

Critique of American Dream in Franzen's *The Corrections*

This research writing aims at exposing how Jonathan Franzen critiques the concept of American dream in his novel, *The Corrections* (2001). The term American Dream is used in many ways, but essentially it suggests that anyone in the United States can succeed through hard work and has the potential to lead a happy and successful life. It mainly consists of the issues like Life, Liberty and the Pursuit of happiness as promised in American constitution. American Dream is related to the material prosperity, happiness and glorious socio-cultural aspects of life as well as the emphasis up on the individual relationship.

The primary objective of this research is to explore paradoxes embedded in the discourse of American Dream. It investigates the failure of American Dream in contrast to the promises it distributed. The project probes into the slack ideals of American Dream that promises success, prosperity to every individuals and exposes the dichotomy between appearances versus reality, love versus betrayal and symmetry versus disorder.

The Corrections shows the contradiction of the American Dream in relation to the Lambart's family. The Lambart family got so badly damaged becomes dysfunctional because of the intoxication of American Dream and its core-the materiality and money economy. The individual, families and community as a whole has been crushed by such degrading and corruptions. The Lambarts; Gary, Chip and Denise Lambart have moved to the Northeast and become accomplished professionals in the respective fields of investment banking, critical theory professing and gourmet cooking. There is neither emotional attachment among the family members nor they are bound by the family responsibility. The characters are guided by individualism and freedom and cannot preserve their morality and social value; they are the hollow

men, by following the so called American Dream, and they forget their family and social responsibility. They only concern about their own lives and at last get frustrated and depressed.

Basically the concept of American Dream is associated with the dream of success, upward mobility and overwhelming charm that American space provides to everyone. This dream primarily concerns to grace, elegance and splendid qualities of life which are the guiding principles and ideals that its founding father such as Thomas Jefferson and George Washington envisioned for American Dream. It is shaped and concretized in different ways. Declaration of independence is the promise to American Dream and American constitution can be taken as the fulfillment of promise. The main character of the novel, Alfred Lambert, is suffering from Parkinsons and mental delusions as well as physical aging. His three children have tried to escape the control of their parents and have both succeed and failed.

The novel contains the anxiety of the presentsituation. These sense of anxiety found in its characters has been compared with those of Americans following the September 11 terrorist attack; despite the novel's release having preceded that events by 10 days. As a result, many have interpreted the novel as having prescient insight into the mood of post 9/11 American life, and numerous publications have ranked it with the best work of contemporary fictions. Since the publication of the novel, it receives many critical responses. Many critics view this novel from different perspective.

Christoph Ribbat views the text as not the avant-guard against the mainstream but the low-tech over high-tech. He does not find any new trend in the novel. He opines "*The Corrections* a book that might also be called the collections or the connections. The ties this novel fabricates both between its protagonists and between

text and reading audience come into being not by pitting the avant-guard against the mainstream but by favoring the low-tech over the high-tech” (564). Ribbat views the novel as fabricated the reader and protagonist and text and also shows the text not as avant- guard. It means that there is no radical departure from the mainstream writing trend. It has no any new writing trend rather it has legacy of contemporary writings, which shows the present condition. In the same time there is no hope for betterment at all but the writer shows little hope at last and middle in the novel. In the real sense there is no possibility of betterment because of characters wrong doing and violating social norms and values. The writer intently shows the optimism which is not possible in the novel because of characters’ wrong doing tendencies. To show it is not avant-guard he further views, “*The Corrections* makes similar gesture prepared in Frenzen’s first two novels and in his nonfiction” (559).His all works are somehow similar gestures and the present work also is not departure from it.

James Annesley in his article *Market Corrections* attempts that it is deliberate attempt to locate the Lambart families within socio economic context. He views:

Jonathan Franzen’s *The Correction* makes a very deliberate attempt to locate its account of Lambart family within economic context. There is the shift in American economic fortune at the end of the 20th century affected by market corrections allude to in the novels title. There are internet technology and the force of the operating system developed by all conquering W-Corporation.(111)

Annesley in this article opines that the novel attempts the Lambart family in the socio-economic context of the time when there was also corrections in the American market. There is also correction in the market because of internet technologies. Likewise, correction in the American market after recession Lambart family also

needs correction in the socio-economic context. It has not only one side to interpret but it has multiple layers to discuss. It seems as a kind of family fiction.

