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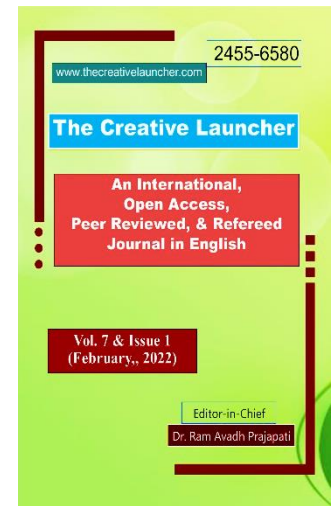
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The Struggle for the Existence in John Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath*

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Abstract

The issue of struggle for existence in John Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939) is examined in this research article. The struggle for existence is a universal topic that appears in Steinbeck's writings as well. Steinbeck's works are full of characters who struggle to make

both ends meet as migrant farmers during the Great Depression. He admired those who worked hard and lived honourably. The characters were given Steinbeck's voice and vibe. Their flaws, struggle for survival, and unwavering courage are not only theirs but also Steinbeck's. Even though the fact that he authored fiction, his characters are realistic in their portrayals of contemporary America. *The Grapes of Wrath* earned Steinbeck both praise and scorn. It's based on the American Great Depression, which ran from 1929 to 1939. Many people were destroyed by the stock market fall, which resulted in widespread unemployment. *The Dust Bowl* of the 1930s followed. Due to a lack of rain and strong gusts, the top soil swept away. Farmers were forced to sell their lands to the banks as a result of this. *The Grapes of Wrath* was inspired by the migrants' suffering and sacrifice. This single work serves as a testament to the human experience in tough times.

Keywords: Existence, Depression, Struggle, Suffering, Identity, Migration, Unemployment

Steinbeck's social concern is evident on nearly every page of *The Grapes of Wrath*. It is his portrayal of the current socio-economic crisis through the disintegration of a single suffering family, the Joads, that elevates the work from a social document of limited relevance to one of the finest expressions of realistic art of our time. The destruction of the old value structure, which originally received its power from now-defunct landowning, an agrarian society that had previously functioned democratically, is microcosmically enacted by the progressive disintegration of family togetherness under economic hardship. Joad, on the other hand, is merely an archetype. Each Joad is distinct from the others and has enough personalization. In a broad sense, their disintegration as a family unit typifies a contemporary social crisis, but their trials play a critical role in keeping them together. Members of the family either die of old age and exhaustion or simply walk away, as the Joad's eldest son Noah does when they camp by a river. Noah's decision to leave cannot be justified solely in terms of economics as a sacrifice. His economics is as important as his symbolic oddity. But as Steinbeck distinguishes between the farmers' good character and the banks' corruption. He describes the bank as a monster that devours man's profits and hard labor. Instead of providing humans a new lease on life, the tractor kills their roots. "...as though the Bank or the Company were a monster, with thought and feeling, which had ensnared them. These last would take no responsibility for the banks or the companies because they were 89 men and slaves, while the banks were machines and masters all at the same time" (p 33). The tractor does not improve the farmer's life; rather, it destroys human activity. "It's not me. There's nothing I can do. I'll lose my job if I don't do it. And look-suppose you kill me? They'll just hang you, but long before you're hung there'll be another guy on the tractor, and he'll bump the house down. You're not killing the right guy" (p 40).

This is something he tells the pleading tenant of. The tractor driver is powerless to stop the bank or the system. He has a responsibility to follow the directions that have been provided to him. The Joads, like everyone else, leave their ancestral homes and relocate to California, the land of color and vibrancy. As they prepare to move from a self-centered to a selfless worldview, the Joads lose their homes and assets.

After being released from prison, Tom Joad returns home. He was sentenced to four years in prison for murdering a guy in self-defense. During the summer, a lady hit a turtle crossing the highway with her car, and a young guy attempted to drive it over with his truck. For a fleeting second, the turtle tries to flip the car over with its legs in the air, but finally falls to the ground and resumes its plodding journey. The turtle depicts the challenges the Joads will endure on their journeys, such as familial abandonment and technological failure. This serves as a premonition of the Joads' adventures as they journey west. The turtle struggling to cross the road, as depicted by Steinbeck, is a metaphor for the farmers' misery as they make their way to the west. This reflects the fact that the cosmos is filled with stumbling blocks that make life difficult and dangerous. As Steinbeck asserts, the Joad family, like the turtle that trudges across the road, will be called upon to battle the malignant forces that seek to topple them, such as drought, industry, unemployment, poverty, human envy, and fear. Tom Joad encounters Jim Casy, a preacher, on his journey back to his family. Tom is depicted as a man of action, but Casy is depicted as a guy who is guided by his thoughts.

