

ISSN: 2395-4132

# THE EXPRESSION

An International Multi-Disciplinary e-Journal

**Bi-Monthly Refereed & Indexed Open Access e-Journal**



**Vol. 2 Issue 5 Oct. 2016**

**Impact Factor 1.854**

*Editor-in-Chief : Dr. Bijender Singh*

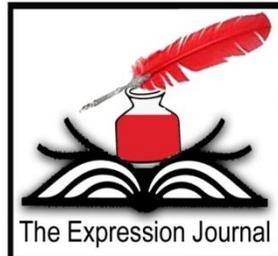
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(A Peer Reviewed and Indexed Journal with Impact Factor 1.854)

[www.expressionjournal.com](http://www.expressionjournal.com)

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## JOHN STEINBECK'S GOSPEL OF HUMANISM WITH A CONCERN FOR INDIVIDUALITY AND SOCIABILITY: AN ANALYSIS

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### Abstract

The fame of John Steinbeck stands unique in the literary scenario. He emerged as a writer focusing his attention on the relation of individual to society and eradication of economic and social injustices meted out to people in the modern society. This paper throws light on his concern towards humanity and society and proves that he is a person with deep inclination to the downtrodden and have-nots. He has touched the themes which are akin to human beings and individuality and sociability can be generally found in his works. *In Dubious Battle* is one of the best novels of John Steinbeck. It is the first strike novel in which he teaches the have-nots the gospel of humanism. *In Dubious Battle* is a 'hot' novel and so the worker delineated in it are not so lenient and amicable as they are in the *Grapes of Wrath*. Here in the novel, London is picture das kicking his individual interests. Steinbeck depicts two groups, the owner's and the workers' yet his sympathy is always with the workers. By favouring the tower stratum of society, he wants to nourish democracy which is an important asset of humanism.

### Key-Words

John Steinbeck, Humanism, Individuality, *In Dubious Battle*, *The Grapes of Wrath*.

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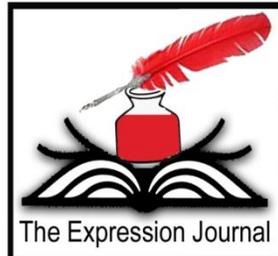
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## **JOHN STEINBECK'S GOSPEL OF HUMANISM WITH A CONCERN FOR INDIVIDUALITY AND SOCIABILITY: AN ANALYSIS**

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John Steinbeck, born in 1902, emerged as a writer focusing his attention on the relation of individual to society and eradication of economic and social injustices meted out to people in the modern society. He was out and out a realist granting social interaction universal current appeal and recognition. He followed the Aristoleban of thinking in which society is supreme and an individual apart from it is not a men at all. "It is not men's consciousness which determines their being but their social being which determines their consciousness. Like Rousseau Hegel and Karl Marx, John Steinbeck was of the opinion that society is since quo non for men. To solve this problem all his books move in two marked trends - "from extreme unsociality or individualism to a height of sociability and then back to individualism, with a new name, this line scientific isolation" (Liscal, 10)

*In Dubious Battle* is one of the best novels of John Steinbeck. It is the first strike novel in which he teaches the have-nots the gospel of humanism. So far as the sources of the strike dealt within the novel are concerned, they are apparent from his biographies. First of all, in Sallinas where he lived, there was often the scene of labour migrations and strikes. The labour problems that dominated in the Sallinas Valley were not far off things for him. He himself worked with migrants and underwent the sordid realities. Throwing light on this aspect, Peter Lisca remarks:

"Steinbeck's familiarity with the labour problems of Salinas Valley was not merely that of an observer, for he had himself worked with migrant labourers on ranches.... Since his boyhood" (Jbidem)

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This intimacy with the workers and the first hand knowledge of their modus operandi enabled him to interpret realistically the workers' habits, attitudes and languages. The second clue that Steinbeck got was from his friend, Tom Collins who made him acquaint with the perspectives he earlier did not know. It was the same Tom to whom Steinbeck dedicated *The Grapes of Wrath* afterwards. *In Dubious Battle*, therefore, is his first strike novel in which he is exclusively concerned with the worker's problems in a tremendous ways. This novel is a story of human society and its predicaments which grow due to widening chasm between the lower and the upper strata. The lower and the upper class of society fall into a conflict because they go astray from the path of human values. In this novel, the strike has a definite commitment to group life. The workers living from hand to month though it is at have no way to face the landowners. Even though some workers for the sake of their selfish ends become ready to work over at the reduced wages, the owners don't stop the exploitation. That is why the workers from their group decide to start strike.

Some workers, the tress passers of human code of conduct may break the strike. But if the strike is a carried on properly and systematically, such workers begin to feel that their interests are safe if they participate in the strike. Mac teaches Jim Nolan,

"A strike that's settled too quickly won't teach men how to organize, how to work together. A tough strike is good. We want the men to find out how strong they are when they work together" (Steinbeck, 22).

So the very first benefit which a well-organized strike yields is the unity and integrity among the workers. If once a strike takes place, the workers get quite united. The second benefit from the strike is that the workers learn as to how to work together. When they work together, their strength increases and they get better rewards for their work. They can neither be exploited nor be tortured by anybody. Throughout the novel, the party organizers are dedicated to collectivize the workers. They inspire them to strike against the owners.

