

Steinbeck's Call for Self-improvement Represented by Ma Joad in “The Grapes of Wrath”

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Abstract

In “The Grapes of Wrath” Steinbeck endows Ma Joad attributes that make her an embodiment of the theme of self-improvement. This study aims at examining these attributes and proving that the author has succeeded in providing a model of a woman that is needed in guiding and directing her family to the concern humanity. To achieve this it is helpful to employ concepts and principles of social and literary thoughts such as Emersonian Oversoul and Pragmatism to examine Ma Joad's views and behavior in different situations. It appears that she possesses traits that are necessary for the individual to adapt him/herself to struggle hard situations for a better future. She is a model of a woman who is needed to solve economic and social problems.

Key words: Emersonian Oversoul, Transcendentalism, hardship, Pragmatism

INTRODUCTION

During the 1930s -Great Depression era- American writers took different perspectives dealing with the situation. Authors like James T. Farrel in "Studs Lonigan" (1932) and Jack Conry's novel "The Disinherited" (1933) have examined life difficulties during this period. Henry Miller assumed a unique place in

American literature in the 1930s with his major works "Tropic of Cancer" and "Black Spring". Other figures found hope in the positive values of American culture. The writer James Agee and the photographer Walker Evans collaborated on a book about Alabama share croppers "Let Us Praise Famous Men" (1941). Although it deals with the difficulties that face poor farmers, it portrays the dignity and strength of people's personal characters that it presents. Another famous writer during the 1930s is Nathanael West with his most famous short novels "Miss Lonely hearts" and "The Day of the Locust".

John Steinbeck wrote about poor, working—class people and their struggle during the 'Great Depression' in order to lead a decent and honest life. "The Grapes of Wrath", published by Viking Press in March 1939, considered his masterpiece, is a socially oriented novel that tells the story of the Joads, a poor family from Oklahoma and their journey to California in search for a better life. Steinbeck presents in Ma qualities that are required for self-improvement. He creates and develops her in a way in order to reflect these traits during the Joads journey to California.

1. LITERATURE REVIEW

1.1 John Steinbeck and "The Grapes of Wrath"

John Steinbeck believed in man's greatness. Railsback and Meyer (2006: 106) state "a writer who does not passionately believe in the perfectibility of man has neither dedication nor any membership in literature".

Steinbeck was born in California in 1902 and grew up in Salinas a green valley about twenty five miles from the Pacific Coast. Ibid (xlii) claims that his strong connection to the land set him apart from other writers of his time and shapes him as a novelist.

Steinbeck had visited several of the migrants' camps during the 1930s American Great Depression and wrote a series

of newspaper and journal articles about these workers and their plights. Later these articles were gathered into the collection "Their Blood is Strong" (1939). Steinbeck's experience among the working class has lent the authenticity to his depiction of the lives of the workers, who remain central for "The Grapes of Wrath".

In "The Grapes of Wrath" Steinbeck emphasizes the need for improvement within the individual as an important process for social progress. This idea is raised through the main character 'Ma Joad' who possesses a number of traits that single her out as an individual needed to care for humanity.

"The Grapes of Wrath" is considered one of the American classics. The story is set during a turbulent era in American history, the 1930s Great Depression. It was the longest and most severe economic depression ever experienced by the industrialized world. Steinbeck (2006) draws a vivid picture of this situation as follows:

The Wind grew stronger, whisked under stones, carried up straws and old leaves, and even little clods, making its course as it sailed across the fields. The air and the sky darkened and through them the sun shone redly, and there was a raw sting in the air. During a night the wind raced faster over the land, dug cunningly among the mullets of the com, and the corn fought the wind with its weakened leave until the roots were reed by the prying wind and then each stalk settled wearily sideways towards the earth and pointed the direction of the wind. (2)

To intensify the environmental disaster, banks appear to worsen the situation of thousands of families. Steinbeck (2006: 32) describes the bank's stance, saying, "The Monster has to have profits all the time. It can't wait. It'll die. No, taxes go on. When the monster stops growing, it dies. It can't stay one size".