The Joad home has been forced off its foundations, as Tom and Casy can witness. Tom and Casy see that the Joad house has been pushed off its foundations. "Joad stopped at the step, a twelve-by-twelve timber. Doorstep's 91 here," He said. "But they're gone-or Ma's dead." (43) Tom and Casy try to find out if Tom has received any messages, but they are disappointed to find none. Although the house had been abandoned, it had not been robbed by its neighbors. Tom removes the turtle from his pocket and places it on the ground. Tom eventually locates his family members at his uncle's house. He runs into his father, who has piled the family's possessions outdoors. "We ain't got so much money, an' a fella says it's damn near two thousand miles to California. Quicker we get started, surer it is we get there. Money's a-dribblin' out all the time. You got any money?" (87). This is a problem not just for the Joads, but also for individuals who want to depart the region by loading their things into the wagon. They pack their belongings onto the wagon and set out on their journey to find a better place to live. "In the little houses the tenant people sifted their belongings and the belongings of their fathers and of their grandfathers. Picked over their possessions for the journey to the west" (90).

With a heavy heart, the farmers set out for California, leaving behind all of their belongings and memories. By revealing how important their homes are to them, Steinbeck expresses the migrants' feelings. They are forced to sell their treasured possessions because they require funds for their journey and cannot carry everything with them. Farmers have little choice but to obey their ruthless brokers, who pay a lower price because they know the farmers are unable to demand a higher price. Because everything must be sold or left before they can relocate to their new location, the farmers are sad to have to sell most of their prized land for pennies on the dollar. "And when the sun rose, the camping place was vacant, only a little litter left by the people. And the camping place was ready for a new world in a new night. But along the Highway the cars of the migrant people crawled out like bugs, and the narrow concrete miles stretched ahead" (p.209).

Joad's family travels from Arizona to California. They make a pit stop along the Colorado River in the afternoon before heading into the desert, which separates them from the

state's agricultural area. Tom and Pa Joad meet a father and son while swimming in the river, who warns them of the farmers' abuse. They claim that living in California is challenging because, in addition to fertile ground, harsh landowners, fewer employees, and other challenges await them. The Joads are terrified, but they have no choice but to relocate to get a better career. When the rest of the family has gone, a police officer enters Ma Joad's camp tent and orders her to leave. Ma Joad's face darkens with rage as he talks aggressively, and she reaches into the utensil box for the iron skillet. Backward motion is taken by the guy. He tells Ma Joad that they aren't in their homeland, but rather in California. He looks down at her calling them as Okies.

Migrants are subjected to a great deal of hardship, not just because of severe weather but also because of the government. They were mistreated by landlords, whose system prevents them from subsisting on the minimum salaries granted to them. Many of the troubles that haunt the Joad family and migrants, according to the book, arise from the greed of harsh landlords and money-hungry officials. Their system merely serves to push families into poverty and to keep them imprisoned in the system. Through the narrative, which depicts the economic realities of the time and the severe actions of the authorities, Steinbeck highlights the socio-economic state of America.

The panoramic design and the epic scale of *The Grapes of Wrath* are matched by a rich variety of styles. Edwin Berry Burgum in *The Sensibility of John Steinbeck*, says that there is hardly any style practiced today that is missing in *The Grapes of Wrath*:

The introductory panels, through which Dos Passos sought to present the background against which the story is written, are there. Passages are there in the introspective technique of Joyce; others reminding of the curt understatement of Hemingway; others which echo the diapason rhetoric of Thomas Wolfe. But at the same time there are stretches of narrative which might have come out of *Gone with the Wind*, or a serial in *Saturday Evening Post*. (p.113)

On their voyage to California, the Joads endure challenges and obstacles. Their family dog is killed by an automobile, and their grandparents pass away. While journeying to California, they enlist the assistance of Mr. and Mrs. Wilson. The Wilsons and the Joads get along swimmingly, and the Wilsons provide support and consolation after Grandpa's passing. When the Wilson automobile breaks down, the Joads offer mechanical aid. It's not easy for the Joads to trek through the desert. On top of their car, the Joads journey under the hot sun.

