instigate their anger and lead them on. “This guy didn’t want nothing for himself—” he began. . . . “Comrades! He didn’t want nothing for himself—” (IDB 793).
The actual purpose and cause for which the group comes together is lost in the web of violence perpetuated by both the owners and the Party. When some pickers work despite the strike and don't come over to their side, they are beaten mercilessly by the strikers. The group has a life of its own and if misdirected it can unleash hell on earth as is seen by the fury of violence that is let loose by Jim. In the words of Doc violent means can only lead to violence.

Doc Burton is the most sensible of the characters and the author's spokesperson when he says:

"We fight to make the world safe for democracy"; or... "we will wipe out social injustice with communism." But the group doesn't care about the... Democracy, or Communism. Maybe the group simply wants to move, to fight, and uses these words simply to reassure the brains of individual men. (IDB 641-2)

Steinbeck knows that it is a lack of understanding that others are also men like us that leads to violence and hatred. Hatred is the cause of confrontation and violence; hatred amongst the workers for the owners and amongst the owners for them is depicted in the novel that bursts into violence. It is hatred, which is often common between the haves and have-nots. At its peak, hatred bursts out in the form of strike or violence, ending in blood-shed. In this novel the words of hatred used by Mac for the vigilantes hired by owners:

They're the same ones that burned the houses of old German people during the war. They're the same ones that lynch Negroes. They like to be cruel. They like to hurt people, and they always
give it a nice man, patriotism or protecting the constitution. But they’re just the old nigger torturers working. The owners use ‘em, tell ‘em we have to protect the people against reds. Y’see that let’s ‘em burn houses and torture and beat people with no danger. And that’s all they want to do, anyway. They’ve got no guts; they’ll only shoot from cover, or gang a man when they’re ten to one. I guess they’re about the worst scum in the world.” (IDB 657)

Most of the time the protest for existence is perverted and replaced by a sense of hatred instead. And skillfully the leaders use elaborate words to address protest cum hatred as revolution.

Instead of a fight for survival, equality and dignity, the fight becomes one of hatred and blood-shed. Beginning with the intention of social protest it ends with a blood bath that negates its initial purpose of survival.

*Of Mice and Men* is also a novel of social protest that brings into focus not only the economic disparities and exploitation, but also the social, racial and gender discrepancies to the fore.

However the theme of protest integrated into the narrative of the novel is more concentrated on the individuals than the group though the group’s palpable presence is felt at the background of the story.

At the individual level the novel represents the struggle of the misfit Lennie in a society that is critical of persons like him; it is the struggle of survival for him and George in their dream of a future wherein they will have a land and a house of their own; it’s a portrayal of the exploitation of these men
and men like Crooks who are discriminated against because of the colour of their skin.

The Negro, Crooks in Of Mice and Men is a victim of racial segregation. He lies in a small bunkhouse where no one visits him, and for miles around there is no other Negro to give him company. He is unhappy with his segregation though he poses himself as a proud, aloof man. He tries to keep his distance and demands that other people should keep theirs. But his aloofness is definitely not his choice, as it is forced on him. This rejection gradually made him so aggressive that he does not allow anyone to enter his room, although he is craving for company all the while. Desperate for companionship he shares his feelings with a half wit Lennie. Steinbeck has given a perfect picture of Crooks' complete withdrawal into himself in this novel.

Crooks' position is clear from the words of Curley's wife when she threatens him, “Well you keep your place then, Nigger. I could get you strung up on a tree so easy it ain’t even funny.” (OMM 857). Curley's wife herself is a victim of discrimination because of her gender. She lives her life in the memories of lost dreams and is not very happy with Curley whom she doesn't like and who “ain’t a nice fella.” (OMM 863) Her blatant show of sexuality is in fact an expression of her desperate need for attention and companionship.

The closest that the individuals come to form a group is evident in the partnership of Lennie and George: both are indispensable to each other, complimenting the other for what he lacks in. Their dream of a land of their own, house and rabbits is an escape from the harsh and deplorable reality they
are forced to live in because of their marginalized position in society. Their
dream is shared by everyone at the ranch and brings them together, giving them
the confidence and strength to fight back. When Curley’s wife abuses them with
her disregard Candy explodes in anger:

You don’t know that we got our own ranch to go to, an’ our
ownhouse. We ain’t got to stay here. We gotta house and chickens
an’ fruit trees an’ a place a hundred time prettier than this. An’ we
got fren’s, that’s what we got. Maybe there was a time when we
was scared of getting’ canned, but we ain’t no more. We got our
own lan’, and it’s ours, an’ we c’n go to it.” (OMM 855)

George’s last act of shooting Lennie is an attempt to save his friend from
the torture and violence of the group, and it also demonstrates the destruction of
the dream that he and Lennie had shared. The group or the society does not
allow them even to live in the warmth of their dream and breaks their illusion of
an escape from its hold.