Farmers' families were forced into the road. As portrayed in the final chapters of "The Grape of Wrath", their only hope was to settle and survive. The migrant famers lose

the sense of belonging; they have difficulties to cope with the new situation. Men quit leading their families; some even abandoned their households that fell apart under the severe pressures. It puts the responsibility upon women. They had to work hard in order to feed their families beside carrying the burden of the house work and controlling the household.

The issue of social change raised by "The Grapes of Wrath" is examined by a number of critics. Wentworth (2012) claims that the novel moves from an old concept of community to a new sense of community built on the new social conditions. Steinbeck's novel is about the Joads' education that leads to a change from the family isolating itself as a part of a self important clan to accepting itself as a part of one great human family. Bluefarb (1972) views the Joads' flight as an inward journey. The education Tom received leads him to embrace brotherhood perspective and think of the larger human community.

Motley (1982) claims that Ma Joad is influential in her people and she is essential attribute for social change. She is glue and guard against individualism.

Two of the American philosophies that influence Steinbeck's writing are Emerson's concept of the Oversoul and American Pragmatism. Steinbeck brings these concepts into action when he develops his characters and raises the problem of social integration. Ma Joad the pragmatic teacher helps other characters transform from passive self centered individuals into active ones who are conscious of the needs of their society.

1.2.Emersonian Oversoul

Ralph Waldo Emerson was born in 1803 and died in 1882. Leude (2008) considers Emerson the philosopher of optimism of the nineteenth century, and the pioneer in answering the question of man's relation with nature. Emerson stresses the importance of this relation in his essay "Nature" (1836). His philosophy revolves around the idea of the Oversoul. Emerson

has built this concept upon the fact that there is a harmony between man and nature, and it gives him/her an impression of wisdom, happiness and simplicity. Emersonian Oversoul emphasize man's particular being connectedness and unity with all other beings. This concept is applied to the analysis of "The Grapes of Wrath" because it is related to an important issue raised by the novel: social integration. This old concept is realized in the novel in a new and concrete form. Ma believes that goodness results from the unity of the family. She believes in Casy's words: "I got to thinkin' how we was holy when we was one thing, an' mankin' was holy when it was one thing" (Steinbeck 2006: 81). She translates this concept into actions throughout the narrative and involves herself and other characters in processes of self- improvement.

1.3 Pragmatism

Pragmatism is a philosophy about values and morality that teaches putting ideas into work. It emphasizes the role of our experience of the external world as the foundation for our perception of it. Stanford Encyclopedia of philosophy relates its origin to the United States around 1870. The most important of classical pragmatists were Charles Sanders Peirce (1839-1914), William James (1842-1910) and John Dewey (1859-1952).

The concept of Pragmatism is important to examine and interpret how Ma Joad perceives life and acts in a suitable way to cope with the circumstances she is facing. She holds belief that "we 're the people—we go on." This statement reflects her belief in her individuality and constitutes the foundation of her will to endure and survive which is reflected in her decisions and behavior throughout the novel. According to Commager (1950: 95), pragmatism is an individualistic, humane and optimistic philosophy that celebrates the individual's uniqueness and encourages him to put his own faith into action.

1.4 Feminism

There are objections to the ideas that render women subordinate to men and women's roles are rendered to wife and mother. As McKay (1990: 93) thinks male definition of women nature has no scientific foundation. Women biological inability to perform is a social myth set by social values.

In "The Grapes of Wrath" women's social role has been of central importance from the beginning of the novel. Steinbeck draws a sophisticated relationship between the two genders when he introduces Ma Joad. This relationship is based on cooperation rather than dominance and authority.

2. ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

2.1. Characterization of "The Grapes of Wrath"

Steinbeck's characters in the novel reflect the values of the low class-working people, a social stratum that has a recognized will to work and to endure hard life. These characters are simple in their needs, hopes and dreams. Bloom (2000: 28) claims that the folk element and primitiveness in their traits help our perception of their humanity. Moreover, their humane attributes make us deal with them as real people and put them against the lifeless institutions which have the wealth and power but lack human feelings.

The narrator's treatment of characters in "The Grapes of Wrath" emphasizes the major themes of the novel. It focuses on the group rather than the individual as one way to provide a complete picture of the migrants' tragedy. Steinbeck employs nameless characters in order to perceive the Joads' suffering as a part of the tragedy of all tenant migrants. Owens (1989: 109) states that "There must be thousands Granmas and as many Ma Joads, and that the families about to descend into a sea of families in precisely the circumstances and facing their predicament with roughly the same proportion of courage and cowardice".