The truck took the road and moved up the long hill, through the broken, rotten rock. The engine boiled very soon and Tom slowed down and took it easy. Up the long slope, winding and twisting through the dead country, burned white and gray, and no hint of life in it. Once Tom stopped for a few moments to let the engine cool, and then he traveled on. (231)

As a result, Joads' journey to California is not as smooth as they had hoped. They are confronted with problems brought on by both men and nature. Nature is cruel to them at every step. Tom sneaks past the guards on his first day at the farm. They're meant to keep the pickers away from the employees while they investigate the noise in the camp. He tracks down Jim Casy, the leader of a labor organizing organization. Casy, who has served time in prison, tells

Tom about his experience. He educates Tom about group dynamics and the advantages of working together. He also mentions that he and other men are participating in the strike. Casy learns a lot in jail and recognizes that his battle is motivated by a desire. He also recognizes that people will only get all they desire if they demand it as a collective. Some of them may be hurt in the process, but the process will continue. While they are conversing, a group of guys emerge out of nowhere and attack Casy with flashlights and tools, killing him. Tom, enraged by this, seizes the weapon and fires at Casy's assassin. He is even brutally beaten, and he flees the scene. The lopsided economic structure depicted by Steinbeck is destroying the lives of farmers and the agricultural sector. As they visit a peach plantation where they have been promised work, the Joads pass through a gathering of pickers. The Joads have gotten themselves into a bad situation. They are given a dirty cabin that is covered in grease, and they are forced to pay higher food expenses. "The four Joads took their buckets and went into their orchard. They don't waste no time, Tom said. Christ Almighty, Al said. I ruther work in a garage" (388). They lead their lives as pickers plucking the peaches in the orchard for low wages.

As Casy requested, Tom decides to work for the poor laborers. He takes the name of Casy and declares himself a defender, declaring that he is joining the fight for workers' rights and that he will be found whenever they need him. Tom aspires to be like Jim Casy and dedicate his life to a larger cause. He completes the metamorphosis that began several chapters ago and then goes on to lead the strike that will improve their future. Robert E. Spiller has also observed that *The Grapes of Wrath* is "an American epic, a culminating expression of the spiritual and material forces that had discovered and settled a continent" (p.117-25).

Since Tom has abandoned them and there are no other strong members of the family to collect food for the entire family, the Joads are in their most dire predicament ever. Pa is forced to act due to the excessive rains and the arrival of Rose of Sharon's kid. He marshals the other guys in the boxcar camp to prevent it from flooding. The Wainwrights consider fleeing the floodwaters but instead choose to stay and assist others. The trees have fallen and the automobiles have been flooded. Rose of Sharon gives birth to a stillborn baby amid the rain. Uncle John carries the baby in a box and abandons it in the rain with pain. The box, however, falls over, dropping the baby into the water. *The Grapes of Wrath* does not conclude on a sour note, but rather on a positive note, with the promise of a brighter future. It guarantees that progress is made despite setbacks. Rose of Sharon loses her husband and kid but yet does something noble. During the floodwaters, the Joads find a barn to refuge in. They see a hungry father and a worried son inside. To keep his son alive, the father has given up all of his meals, but he is now in danger of dying. Rose of Sharon saves the guy who was about to die by sharing her breast milk with him. The Joads' family, which was larger at the start of their voyage to California, grows smaller as the narrative progresses. Grandpa and grandma pass away as a result of old age and travel. Three of the family's young men forsake the others in the middle of their trek. Tom hides in fear of police after killing a guy in retaliation for Casy's murder. Connie abandons his pregnant wife to pursue his job. Noah abandons his family and vanishes in Oklahoma. Only the ladies survive, and they inspire confidence in the other guys in the household. Perry D. West Brook has very rightly observed that the westward journey of the Joad is symbolic of their rebirth. West Brook agrees with Thoreau that "We go east-ward to

realize history and study the works of art and literature, retracing the steps of the race; we go westward as into the future, with a spirit of enterprise and adventure” (p.215). Steinbeck’s use of mythology to visualize the spiritual condition of humanity has raised this novel to the stature of an epic.

The Joads’ family learns to collaborate with strangers and to be empathetic and adaptable on campus as a result of their move from Oklahoma to California. Despite the rude treatment they have received, they continue to serve others and remain united. In *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939), Steinbeck emphasizes the significance of staying unified to survive in difficult times. *The Grapes of Wrath* brilliantly captures the farmers’ anguish, aspirations for a better life, and unfulfilled promises (1939). He adds a dramatic element to the narrative as well as a personal touch. With his great personality, he raises the whole human race.

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