Chapter-8

CONCLUSION
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Rarely a soul burdens itself with the question of personal, national or universal reformation. The American author, John Updike is one of those extraordinary names that has borne the risk of putting his literary career at stake more than once, not for demoralising the human reason but for pulling it from the pit of darkness and raising it above the level of petty dreams, deeds and desires.

In the present work, it has been discussed as to how Updike’s select novels bring forth the sketch of an American portrayal that basically rests on the blind belief in the possession of the land, false notion of belongingness, corrupt political and educational system, deplorable process of construction and destruction in all spheres of consumerism, adultery, deteriorating values and wavering faith or more precisely, atheism.

The novels of Updike tend to toil tirelessly for the reformation of American mainland. For this he employs numerous techniques; very often he wears fatherly attire giving nostalgic sermons on the foregone time and despising the present changes and warning his countrymen about the near future. Sometimes he fits himself into the character of a punishing mother and thrashes upon the readers a volley of questions as to what they have done for America; at other times he is an innocent animal or ‘Nature’ itself, struggling to meet its basic fulfilments and begging the mankind to spare its existence.

If put together, his select novels are like dots, when joined with a pencil, make a closed circle, which indicates the closed arms of American possessive Self that has stopped to welcome the world towards itself or share its own prosperity with other nations, thereby failing to extend towards them a message of love, friendship and respect. Instead, America has developed a habit of spying on other nations to check their progress
and interfere in their private network by sending its troops there under the notion that ‘war is glory’.

While inside the mainland, administration hardly cares about the young enthusiastic souls who travel overseas to fight with full valour, dreaming of promising prospects for themselves if they return alive to America. At the end of each phase of war, the dead soldiers’ names are inscribed on the charts as a tribute while the survivors are rendered jobless.

On the other hand, the corrupt educational system has useless teachers as its pillars. These teachers, who are merely drunkards, have wantons eyes, distracted minds and unstable sexual lives which leave them with less or no time for their disciples. As a result, the administrative heads of such institutions give away hoards of money as salaries to the workers without getting anything in return except terrorists, whores and faithless scholars as products. Same is the case in the divinity schools where the innocents and fervent aspirants grow bushy tails and white hair till they grow faithless, under the guidance of their already proud teachers who claim to possess full knowledge about Divinity and therefore themselves have lost their faith in God.

Moreover, a society which worships the inventions in every field of technology along with ruthless rejections of the already existing ones is the least reliable one. New means of transport and communication, factories, furniture and even gadgets are welcomed warmly and pockets are emptied for them whereas the older things are mercilessly discarded, forgotten and left to rot. Thus, the sense of insecurity has crept everywhere. Even the human mind is full of such insecure feelings that he will also be thrown away as soon as his utility ends. All time round, people are aware of their irresponsible attitude and fear the moment when they shall be treated the same way by the
next coming generations but these concepts have been so internalized by the Americans that none of them can avoid them.

As far as the values are concerned, their situation is no better than the forgotten technology and gadgets. Young generation shows signs of disobedience to their single or both parents and surprisingly these signals are promptly welcomed, as the parents or elders themselves are all prepared to manage their own routine with their own changing sexual partners in a childless house. An empty space and parentless children are a perfect symbol of American existence. Adultery has crept deep into the roots of the society where temporary partners, embarrassingly or shamelessly, go on ‘receiving the smiles of the outside world’. Theses incidences are not just confined to high class, porn production or middle class society but also in such pious families as those of the divinity professors or parsons. Most of the same age-group partners are found struggling for divorce, some years after their marriage. In almost all the cases it is the husband who kicks out his wife and that also under the influence of another woman, most probably younger than his first wife. It is easily expected that the divorcée is more than compensated with her alimony. The tragedy is that the second wife, after attaining marital and financial security, goes on attempting stunts with her sexually playful nature, thus following a series of affairs under the older husband’s nose.

In rare cases, the woman goes on marrying one man after the other, driving them to commit suicide, because her motivating factor is not sex but the resultant accumulated inheritance which becomes ‘like layers of sedimentary rock compacted by the pressure of the time’, besides the cherishable position of being a widow after every husband passes away. Apart from natural sex partners, gay and lesbian trend also finds a fair space in American society.
In terms of the preservation of ‘Nature’, America is regarded as the least responsible. Large scale deforestation, plotting of land for commercial purpose and construction of housing complex, chemical factories, nuclear reactors, callousness towards plantation projects, indifference towards wildlife and reckless poaching in the name of saving ‘house-gardens’ gives the true image of American ecology. After witnessing the biological side-effects of nuclear attacks on Japan during World War-II, Updike grabs the opportunity to come up with the idea of ‘Pseudozoans’, which are even more dangerous than just biological impairments because they devour not only life but everything that they find in their way, ranging from plants to petroleum.

Some years of his life had seen Updike in a spiritual crisis and with divine grace he got the revival of his faith with Roland Bath and Kierkegaard. Significantly, almost all his novels have God in abundance. He begins with a protagonist overwhelmed with a biological soundness, possession of full divine knowledge or with vanity of being the superior organism in the chain of animate things of Divine Kingdom. Through these three levels, Updike categorises American Self and also states, very frankly, the causes that have consumed human reason. On these grounds, we can discuss the last and the most important image or idea of America that has been brought through the printed pages in Updike’s novels. People soaring high in distinguished amplitudes of knowledge regarding theology, be it Professor Roger Lambert or Rev. Clarence Wilmot or Sheikh Rashid, ultimately end up as vain fanatics disdaining divine power. Updike gives such characters a hateful image where the once angelic fountain has turned into a contaminated devilish heap with qualities such as intolerance, contempt, depression, doubt, hatred, restlessness and inferiority complex. An American theology department or an American clergyman belonging to such dark mindset can produce nothing except lost scholars, who eventually turn as atheists as their teachers. Another class of people that remains at distance from
God are the young generation with sound health because this health is used ironically. In fact, it is handed down to adultery instead of serving God by extending their love towards orphans and the needy. It is also clear from some novels like the Roger’s version of his imaginations of Dale’s gradual fall that faith seeps out as soon as one commits adultery. Even the novel *Villages* has Owen who is an example of adulterous American nature. The third category belongs to people who almost forget the fact that death would ever take them back to God where even the unicellular amoeba is equally placed with the bearers of reason and intelligence.

Last but not the least, Updike’s novels are intertwined with each other with elements like adultery, guilt and the forgone faith that is revived after generations through a deed of ultimate nobility or self realization. If one of the novels deals with the salvation of the soul, the other one works upon the reformation of the same, thereby giving the readers a panacea for the perpetual decay in culture.

This study is providential to have Updike as its pivotal force; an author, who selflessly worked for rehabilitation of his nation. He was always sure that evidence helps us to improve ourselves and purify our souls. His protagonists are distinguished individuals representing the short-comings of human nature. For each of these imperfections, Updike starts his tale with the prevailing depressed or cursed state of the concerned character. Then, he goes on to describe, in a flashback, the phases of the protagonist’s past and at the same time contrasts the once gone blessed and confident self with present degenerated image. Be they Owen Mackenzie, Roger Lambert, Ben Turnbull or Clarence Wilmot, Updike takes them for oscillating swings between past and present and in this way gives their complete biography thereby warning the nation of its consequent future. This work is a benevolent attempt to reorganise the civilization that once carved itself out of the wilderness and storms and its sense of extreme belongingness.
caused it to get shrivelled up in itself. The resultant insulated individuals, therefore, have to be counselled to loosen and open up themselves to the world which is a temporary home for human beings and all kind of wildlife, and not a division of continents, oceans or nations.