2.2. Ma Joad's Social Background

Ma Joad belongs to uneducated poor uneducated patriarchal farmers society who struggle the forces that work to drive them out of their land. Leude (2008) claims the only world where one can change is the world of the commons.

Women appear in the beginning of the narrative when the representative of the bank orders them to depart the land the farmers are outraged by the decision and lead an argument. Women watch their men silently (31). They are wise enough to know how to deal with their men. McKay (1990: 100) believes that women are aware of the depth of the men's confusion and frustration, and they know well that their role at the time is to keep silent.

Within this boundary of wise women Steinbeck creates Ma Joad, who understands when to mother her men and when to wait for them to decide. She knows well her responsibility to make the crucial decisions when men are confused. Before they begin their journey to the west she emerges as a wise woman who wants her son Tom to take decision. When Casy asks to join the Joads to California Ma does not reply immediately and look at Tom. Her gesture means he has to decide as a mature man at this moment (93).

Ma Joad is introduced within her extended family which prepares her to accept any change that involves their life. First, she welcomes Casy and convinces Pa to take him to California in their old truck in spite of food limitation. It also prepares her to live within the larger boundaries of community during the journey and to extend her mothering to other people. On the road they meet the Willsons, a family from Arkansas, and live together as one family (163). Then they indulge into a larger community as it is portrayed in Chapter Seventeen when the migrants' suffering brings them together. Steinbeck describes their situation "...the twenty families became one family, the children were the children of all. The loss of home becomes one loss, and the golden time in the West was one dream. And it

might be that a sick child threw despair into the hearts of twenty families of a hundred people" (193).

During the Joads' journey, the family undergoes a number of losses of its members in addition to Pa's Withdrawal from his position as a leader of the Joads. This leads to noticeable shift in the family structure that creates an additional burden on Ma's shoulders. She needs great efforts to re-stabilize the family. Ma proves great ability to deal with the problems arising from the changing situations during their journey. She does not give up and.

2.3. Ma Joad's Adaptability to Hard Circumstances

Being evicted from land and facing the circumstances of migration and losses, Ma Joad demonstrates a great ability to control hard situations and experiences a deep learning process. In the end of the narrative she recognizes that "worse off we get, the more we got to do" (445). She transcends her conventional position as an ordinary uneducated woman to prove herself as an intelligent learner. Her poor education does not betray her great ability to observe and study the situation and act accordingly. This characteristic enables her to guide her family when it is necessary. The narration shows a remarkable strength and endurance through her physical description:

Ma was heavy, but not fat; thick with child-bearing and work. She wore a loose Mother Hubbard of gray cloth in which there had once been colored flowers, but the color was washed out now, so that the Small flowered pattern was only a lighter gray than the background. The dress came down to her ankles, and her strong, broad, bare feet moved quickly and deftly over the floor. Her thin, steel gray hair was gathered in a sparse wispy knot at the back of her head. Strong, freckled arms were chubby and delicate, like these of a plump little girl. Her full face was not soft; it was controlled, kindly. Her Hazel eyes seemed to have experienced all possible tragedy and to have mounted pain and suffering, like steps into a high calm and a super human understanding. She seemed to know, to accept,

to welcome her position, the citadel of the family. The Strong place that could not be taken. (74)

The delicacy of her hand is suggestive of her motherly tenderness which is necessary at a time. However, her experience in life as a mother produces a stronger and tolerable body structure beside a good perception of life. These traits constitute part of the characteristics necessary to face the difficulties that face them on the road. Motley (1982: 406) claims that Steinbeck's portrait of Ma Joad is peculiar. Steinbeck does not take housework and child bearing as signs of her oppression nor does he consider her physical strength to denote lack of traditional beauty.

Her old faint colored dress is a sign of her economic status. One may think she must dream of new beautiful clothes. Nevertheless, she transcends her immediate needs to a broader scope and thinks of the white house that brings them all (148). She adopts collectivist view and makes consideration of all people.