The dreams that Steinbeck expresses through his characters is a symbol of
the human yearning towards what we wish and hope for; wisdom, justice,
compassion and nobility in our self as well as in the world around us. Lennie and
George symbolize this yearning and so does the striking workers, the migrants
like the Joads, individuals like Caleb and millions like them: in fact all
humanity.

Love for his country and the people makes Steinbeck angry at their
drawbacks. The wrath of Steinbeck of the Thirties arose out of a
love for the migrant workers. The unhappy lot of the victims of the Depression, the social outcasts and those by nature handicapped to live a normal life, moved him to write compassionately about their suffering. (Satyanarayana 140)

The Grapes of Wrath, Steinbeck's most popular novel till date, is also his major novel of social protest. It bears testimony to the plight of the migrants from Oklahoma who are forced out of their lands and their houses, dispossessed and without livelihoods to struggle for survival. The novel is in one sense a documentary account of American socio-economic events of the 1930s. This novel, a strong voice of social protest, won the Pulitzer Prize in 1940. The novel is a protest novel that tells the story of the migration of the Joads, an Oklahoma Dust Bowl family, to California. During their almost biblical journey, they learn the necessity for collective action among the poor and downtrodden to prevent them from being destroyed individually. A portrait of the bitter conflict between the powerful and the powerless, of one man's fierce reaction to injustice, and of a woman's quiet, stoical strength, The Grapes of Wrath is a landmark of American literature, one that captures the horrors of the Great Depression as it probes into the very nature of equality and justice in America.

Displaced from the land which was a part of their life and identity for years they are forced on streets because their lands had become unproductive and the mortgages they had taken from the banks were not paid back. Their lands are seized and their houses bulldozed to evict them off the land. Forced to leave, there arises a futile voice of protest:
Sure cried the tenant men, but it’s our land. We measured it and broke it up. We were born on it, and we got killed on it, died on it. Even if it’s no good, it’s still ours. That’s what makes it ours—being born on it, working it, dying on it. That’s what makes ownership, not a paper with numbers on it. (GOW 32)

Economic progress leads to victimization of these landless workers leading to mass migration West in search of work and a livelihood. Lured by the bills that advertised an abundance of jobs in California the people travel west to work as farm labourers.

Steinbeck himself witnessed the misery of these workers and their exploitation by the rich farm owners of California valley. The abundant produce of fruits is dumped and let to rot but the poor, starved workers are threatened with punishment if they tried to collect them.

The people came for miles to take the fruit, but this could not be. How would they buy oranges at twenty cents a dozen if they could drive out and pick them up? And men with hoses squirt kerosene on the oranges, and they are angry at the crime, angry at the people who have come to take the fruit. A million people hungry, needing the fruit - and kerosene sprayed over the golden mountains. (GOW 319)

There is no shortage of work in California: apples and cotton need to be picked but the supply of workers is more than the demand. Thousands of hungry, landless people struggle to find work. The situation is fully manipulated and
exploited by the farm owners who go on decreasing the rate of wages to a meager sum for they know for every one hand that refuses to work at such less rate, a thousand more will come forced by hungry stomachs and wailing kids.

Hunger and deaths become a part of the lives of these migrants gradually transforming their misery into wrath.

... and in the eyes of the people there is the failure; and in the eyes of the hungry there is growing wrath. In the souls of the people the grapes of wrath are filling and growing heavy, growing heavy for the vintage. (GOW 320)

As an important development of the situation, the people come together united by their pain and hunger. The group-man starts to take shape. Earlier it was the family that they were only concerned about but gradually the family grows bigger to include all the migrants in a common goal of survival. The novel beginning with the Joad family, progresses to encompass the whole ailing humanity of the landless peasants in its confines representing the group. The danger posed to their survival by the existing conditions generates the group and leads it forward, first under the leadership of Casy and later in the adherence to his teachings by Tom. Steinbeck makes his observance of the above aspect as crucial to survival. He says:

Where there is little danger, there seems to be little stimulation.

