

Emerging of new womanhood in the grapes of wrath of steinbeck

[Sociology](#), [Identity](#)



The artist does not create in vacuum, he depicts the values of the society which is part of and the framework of his writing, and by his imaginative power his works present a picture of his own particular society. Hebeside being a painter, also plays a crucial role in explaining and interpreting its menances and then recreating them by his own experiences and their works seems to be a kind of social commentary. The artist creates artistic works based on the ideas and problem of the time and thus provides an elaborate details of social situation as Steinbeck depicts the socio-economic milieu which determines the characters, he can be safely placed in the tradition of realistic writers. He has blended scientific ideas, social realities, economic thoughts, biological views with moralistic approach. He has every determinately advocated a humanitarian religion. Sometimes, dominated by his desire to convey social realities, he becomes oversympathetic with characters who are victims of society to the extent that he is labelled with the charge of sentimentality and sometimes he becomes too objective to be charged of being too detached. His works are characterized by a predominance of social problems. In this Noble Prize Acceptance speech/he clearly defines the role of a writer: ' The ancient commission of the writer has not changed. He is charged with exposing our many grievous faults and failures, with dredging up to the light our dark and dangerous dreams for the purpose of improvement furthermore, the writer is delegated to declare and to celebrate man's proven capacity for greatness of heart and spirit for gallantry in defeat for courage, compassion and love. In the endless war against weakness and despair, these are the bright rally flags of hope and of emulation'.

Steinbeck went through many trials throughout his life which were difficult enough to deal with, among which many of experiences were very harsh and having adverse impact. Steinbeck's life is the finest example of the saying whatever does not kill you, makes you stronger. Different phases of life, be it to be employed as a ranch hand or to be a marine biologist or to be a war transcript writer, not only strengthen his being but also improved his writing. All the works of Steinbeck has in some or the other way a little piece of himself and it appears as if he has used his experience as a tool for his writing as many of his experiences are used in his novels. Sometime they are used so blatantly although used very well, suggest that they are having such an deep imprint on his mind and heart that he could not resist the temptation of sharing them with the people and instead of compiling books on his life he has incorporated his familiarities with the variety of professions and the people as well as the relationship that he formed with these people into the works through events and characters. Steinbeck met the variety of people during his life time owing to his different types of profession which aided him in the unique diversity of his characters. The Grapes of Wrath is a fiction work by Steinbeck which is based on the events experienced by him. The whole plot and structure of the novel revolves round the family of Joad which was directly affected by the Dust Bowl Tragedy. It follows the life and the journey of Joad family to California in an attempt to leave their shattered life behind and start a new life staying together. Steinbeck believes that the path of independence and going alone may not always be the best solution and option for their family. Though the novel was looked upon by some critics only as a documentation of class struggle but the critics like Chester

E. Elisinger praises it and point out that ' Steinbeck was concerned with democracy, and looked upon agrarianism as a way of life that would enable us to realize the full potentialities of the creed'. Steinbeck has mirrored in this novel a number of social , political, cultural and economical aspects of an American family of Okhlahoma in the great Depression time of the thirties. Peter Lisca points out.

' The Grapes of Wrath did not have a chance of being accepted and evaluated as a piece of fiction from the beginning it was taken as a substantial fact and its merits debated as a document rather than as a novel a small sampling of the relevant literature may indicate the nature of social political economical controversy which eclipsed The grapes of wrath as a novel.

The grapes of wrath on a surface label can be considered as a documentary book as he first went to Califorma as photographer from life magazine to observe the harsh condition of the migrant camps where he realished that the migration as well as the condition of these people was not to be taken so lightly rather was prefect material for an epic novel. But to confine the meaning of novel only to one particular land or social condition would undermine the significance of the novel since the novel has cosmic dimensions and universal significance and the framework of American society has been given a thematic extension which embraces the whole of mankind. Joad family epitomised the movement of humanity from a static position to an ever growing social, moral and spiritual state of human being. Natural calamities are the result of cumulative human action not only the

wayward manifestation of nature and unless the people make united efforts for the improvement of the society. The Joad family is the strongest example of the unity throughout the novel and especially Ma.

Although women are considered very close to nature and man has controlled nature from primordial time by the weapon of culture making women away from the main stream as well as singled out from others in the society.

Steinbeck has also depicted the concept of the way families were run. At the beginning of twentieth century families were led by the men. They make the decision, they made the money for the family while women worked behind the scene and without taking any credit to their part, they used to do everything to make a better life for themselves and for their families but as the Dust Bowl struck, women's role changed in the society. They started to take the charge of the family affairs since in the tough time of dispossession and migration it became inevitable for them to be financially independent to support the family Steinbeck has based the story on real events witnessed and experienced by him. In the Grapes of Wrath Ma Joad is one of the finest portrait of women character who transcend the commonly known traits of women. As the Joad clan disintegrates due to migration, Ma Joad emerges as a central and cohesive force. Though in the beginning she also has stood in the shadow and accepted the things for the way they were without questioning. The degenerating condition of the women is clearly evident in the lines of the novel: ' And then he stood embraced by his own speech. Ma looked to Tom to speak, because he was a man, but Tom did not speak. She let him have the chance that was his right and then she said. Why, we'd be

proud to have you'. She is the mother of Tom and she has to see his director indirect permission before giving voice to her opinion only because she is a woman. Neither age nor her motherhood can give her the right to speak her mind. Even her husband threatens her with a beating in an attempt to salvage his position in the family, though soon he realises the truth that Ma would be better choice to lead the family and bear up the responsibilities but not ready to accept. Ma gradually rises to power and everything is done by her for the good of the family. When the men of the family came up with the idea to split of the family, she vehemently opposed to the disintegration and tried everything in her power to keep her family together. She ceased to exist the era of women being considered as property; once she stood up for herself and having her moment of threatening she surprised the Pa:

' Ma stepped in front of him. I ain'ta gonna go. What you mean, you ain't gonna go? You got to go. You got to look after the family: Pa was amazed at the revolt, Ma stepped to the touring car and reached it on the floor of the back seat. She brought out a jack handle and balanced it in her hand easily. I ain'ta gonna go; She said. ' I tell you got to go. We made up our mind: And now Ma's mouth set hard. She moved the jack handle gently again. An I'll Shame you'.

In cup of Gold Steinbeck states: All girls and women hoarded something they never spoke of. Another life went on inside of women. Ma, Joad's inside of a woman sublimates into love and she demonstrates the angelic quality of unqualified love for the member of her family which makes her the mother not only to her children but also to the family. She holds her dead mother in

law all might long only when they passes away through the desert. She informs the family grandma's death later on, she did it all to keep her family together and to enable them to survive the journey and discrimination of califorma. She does not get frustrated with the wretched condition in california rather exhibits optimism and firm belief in a better future. Being governed by her unshaken faith she sacrifices all the comforts of government camp and forces her family to move as she knows that the family need work. The last scene of the novel depicts the growth of Ma's consciousness and raises her character to the size of a cosmic vision.

On finding the starving old man Ma: ' looked at Rose a Sharon, huddled in the comforter Ma's eyes passed Rose of Sharan's eyes and then came back to them. And the two women looked deep into the each other. She said, yes. Ma smiled, I knowed you would I knowed. Rose of Sharon loosed one side of the blanket and bared her breast You got to she said and smiled mysteriously.