Ma Joad's description emphasizes her strong character; her "Hazel eyes" reflect life experience that contributed to building her strong personality that fits her position in times of crisis. She is a woman with "superhuman understanding". In the beginning of the novel, Ma Joad reveals good perception and readiness to learn. She gets Casy's new concept of religion when he states his adoption of more practical concepts of religion in his words:

I ain't gonna baptize. I'm gonna work in the fiel's, in thegreenfiel's, an'I'm gonna be near ta fblks'. I ain't gonna try to teach 'em nothin'. I'm gonna try to learn, Gonna learn why the folks walks in the grass, gimna hear 'em talk gonna eat with 'em an' learn, Gonna listen to kids eatn'mush" Gonna eat with them an' learn" His eyes were wet and shining. "Gonna lay in the grass, open an' honest with anybody that'll have me. Gonna cuss an' swear an' hear the poetry of folks' talkin'. All

that's holly all that's what I didn't understand. All them things is the gum! Things. (94)

Casy rejects what he considers old destructive religious concepts and emphasizes the importance of collaboration in people's life. For the first time Ma Joad says "A-men" (94). Ma's response reflects her consciousness of the necessity practical conception of religion as salvation for people's dilemmas. She brings his words into reality and works hard throughout the novel displaying this collectivist perspective and tries to teach her children that it is important to face harsh situations they encounter during their journey.

On the road Ma emphasizes her ability to reflect on the situation she encounters and infer its consequences. She possesses an ability to manipulate the available elements appropriately to cope with it. In 'Chapter Thirteen' of the narrative the Joads meet the Wilsons and mix in one family. When the Wilson's car breaks down Tom and Casy volunteer to fix it while the rest of the family continues to California. She refuses to go although Pa orders her "I tell you, you got to go. We made up our mind" (168). Pa's tone is sharp and decisive and there is no room for argument. Here Ma Joad projects a new personality. She protests against the decision and holds a jack handle to threaten Pa. She says "On'y way you gonna get me to go is whup me." She continues "I'll shame you, Pa. An' you ain't so sure you can whup me anyways. An' if ya do get me, I swear to god I'll wait till you got your back tused, or you're settin' down, I will knock you belly-up with a bucket. I swear to Holly Jesus' sake I will." The harsh argument goes on and in the end Pa is helpless (169).

Ma believes that nothing compensates the unity of the family. Ma is motivated by the profound need for group feelings and real togetherness in the face of the hard circumstances. She believes nothing protects them against hardships except family unity. She believes that "All We got is the family unbroken.

Like a bunch a cows, when the lobes are ranging, stick all together. I ain't scared while we're all here, all that's alive, but I ain't gonna see us bust up... I'm a-goin' cat-wild with this here piece a bar-arn if my own folks busts up" (170). Ma predicts the serious consequence if they leave Tom behind on the road; the disintegration of the family. Therefore, she faces Pa's irrational decision and displays aggressiveness. She teaches her people that grouping is natural and separation from the group is unnatural.

Another example during the loads' journey is in the desert when Granma dies. Ma does not tell the family about her death. She has an idea that officers in the agricultural inspection will not allow the Joads to cross to California with the corpse of the woman in the truck. This time the event requires someone who is emotionally tough. It is the time for Ma to test her belief. She states, "Worse off we get, the more we got to do" (445). She thinks the family must cross safely, so she projects her practicality and takes control over her emotion. She acts to conceal the corpse till they cross to California then she tells them that Granma has died. She tells them "I was afraid we wouldn' get acrost... The fambly had ta get acrost" she said "I tol' her when she was a—dyin' we couldn' stop in the desert...Itol' her" (228).