Perhaps the pattern of struggle is so deeply imprinted in the genes of all life conceived in this benevolently hostile planet that the removal of obstacles automatically atrophies a survival drive. With
warm water and abundant food, the animals may retire into a
sterile sluggish happiness. This has certainly seemed true in man,
Force and cleverness and versatility have surely been the children
of obstacles. (Steinbeck Portable Steinbeck xvi-xvii)

This idea is reflected in the novel where the people are struggling
persistently to make ends meet, to survive. Steinbeck here represents the struggle
of man against the odds which highlights his complete faith in the spirit of man
that can overcome all obstacles and difficulties and yet retain its compassion and
humanity. The novel is also a sharp indictment of the oppressors who exploit and
abuse the poor and weaker men for their own profit and selfish ends.

Steinbeck’s most ambitious novel East of Eden also has a strong theme of
protest working within its narrative. Unlike the other earlier novels the protest
that the author voices in this novel is more of a philosophical kind and is
directed against abstract elements of good and evil existent in our lives. It
depicts the struggle that every man has to undergo in life between these two
polarities within him for the choice, irrespective of circumstances resting with
him or her alone. His most substantial work, Steinbeck in the novel stops
looking towards social injustice as the source of evil, and instead explores the
roots of evil in human psychology.

Describing the human condition Steinbeck says:

Humans are caught- in their lives, in their thoughts, in their
hungers and ambitions, in their avarice and cruelty, and in their
kindness and generosity too- in a net of good and evil. . . . A man.
after he has brushed off dust and chips of his life, will have left
only the hard, clean questions: Was it good or was it evil? Have I
done well- or ill? (EOE 359)

Man is caught up in the conflict of good and evil and Steinbeck portrays
this struggle in the novel. His social protest in the novel is more of a moral,
psychological, and emotional protest that deals with the moral question of good
and evil and the effects of emotional depravity on the psyche leading to evil. It
aims to set free the individual will and empower man with the power to choose.
It is within man to make the decision wherein his life lies, in goodness or in evil.

It is said, 'We are loved not because we are good but we are good because
we are loved.' Steinbeck reaffirms this in the novel when Lee says:

The greatest terror a child can have is that he is not loved, and
rejection is the hell he fears. I think everyone in the world to a
large or small extent has felt rejection. And with rejection comes
anger, and with anger some kind of crime in revenge for the
rejection, and with the crime guilt-and there is the story of
mankind. I think that if rejection could be amputated, the human
would not be what he is. Maybe there would be fewer crazy
people. (EOE 235)

Evil is more often than not perpetrated by rejection, jealousy and hatred.
The rejection of Charles by his father Cyrus and by Adam of Caleb results in
their alienation and as a result towards evil. However in the case of Caleb (Cal),
Lee enables him to have a choice for a new beginning. It is he who brings about
a reconciliation between father and son, and Caleb is blessed with the word ‘timshell’, ‘thou mayest’ by his father.

Each generation has to face the conflict of good and evil and decide their own destinies. They are not victimized by hereditary traits but have the power to choose. The pressure of external factors is there but it’s the strength of one’s character and his determination that will help the individual and through him the whole humanity to make a choice of heaven over hell.

The novel is a protest against the human condition that grips it in a labyrinth of good and evil, but enables it to make a choice and break free. Man is the most important thing and it is for him to decide the course that his life is to take. The novel reflects the novelist’s pragmatist and humanistic approach that empowers man with a purpose and a choice.

Steinbeck’s prime concern in his novels was always man. A compassionate human being and writer he was angry and unhappy at man’s inhumanity to man, which he expressed vociferously through his novels in the form of a protest. The theme of protest forms a major theme in Steinbeck’s fiction. Social protest is a theme that runs through all his novels though the handling of the theme is different and varied.

If the theme of social protest is for the simplicity and innocence of an ethnic community and their identity in Tortilla Flat, it is an issue of exploitation and misuse in In Dubious Battle. In Of Mice and Men the theme again becomes one of exploitation and survival which finds a more vociferous depiction in The Grapes of Wrath wherein the exploitation and survival of family transforms into
that of whole humanity. Social protest is a theme that metamorphoses into a moral and emotional protest in *East of Eden* reworking the ancient myth into a story of rejection and love, evil and good.

Whatever the way in which Steinbeck has dealt with one of his major themes, one distinctive feature that runs through all of them is the motto of survival. It’s what in the words of Ma Joad seems to confirm that everything seems to be aimed at survival; at going on against the odds and enduring to survive, to live. The exploitation, the oppression, poverty, hunger, death, violence, hatred, rejection, all are the evil; the obstacles that try to snuff out the life force but fails to do so. Its failure is a result of the human spirit’s strength in fighting back and overcoming all obstacles to survive, to choose goodness, humanity, love and compassion; to choose to live.