Alan Davis on the other hand interprets the novel as the family fiction where he sees the archetypal romance. He views:

Franzen despite occasionally copping a stance has written a very good novel about family life in America. Our families and their fates are ever on our mind and if writers like Franzen can be believed, we are not so much what our families make of us as what we try to invent as we endlessly pull away from and return to the archetypal family romance. (161)

In this short article Davis shows it as the archetypal romance and it also portrays the family life in contemporary America. It portrays as a good novel about family life. He shows the family which becomes dysfunctional and there is no harmony among the characters but still a family, which is the reality of contemporary American society because of socio-economic structure. But on the other hand, Joseph Carroll in his research paper argues it as the ideological critique of late capitalism. He argues:

Jonathan Franzen's *The Corrections* is a major novel a family drama that broadens into an ideological critique of late capitalism in the 20th century. The critical response to his novel suggests the magnitude of his achievement; a flood of enthusiastic reviews in high profile venues a national book award, and a substantial handful of scholarly commentaries by academic literary critics.(87)

In the above abstract Carroll sees the novel as the critique of late capitalism in the twentieth century. Carroll views that the writer is the critique of late Capitalism, which he presents well in whole novel where he shows how the Capitalistic society fails because of its inherent tendencies. Roncharle's presents it as, "A giant leap for

Franzen not only beyond his two previous novels, but beyond just about anybody else's" (19). In this line he shows it as the work unique than others and himself too. Carroll further views that the Franzen's work as the ironic representation of the society of the late twentieth century. He further opines:

I think Franzen lacks generosity and conforms timidly to current ideological conventions. He minimizes or suppresses positive family emotions and ironies common moral norms. A smug facile postmodern skepticism hovers over all aspects of the domestic and the social life depicted in the novel. Because he envisions his characters from within the limitation of his own persona, he often gives an implausible, distorted and impoverished depiction of their inner lives. (89)

In this excerpt Carroll views that novel minimizes positive family emotions and ironies the common moral values. It is presented as the post modern novel. Hence, in this he finds the postmodern features in *The corrections*.

The Corrections presents the characters who are guided by pursuit of happiness and better and successful life. There is no emotional attachment among family members; they want to live in better world to gain material prosperity. The research work therefore explores the characters relationship and their individual and free life tendency. From its publication to present, many researchers have studied the novel from various perspectives but the present study deals with the issue of American dream and its failure.

American dream has assured every American's happy, successful life. It has long been bound up with America's politics and political ideology. Hochschild argues, "American Dream is and has been, for decades if not centuries, a central ideology of America" (XI). The American realizing this dream thus has become a

principle mechanism of American political stability and economic prosperity.

American dream also critically allied with the American politics. It is the emerging concept of declaration of independence of the US by Thomas Jefferson, where he declares, “All men are created equal that they are endowed by their creator with certain unalienable rights, among these are life, liberty, pursuit of happiness”(1). This is the promise to the American people which becomes the American Dream. Along with this, thing it indicates something more than that which is also scripted in the preamble of US constitution as, “provide for common defense, promote the general welfare, secure the blessing of liberty to ourselves and our posterity”(1). Constitution of America also advocates for the happy prosperous liberal and dignified life.

American Dream is also associated with materialism. It is related to the American people’s liberty of property and right to get rich. Hochschild views, “the promise that all Americans have a reasonable chance to achieve success as they define it material or otherwise through their own efforts and to attain virtues and fulfillment through success” (XI). Here Hochschild claims that this success is the material one which they get from their own effort. It is related to all Americans’ belief that they have reasonable chance to get success on their own. One’s own house establishes the material benchmark for individual or family achievement as the product of political and economic policy. One of its central goals was to bind as many Americans as possible to American political system through property ownership. Home ownership is the materialistic success. Politicians were eager to reinforce the capitalism in this trend from beginning to present.