It requires courage and patience to cope with the situation. Ma proves to be the wise woman with her astonishing strength which is the result of her experience in life when she "experienced all possible tragedy and mounted pain and suffering". She tests her faith; if she is disturbed or gives up the family breaks. (74). Motley (1982: 406) states, "Steinbeck works on a mythical level not to deny reality but to explain the power and endurance that survive Ma Joad's hardships"

Ma continues to be a woman capable of enduring hard circumstances till the end of the novel. In California, the family faces the harsh rain and the stream water raises and floods the old train car the family uses as a house. This event coincides

with Rose of Sharon's delivery of a stillborn baby. Ma does not break down or wait for the men to act. She decides to leave to a dry place. She carries her son Winfield on her shoulder and leads the family into a barn on a higher land to escape the harsh rain storm (453). At this time she proves practically her view about life as a woman. One day, Pa feels that "life is over an' done". She responds with a smile:

It ain't, Pa. An' that's one more thing a woman knows. I noticed that. Man, he lives in jerks—baby born an' a man dies, an' that's a jerk—gets a farm an' loses his farm an' that's a jerk. Woman, it's all one flow, like a stream, little eddies, little waterfalls, but the river, it goes right on. Woman looks at it like that. We ain't gonna die out. People is goin' on-changin' a little, but goin' right on" (423).

Nothing affects her will to tolerate hardships and stops her from going on. Ma is aware of situations that require patience and readiness to act. Here she displays an ability that is crucial for the continuity of her family. She embodies Emerson's conception of humans' endurance. He (1995: 26) believes that the individual should continue in spite of all oppositions. Everything vanished but he/she persists.

2.4. Ma Joad the Pragmatist Teacher

Ma is aware of the necessity of social values which are important in the process of self development. She reveals great ability to convince others. Before the journey starts men sit to decide whether they can take Casy with them to California. Pa Joad asks "kin we, Ma?"

Ma cleared her throat [and says] "It ain't kin we? It's will we?" She said firmly. "As far as 'kin', we can't do nothin', not go to California or nathin'; but as far as 'will' why, we will do what we will. An' as far as 'will'-- it's a long time our folks been here and east before an' I never heard tell of no Jaads or no Hazlett, neither, ever refusin' food an' shelter or a lift on the

road to anybody that asked. They's been mean Joads but never that mean," Her tone had made him ashamed. (102)

Now she is a representative of her people; in the beginning of the novel an unnamed farmer recognizes the necessity of group work in the face of their oppressors in order to bring change (38). Ma recognizes the power of man's 'will' in life. She tries to teach Pa that free will has a major role in people's choices. Her words to Pa reflect the optimism of "The Grapes of Wrath" in favor of self-improvement and social change. She has to shake the individualistic view that constrains Pa's vision to see beyond himself. Ma's attitude toward community and collectiveness gives her the power of speech. First, she clears her throat as she discards anything that thwarts her will to guide her action. She uses strong assertive words with critical tone "we'll do what we will." (280). These words bring into ground her believe "We are the people an' we go on." She reminds Pa of his good heritage. This is a very effective way to arouse someone's sympathy. Moreover, her view can be taken as a strong foundation of the persistence of her people and a foundation of a great civilization.

Ma's convincing ability and the assertiveness in her words are important aspects of her character. This situation introduces her as a teacher who uses language effectively to reflecting her wisdom and cleverness. She needs to support her argument; she is conscious of Pa's need for strong men to help him during the journey. She takes an advantage of this to convince him. Ma points to Casy and says, "an' a man strong an' healthy, ain't never no burden" (102). Ma provides a lesson and defines the first step in the Joads' transformation; it is important to stop thinking of themselves as self-contained family and become aware of the larger community of humanity.

She tries throughout the journey to change Pa's mind and his selfishness. Sometimes, she has to speak with him in a harsh tone, In Weed patch camp, the family faces the problem

of getting work that causes serious crisis for it. Pa feels comfortable in this camp although his children's health deteriorates. Ma is the only person who dares to speak it out; she points at her son Winfield and says, "We got to do somepin" Then Ma reminds Pa Joad of his position in the family. She believes that his attitude affects the family, so, he has to deny his personal interests and care for the family. Nevertheless, Pa emphasizes his selfishness and decides to stay because he thinks it is comfortable in Weed patch and fears what will face them if they leave. This drives Ma to address him in serious tone; she addresses him, "Well, if we got to, we got to. First thing is, we got to eat" (351). Her concern of her family drives her to decide to leave the camp.