A humanist will always protest and fight back against injustice. Steinbeck fought back with his fiction and so did Mulk Raj Anand with his. All his novels are novels of protest against the society, the economy that thrives on discrimination, exploitation and oppression.

*Untouchable* is a novel that strikes out at the society that exploits and oppresses an individual because of his birth. Though indispensable to society because of the work they do the untouchables are subjected to inhuman treatment and apathy on the part of society.

In his novel *Coolie*, Anand criticizes the social and economic hierarchy in society that enables the powerful to dominate and subjugate the weak, be it a babu in office mistreating a poor orphan boy or the factory owners exploiting the
poor workers. In his novel *Two Leaves and a Bud*, the exploitation and misery of the tea plantation workers are portrayed who are treated with contempt and utter disregard.

Anand's concern for the socially and economically oppressed people reflects his humanitarian approach. In his fiction John Steinbeck also represents a parallel concern that levels both the authors on similar grounds. It is their anger and wrath at the deplorable circumstances that man is forced to live and endure, which finds a frequent expression through their fictive narratives. Culturally distant both the novelists are alike in their concerns, thoughts and approach. Pen is considered to be mightier than the sword; a sword can strike a few but the power of the pen can affect millions. As literary artists, John Steinbeck and writers sharing his concern like Mulk Raj Anand have utilized the immense power and potentiality of the pen to give a voice to the voiceless, to protest against injustice and exploitation by creating awareness and thereby making an effort to rid society of its evils and transform it for the better.

John Steinbeck celebrated friendship, both in his life and in his fiction. In every bit of honest writing in the world, he noted in a 1938 journal entry, there is a base theme, a theme that endeared men to understand men. He was of the view that if men understood each other then they will be kind to each other. Knowing a man well never lead to hate and nearly always lead to love. There is writing promoting social change, writing punishing injustice, writing in celebration of heroism, but always the base theme is the same that of an effort to understand each other.
In his novels Steinbeck was motivated to arouse sympathy for the poor people. He saw that they were often suffering cruelly in their environment and that the causes for their misery were frequently beyond their control. Steinbeck saw and wrote the lives of innocent victims. His writing implies that these unfortunates could just as easily have been well off in the materialistic American society had external circumstances been just a little different. Steinbeck expected readers to hate this suggestion because it would rob them of their own security. He was gratified when many agreed.

When Steinbeck accepted the Nobel Prize in 1962, he declared optimistically that literature was the greatest hazard and also the only hope. He believed that the power of writing and communication was in uniting people and helping them to overcome their most enduring troubles. Steinbeck sought to celebrate man's proven capacity for greatness of heart and spirit. Through the courage, glory, and dignity of all his suffering characters, Steinbeck delivers a message to America, a message that celebrated the power of the survival instinct natural to all living beings. As a writer his philosophy is best expressed in the words of the preacher, Casy in The Grapes of Wrath, who asserts the importance of the job that they had to do, the job of transforming life and society.

Steinbeck's wrath, the angry decade of his literary career mellowed in his later fiction but his crusade against social injustice continued till the very end. Though he represented the dark side of life: the miseries and the injustices inflicted by man upon man, the deplorable condition of life, of humanity, yet underneath all the pessimistic portrayal of life was a bubbling and buoyant
optimism. His faith in the human spirit and its potentiality for goodness was
ever diminished by what he saw and observed, on the contrary it made him all
the more determined to 'do the job'; the job of a writer. In his own words:

The writers of today, even I, have a tendency to celebrate the
destruction of spirit and God knows it is destroyed often enough. It
is the duty of the writer to lift up, to extend, to encourage. If the
written word has contributed anything at all to our developing
species and our half developed culture, it is this- great writing has
been a staff to lean on, a mother to consult, a wisdom . . . a strength
in weakness and a courage to support weak cowardice. (Steinbeck
The Journal of a Novel 115-16)

Steinbeck is truly one of the leading and outstanding writers of social
protest in American Literature. Steinbeck’s social protest is truly unique like the
writer he was. His writings were his means of voicing his protest against the
negative aspects of society with an aim to correct those drawbacks. His anger as
expressed through his novels never obscured him from realizing the inherent
goodness lying dormant in humanity that needed only to be nudged awake to
conquer over the evil. He was a writer who used his skill excellently as a means
to raise the consciousness of his people and help them come out of their
complacency in order to progress towards a positive and better future. The art of
the artist was solely directed and steered by his love, compassion and humanistic
concern that gave to American literature a truly golden voice.

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WORKS CITED