At every step, an attempt is made to cause the workers to work together. Lisa, London's daughter-in-law, has delivery problem. The workers are sitting around the fire and do not try to help her. They are sitting individualistic in action and don't know that the girl's life may be saved if they try to cure her collectively. Mac undertakes to Cure Lisa and asks all the workers bring neat and clean pieces of cloth, and boil them with water. Thus, he makes the stagnant workers dynamic. Again, the ideal hidden behind Mac's commandant is to teach the workers how strong they are when they work together. When Mac orders them, they become quite united and begin to work. "Sleepers were awakened and told, and added themselves to group" (Ibidem, 40). The spirit of working together is a step towards culture of living together with unity and co-operation. The spirit of working together is an instinctive one. We have an inborn craving for working with fellow human beings because we know that group action is always good. The task which a group of men Can do, is quite

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impossible for an individual. So, Steinbeck's implication is to sponsor unity among human beings. When Mac and Jim look at the workers working together, their joy knows no bounds. Mac says, "Men always like to work together. There's hunger in men to work together. Do you know then ten men can lift nearly twelve times as big a load as one man can" (p.43) The workers fall victim to exploitation because they are scattered and disintegrated :

"Most strikers break down because they got no discipline. Suppose we divide the men in squads, let each squad elect a leader and then he's responsible for his squad'. We can work 'em in groups, then" (Ibidem, 96)

Here one can perceive the formation of the squads in a democratic fashion. Just as in democratic system, a group of men elects its leader, similarly London lays stress on the election of a leader for each squad. Thus, Steinbeck emphasizes on the unity of all mankind, for worker's can defend themselves if they work together in a group. In the words of Tedlock and Wicker, "Their job is to give the strikers an experience of working together and a feeling of their united strength and to convince them of the implacable nature of their enemy by a bath of blood their that will turn as many of them as possible into all out revolutionaries" (p. 138)

Whenever, in the novel, the individuals seem to fall in danger they are directed by the party leaders/ workers to be united because without unity, they cannot face any problem. If an individual goes alone, he can do nothing except liking the dust. And if they go along with other men, they cannot be defeated easily because a group has more resistance power than an individual. London commands, Tell'em if they want to go any place, takes some friends along for company" (Steinbeck 86)

Steinbeck does not give importance to individual loss if it is necessary for the welfare of a group. Anderson, who is sympathizer to the workers, gives his private piece of land for encampment because the workers are allowed to stay nowhere. The owners dislike Anderson's activities and put his ban to fire. Mac is very happy and says magnificently, "Somebody has to break if the whole bunch is going to get out of the slaughter - house. We cannot think about the hurts of one man. It's necessary" (Ibidem 146). AL, Anderson's son is also happy though he is seriously injured in the struggle with the men who come to burn the barn. He doesn't reckon his private loss and wants to be on the side of the workers". I want to be fight in 'em all my life. I want to be on the other side (the side of the workers" (p. 144) Joy who was once a member in the worker's committee, sacrifices his life for the sake of strikers. When he wants to climb down the train in which there are scabs and scabs, a scab guns him down. Mac uses his corpse to reinforce integrity among the strikers. "We've got to us him (Joy) to step, our guys up, to keep them together (P 118). When he delivers an inspiring speech, the strikers become wholly united.

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*In Dubious Battle* is a 'hot' novel and so the worker delineated in it are not so lenient and amicable as they are in the *Grapes of Wrath*. Here in the novel, London is picture das kicking his individual interests. The sheriffs allure him with a lot of money and ask him to give up leadership of the workers. But London is so sincere to the whole group of the workers that he rejects the sheriff's proposal. He becomes very angry and threatens to kill them if they intend again to grease his palm. So, at no cost he wants to cheat the group. He turns down every temptation given by sheriffs. The whole philosophy of Steinbeck's life revolves around humanity. Like August Comte, he believe that 'Super Being' is nothing else but humanity. To worship humanity and to be ready to sacrifice everything on its alter is true service to God. Even religion is nothing but 'men'. Jim says, "Religion hell!! This man not God" (P 199) Generally, people conceive that religion is God. Steinbeck's philosophy of religion is very sublime and he believes only in one religion – the religion of humanity. For the welfare of humanity and propagation of love, Steinbeck aims at the eradication of hate. Though the landowners leave no stone unturned in torturing and suppressing the workers; 'Doc Burton advises not to hate anybody. Hate is never pleasant and it begets restlessness and bitterness among human beings.

Man plays a double role in society. First, he is an independent separate individual and secondly he is unit of society. In his second role, his individuality ceases and he becomes a group animal. In the words of Steinbeck,

"But also I believe that man's is double thing – group animal and at the same time an individual. And it occurs to me that he cannot successfully be the second until he has fulfilled the first" (The Saturday Review 22)

The state of being group arrival determines man's social position in which he plays the role of a human being showing humanism in all spheres. Mac doesn't like a group to be protested. So he reacts against Doc and says irritably, "You go too far with collectivization" (P 104). At every cost, Mac is concerned with Collectivization of men. In the story, "The Leader of the people", Steinbeck makes use of image and calls the compact group of men as 'big crawling beast' that has more strength and enthusiasm than an individual. In *In Duious Battle*, he makes use of image, and calls the group of the strikers as a 'big animal'. In the lost chapter of the novel, the owners put barricades on the road so that the strikers cannot reach the working scabs. London delivers a fine speech and breathes into the workers the spirit of unity.

Mac and Jim are communists. They believe in the revolutionary means and think that it is communism that can out root social injustices. Mac says to Doc, "Revolution and Communism will cure social injustice" (P 103). But Doc Burton does not like communism and he "debunks the legend of the communists' altruistic humanitarianism" (Tedlock and Wicker 122). But on the other hand, Doc stresses on the establishment of the communes for the purpose of economic collectivism and inculcation of a sense of humanism.

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To conclude, though in the novel Steinbeck depicts two groups, the owner's and the workers' yet his sympathy is always with the workers. By favouring the tower stratum of society, he wants to nourish democracy which is an important asset of humanism. R. Gibbs in his essay, "John Steinbeck: Moralism" admits that Steinbeck's inclination to the downtrodden and have-nots is to boost up democracy to the core.

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