Pa's selfishness is difficult to be treated. Ma has to teach him to reconsider his family. However, in end Pa reflects the sense of community in a selfless act. When the stream floods and rain storm threatens the migrants, he appeals to collect the men to build an embankment to prevent the water. He says, "How about if we throwed up a bank? We could do her if ever' body helped" (437). Although Pa Joad fails to build a bank and control the flood, his act demonstrates that Ma Joad has succeeded in her mission. She helps him to break the capsule of his individualistic view to recognize his share in communal action. Motley (1982: 398) Views Ma as an anti-individualist. Steinbeck presents her growing power as a source of communal strength sheltering human dignity from anti-social effects of individualism.

Another aspect of Ma's pragmatism is shown in her relation with her son Tom. Steinbeck introduces him on his way home after he has been released from McA Lester prison where he had been sentenced for a murder. He is an indifferent young man who does not demonstrate any concern for humanity when he expresses his lack of remorse for his crime (24).

When Tom arrives home he discovers that everything is destructed and his family has been forced off the land. He loses

his temper and Ma stands close to and addresses him passionately "Tommy, don't you fightin' 'em alone. They will hunt you down like a coyote. Tommy I got to thinkin' an' dreamin' an' wonderin'. They say there's a hun'erd thousand of us shoved out. If we was all mad the same way, Tornmy—they wouldn't hunt nobody down" (77).

Tom displays uneasiness because of their situation. He says, "We take a beatin' all the time." She, calmly, addresses him in convincing words to comfort Tom. She says, "Maybe that makes us tough. Rich fellas come up an' they die, an' their kids ain't no good, an they die out. But, Tom we keep a—comin'. Don' you fret non, Tom. A different time's comin'" (280). Ma's optimistic view of her people's future calms down Tom. She believes in the idea that they belong to a group of tolerable enduring people. She continues to encourage Tom and take him out of his little mind into the vast world that can be a remedy for Tom's weakness. She stands as a pragmatist teacher that believes in the communal action in order to survive. She tells him that collective action is their salvation. Ma gives Tom a lesson taking him out of his lack of consideration of humanity into the concept of brotherhood.

When he tells her "I'm a—gettin' tired, Ma. How about making me mad" (353). Her words come out bringing him closer to her preventing any other voice to disturb her mission with Tom. In a praiseful tone she tells him "you got more sense, Tom. I don' need to make you mad. I got to lean on you. Them others—they're kind a strangers, all but you. You won't give up, Tom" (353). The tired and in-confident Tom shows a strong desire to escape. She appeals to his profound nature; she stirs the concern of humanity inside him preparing him for taking responsibility of his people.

Near the end of the novel Ma's teaching gives its fruit. Tom proves his optimism and his faith in his individuality. Moreover, he displays adoption of the concept of brotherhood in his words:

Then I'll be all around in the dark. I'll be ever'where you look. Wherever they's a fight so hungry people can eat, I'll be there. Wherever they's a cape beatin' up a guy, I'll be there. If Casy knowed, why, I'll be in the way guys yell when they're mad an'— I'll be in the way kids laugh when they're hungry' an' they know supper's ready. An' when our folks eat the stuff they raise an' they live in the houses they build—why I'll be there. See? God, I'mtalldn' like Casy. Comes of thinkin' about him so much. Seems like I can see him sometimes.(419)

Tom expresses his new consciousness of brotherhood and concern of all humanity wherever there is a crisis. He brings Casy's concept of Oversoul into action. Casy tells them: "A fella ain't got a soul of his own, but on'y a piece of a big one" (24). His language does not only reflect Casy's beliefs but also represents his adoption of Ma's belief "we are the people – we go on" (280). The optimist Tom is confident that he will bring change wherever he steps in.

Ma's teaching includes her delicate daughter Rose of Sharon with her overwhelming selfishness and childlike behavior. The immature pregnant woman is in continuous complain. Ma's teaching helps her transformation to an adult mother who cares and nurtures the humanity.

On the road a car hits the Joad's dog dead. Rose is afraid it might hurt her baby. Ma Joad tells her seriously that incidence might affect it if she does not change her view of the world. Ma believes that involving Rose in the housework and taking care of others solves her problem. She addresses her, saying, "Rise up now, an' he'pme get granma comf'table. Forget that baby for a minute..." (131). Ma's words come as an order to teach her little girl that no one sympathizes and comforts her. To deny herself and think to help others is the salvation.