Jim Cullen links American Dream with capitalism, for him American Dream seems like, “the most lofty as well as the most immediate component of an American identity a birthright for more meaningful and compelling the term democracy

constitution or even a US” (17). American Dream is the collective identity and national motto for him. American Dream requires a sense of power and recognition of selfhood in order to reinvent self towards new consciousness and identity. He further argues, “It is the complex idea with manifold implication that can cut different ways, there is no single dream but several that overlap throughout history” (20). In his view American Dream is not a simple concept. It is rather a complex term to explain and define and there is not a single version of the American Dream from the declaration of independence to now a day. Even there are different views among scholars and historians.

Now America has emerged as the nation of emigrants and it also changed the American society. Philip Fisher hints that American Dream now changes. He states, “Which tore apart the previous unifying and singular myth of America” (243). After the Second World War America emerged as a super power and it somehow changed in the conceptualization of American Dream too. Jim Cullen defines 21st century American Dream as, “American Dream remains a major element of our national identity, and yet national identity is itself marked by a sense of uncertainty that may well be greater than ever before” (6). American Dream becomes major element of national identity but it is uncertain, it becomes greater than before. This indicates that there is slow and gradual change in dream and identity itself.

Many people define, expand, and redefine it to include things such as freedom, fulfillment and meaningful relationship but it is essentially upward mobility in terms of economic or social advancement. Cullen links it with history and also talks about the Puritan and states, “Puritan community was not the first to have a dream of freedom and equality, but the declaration became the first to be written out as an official contract of the new Americans” (21). In *The American Dream; A Short of an*

Idea that Shaped a Nation he links it with history of America and capitalism and views that it is the older concept but written document is the declaration of independence which officially talks about the American Dream. The Puritan also have dream which is American Dream but it is not scripted and it is quite challenging to define it, life, liberty and pursuit of happiness is firstly officially scripted in this document. So it proves it is rooted in the declaration of independence. He further views that pursuit of happiness is simply the acquisition of creature comfort. Americans believe that there is not anything money cannot buy it refers that money buys happiness. The market economy and capitalism are to blame for material wealth and possession becomes synonymous with happiness. In his view American Dream relies on adopting self- making and individualism.

American Dream is mainly related with the materialism. So it hints that capitalism is the epitome of American Dream. Cullen argues, “A better life has been a core component of American Dream” (16). By this, it clarifies that to get American Dream, they need the materiality. They get it only through the money economy and they think that happiness can buy with money and it comes through materialism. In the same way historian James Truslow Adams defines American Dream indicating the material prosperity and rugged individualism. He views, “life should be better and richer and fuller for everyone, with opportunity for each according to ability or achievement regardless of social class or circumstance of birth” (9). Here, Adams asserts the American Dream as a belief and its core characteristic lies in hard work and material success. It is associated with popular belief that prescribes with hard work in the form of material well- being. He asserts the dream of land where life should be fuller and richer. He further argues, “Homeownership is frequently cited as an example of attaining the American Dream” (10). It is the symbol of financial success and

independence. It means having the ability to control one's own property, business and one's own boss represent American Dream fulfillment. It also suggests the freedom to live in accordance with one's own value, even if these values are not widely held or accepted.

The idea of American Dream contains lives basics of human being. Hochschild defines as an, “American Dream as defining characteristic of American culture and aspirations” (XI). For her it is the characteristic which is about getting success. And it is related to the American culture that is known as the consumer culture promised by capitalism. In order to clarify, it she further argues, “American Dream was that everybody was going to make . . . a billion dollars, but it was that everybody was going to have opportunity and chance to live a life with some decency and some dignity and a chance for self- respect” (13). This statement illustrates that it is the dream of every American i.e. the dignified life and material success. It is concerned with billion dollars in the name of achieving their coveted desires and goals. People have gone to extent of doing wrong thing because they want material or financial success by hook or crook by one-self.

American Dream, in a broader sense, refers to the pursuit of success for one's family or community as well as individual. Hochschild argues, “American Dream need not be individualistic in the narrow given that one can under its rubric pursue success for one's family or community as well as for oneself” (36). It is not individualistic in the narrow sense because it is the success of the family, community as well as oneself but in the real sense it makes the person individualistic and promotes the rugged individualism, which forgets the background and wants to succeed by one's own.

