Human life is a dialectics of opposite poles. This duality is the essence of life. Naturally all the masterminds in all ages are basically concerned with the polar conflict between good and evil which is one of the perennial themes of literature. The significance and the nature of this conflict may differ but the awareness of its simultaneous existence is universal. John Steinbeck also recognizes this duality of human experience and the complexities of human life as writer. He transforms this tension into art.

Of course, Steinbeck is not the first writer to expose the presence of doubleness of good and evil in existence. His predecessors like Hawthorne, Melville, and Henry James as well as his contemporary writers like Hemingway, and Faulkner have discussed this subject at their best. Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter*, Melville's *Moby Dick*, James' *The Golden Bowl*, Hemingway's *The Old Man and the Sea*, and Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury* are the popular specimens of unfolding the battle between good and evil. Steinbeck, too, in his own remark--"We have only one story. All novels, all poetry are based upon never-ending contest in ourselves of good and evil."--discloses the conflict between good and evil which becomes the central concern of his fictional corpus. With a view to illustrating Steinbeck's treatment of the subject, the present thesis is divided into three
different parts: Introduction, Approaches to the Problem of Evil, and Conclusion.

The introductory part of this thesis is a general survey of the concept of good and evil exposed by the masterminds in all ages. This briefly traces the concept of evil in different religions of the world and provides various definitions of evil and ultimately establishes the concept of evil as a destructive force that brings disorder in human life, and sometimes even destroys it. But eventually it results in helping the good to emerge in human situations.

Keeping in view the above perspective, the present thesis critically studies the problem of evil at four different levels: Economic, Political, Social, and Metaphysical which are perceptible in the novels of Steinbeck. Economic evil unfolds the vicious effect of imbalanced economy--American capitalism--on the socio-economic complex of the Great Depression period Steinbeck portrayed in his novels like *Of Mice and Men* and *The Grapes of Wrath*. Political evil moves around the terroristic forces manifested in Communism and Nazism which invariably fracture the democratic values of life and construct a way to the loss of humanity, a phenomenon which Steinbeck himself witnessed during the Second World War and projected it in his novels of war and treachery such as *In Dubious Battle* and *The Moom is Down*. Social evil deals
with social bondages, predatory drive, and traditionalistic egoism--pride--in modern civilization that originates disaster in human life Steinbeck perceived in the fifties and manifested it in his novels like *The Wayward Bus*, *The Pearl*, and *Burning Bright*. Metaphysical evil reflects an ongoing struggle between the dichotomy of good and evil to show that man can never achieve an ideal perfection due to his limitations and his interaction with different divergent forces. Steinbeck brilliantly discusses this in his *magnum opus*, *East of Eden*, and valedictory novel *The Winter of Our Discontent*.

Explaining the positive aspect of Steinbeck's vision of evil, the concluding part justifies Steinbeck's optimistic attitude which can be followed by going beyond evil to fathom the problem of evil in human life. It also reveals how Steinbeck envisions a creative hope for humanity beyond all pervading evil that has become a constant threat to the world of human values in modern time, and upholds a new pragmatic humanitarianistic concept of comprehensive cast of mind--universal outlook--to celebrate the ceremony of human species in the face of innumerable dangers in modern age. And ultimately this section recapitulates the treatment of evil of Steinbeck's predecessors and contemporary novelists to emphasize the significance of his art in the canon of modern American fiction.