Rose of Sharon and her husband Connie plan to leave to the town and enjoy a better living condition. Ma does not accept the idea as she believes "It ain't good for folks to break up" (165). Rose of Sharon's isolated world drawn by selfish husband

never contributes to changing the future of her people because it is confined to them. She believes that materialistic success is the secret of happiness. Whereas, her mother views living within a group is the solution.

Ma's words to her daughter prove her perception of Casy's perspective of Oversoul. According to Casy "I got thinkin' how we was holy when we was one thing' an' mankin' was holy when it was one thing. An' it on'y got unholy when one mis'ble little fella got the bit in his teeth an' run off his own way' kickin' an' draggin' an' fightin'. Fella like that bust the holiness "(81). She takes Rose to the wide world of humanity bringing the collectivist perspective and her faith in group unity down into the ground.

She continues her teaching and tells her daughter about the course of life preparing her for pain which is natural in man's life. She wants her to be a tolerant adult when she addresses her, "You're gonna have a baby Rosasharon, That's gonna hurt you, that's sompin to you lonely an' the hurt'll be lonely hurt,... They's time of change, an' when that comes, dyin' is a piece of dyin' an' bearin' is a piece of all bearin'..." (209). Ma's experience shapes her perception; she views the individual as a part of a larger whole. The pain is intolerable for an immature girl. She addresses her in a loving passionate tone calling her daughter "Rosasharn". Her words come out as therapy for hurt and pain that her daughter will suffer. Moreover, Ma tells her that sometimes she has to face troubles alone by herself. She stresses a crucial fact in Rose of Sharon's life: she is a part of a large community. This sense of oneness provides a person with the strength and power to survive. Gradually, Rose of Sharon changes her attitudes and perceives the idea of collaboration when she decides to pick cotton with her family.

In the end of the novel a terrible event happens to her. Rosaasharon gives birth to a stillborn baby during harsh rain storm. Surprisingly she stops to think of herself and the loss

she faces. She feels the starvation an old man suffers and feeds him her breast milk. This action suggests that now it is time of change and Rose is a different individual who concerns for humanity.

Ma, the pragmatist teacher cares for another person in the family, Uncle John. He is depicted as an isolated and sorrowful man who is agonized by his sense of sin and guilt. He becomes addict to alcohol and yearns for death to relief his suffering. Ma knows that his remedy is to forget the past and involve himself in work. She rejects any attitude that causes the individual's resignation. She tells John the remedy: "Everything we do—seems to me is aimed right at goin' on... Even gettin' hungry- even bein' sick; some die, but the rest is tougher. Jus' try to live the day, jus' the day" (423). Her words remind one of the time when she burns her past memories before heading west. Now she encourages John to go on free from any burden of guilt. "jus' the day" is the new start for a different person –Uncle John.

In the end he becomes an active participating individual, he reclaims, "Tain't sweatin' me none," he adds, "I'm workin' hard an' sleepin' good. No dreams nor nothin'" (411).

Ma Joad is "so great with love" (229). At Hooverville camp she brings into reality Casy's concept of love. Casy states earlier: "it's all men an' all women we love" (24). She gives the last stew her family has to the starving children. Ma transcends her love and concern of her own children to care for other children. She reflects a communal value; the needy transcend their need and think of others, since suffering unifies them all. She always emphasizes the importance of community integration for man's survival.

2.5. Ma Joad's Faith on her Identity

In the moments of Tom's weakness Ma tries to communicate something deep in his profound nature; his sense of his individuality. She expresses her perspective and she is sure this

will restore his strength and his will to endure. After leaving the burned Hooverville, Tom is fed up with deputies. Ma soothes him with her wise words "us people will go on livin' when all them people is gone... we're the people- we go on" (280). She pronounces sense of her individuality. Ma believes herself to be one of the people who survive and this gives her the power and determination to struggle harsh circumstances. Her belief in her individuality shapes her behavior and her decisions greatly. She always directs the Joads' attention to their relation with their group of people and act accordingly. As Huntington (2005: 21) considers identity as the image of distinctiveness (selfhood).

Identities are defined by the self and they are the product of the interaction between the self and others. How others perceive an individual or a group affects the self-definition of that individual or group. In "The Grapes of Wrath" when migrants arrive at California, they face the hostility of Californians. They are perceived as outsiders and outcasts. People call them 'Okies'. Ma Joad presents a great lesson to her son Winfield who fiercely protests against calling him an "Okie". He tells his mother that a boy says "we was goddam Okies. I socked him. She explains it calmly "He can't hurt you callin' names" (359). To be defined as an outcast may affect how she views herself. Nevertheless, Ma does not show such response. Her words emphasize her first belief that "We are the people." This reflects self-consciousness; she views herself as the one who will never give up. Her words, "He can't hurt you callin' names" express a positive attitude of herself that cannot be swayed when she is defined by others. Motley (1982: 407) describes her as "the image of an immovable fortress". Ma acts to single out her identity. Her faith in her individuality supports her decision. It gives her power to act and the will to continue. When Pa asks her if they "kin" take Casey with them, Ma defines herself firmly with "It's will we?" She knows that strong will is what makes the difference in man's life.

2.5. Ma Joad and Work Value

In "The Grapes of wrath" work value is raised and emphasized through Ma Joad's actions, decisions, and encouragement of her family members to have work. Her faith on work value comes from her believe that change will come from the individual himself. She does not think of the golden opportunity that awaits them in the west whereas the Joads' view of California is shaped by the needs arise of their difficult situation. One example is Grampa who envisions California as a place of abundance food. He thinks, "they's grapes out there, just a-hangin' over in ta the road. Know what I'm gonna do? I'm gonna pick me a wash tub full a grapes, an' I'm gonna set in 'em, an' scrooge aroun', an' let the juice run down my pants" (93). Derived by the threatening famine, Grandpa's desire is to satisfy his first need at the time. Nonetheless, Ma Joad looks at the matter differently. She does not dream of the divine gift that awaits her in California. Her view of her future in the west tends to be different. Ma reveals her hope when she gets there. She tells Tom, "I wonder—that is, if we all get jobs an' all work—maybe we can get one them little houses. An' the little fellas go out an' pick oranges right off the tree. They ain't gonna be able to stand it, they'll get to yellin' so" (91). Ma transcends her desire to satisfy her immediate needs to fill her stomach and have new dresses into great hopes. She believes that her hope cannot be realized without work; having work is important to provide money to satisfy the needs for food and settlement.

Throughout the journey she accepts her traditional position as a housewife and does not quit her house work. She cooks and shares the family their work outside the house, for example, picking crops in peach and cotton field. She is aware of the fact that work changes people's life in many ways. According to Motley (1982: 406), Steinbeck argues that economically productive labor is the woman's source of power.

Ma Joad is conscious of the necessity of work to overcome man's sorrows and sufferings. She tries to involve Rose of Sharon in the house work after her husband Connie deserted her. Ma addresses her daughter in a stern tone, "You got to work," she adds, "sit in the tent and you'll get feelin' sorry about yaself" (268). Her language emphasizes that work is a must and is the only way to defeat one's sorrow. Teaching Rose of Sharon the necessity of work is an important step in her transformation from the self-centered view into adopting collectivist perspective. McKay (2007: 100) claims that house-wife's traditional work provides women with energy, purpose and fulfillment.

On the road at Weed patch camp the Joads feel for the first time that they are human. Nevertheless, Ma decides to leave the camp. She thinks of work as the bond to the place. Because of lack of work Ma does not think of Weed patch as home although it is comfortable. She decides "It ain't our home no more" (355).

CONCLUSION

Steinbeck succeeds to present the idea of self-improvement through Ma Joad. She possesses a number of traits that single her out as a strong woman who demonstrates great perception and undergoes process of improvement.

- She is a wise woman who knows how to comfort her family at times of distress.
- She represents a sort of woman who possesses the will to survive and shows capability to adapt herself to hard circumstances in order to struggle for a better future.
- She is aware of work value in solving some psychological problems and involving her family with the collectivist view
- Through teaching her family, she always acts to uproot selfishness that constitutes an obstacle in their way to

adopt brotherhood perspective until the Joad family becomes the family that care for humanity. They express love and compassion for mankind as a whole.

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