Franzen's novel revolves around the troubles of an elderly Midwestern couple

and their three adult children, tracing their lives from the mid twentieth century one last Christmas. Various critics compared sense of anxiety apprehension found in its character with those of Americans following September 11 terrorist attacks. The novel shifts back and forth through the late twentieth century, depicting in detail the personal growth and mistakes of each family members. Oldest son of the family, Gary is successful businessman but at last he is suffering from the depression or the breakdown. He faces anxiety which is seen in the lines, “Aron did not move further cheering word appeared to be called for, but Gary could not think of any. He was experiencing a critical shortage of factors 1 and 3” (99). Aforementioned line shows that Gary is suffering from depression. He loses his power to think and talk. He encounters very critical situation because of his involvement in wrong doings to get success. In this way, Franzen further mentions that condition is quite critical because now he becomes depressed. Aron utters, “It was therefore all more important now to resist depression to fight it with the truth” (99). These lines prove that the financially successful businessman suffers from mental delusion and it is important to fight against it with the truth. Another son Chip lost his college teaching job after getting involved with students. He is dishonest with many former politico-soldiers. Daughter, Denise has been a successful chef at a number of places but juggles a bewildering array of romantic and sexual relationship. Mother, Enid wants only to have her kids and grandkids return to the Midwest for one last Christmas.

Novel concerns to the thematic issue of American Dream and its failure simultaneously. It carries two contradictory issues the triumph and tragedy of Al Lambart in particular and other character in general. The novel not only presents how Al Lambarts presents American Dream but also shows the failure of American Dream. Al Lambart who pursues his own independent and successful life, career,

freedom and prosperity in the novel but his downfall and failure to maintain these things indicates the failure of American Dream. Therapist declares it as “unqualified success” (97). American Dream is not always the matter of success but also fail and which becomes the tragic sides of the dream.

Reconnection becomes tragic to Lambart’s family. They may never entirely understand each other; they are able to gain some empathy over the course of the novel. Characters have the dream of upward mobility in their respective domain, which is exactly the American Dream. There is also the self-deception which is shown in the lines, “show it is a kind of self-deception, no Gary, it is the way love works” (135). They have material dream and want to live a dignified, independent, prosperous and satisfied life. Al Lambart is engineer and his children also have the job and they believe hard work for the sublimation of decent life, liberty and pursuit of happiness. Because of this ideology there is no harmonious relationship among family member. It indicates the tragic aspects of American life.

The unhealthy part, on the other hand in the life of Lambart, germinates along with seed of his ambition and thrives. It means he cannot remain stable at the point of the apex of his success throughout life. What has dream has been, culminate into sorrow at length which unfolds the failure of dream. He says, “A place can sense if you understand trouble. If you don’t understand it, you get left alone. My problem is I understand it. If I had come to a street like this when I was your age, something ugly with have happened” (226). Dream of Al Lambarts and other characters germinates from the root cause of their neglecting tendency of the social norms and values, ethics and morality and conduct of their respective profession. He becomes a tragic figure in the course of time. This research primarily concerns about the issue of American Dream. Portrayal of other characters along with Al Lambart’s eagerness only to

succeed and achieve their dreams at any cost by compromising and violating the social ethics, norms and values, morality and ethics pave the way for the failure of American Dream resulting into alienation, depression, frustration, absence of solace, disharmony and loneliness.

American Dream seems to be germinated in the psyche of the Al Lambart in particular and other characters in general. Al Lambart is unlucky who detached from his family love, care and affection. He stays with his wife who he knows much. His three children happen to be successful in their field. Gary is a successful bank investor. Chip is college lecturer and later he becomes the script writer and has business and Denise is the chef at the restaurant. All of them want to material well being and free and independent life. There is something wrong but no one cares which is represented in the following lines:

It's one character after another writing their hands about the state of criticism. Nobody can ever quite say what's wrong exactly. But they all know its evil. They all know corporate is directly word. And if somebody having fun or getting rich disgusting! Evil! And it's always the death of this and death of that. And people who think they are free aren't really free and people who think they are happy aren't really happy. (23)

Above mentioned lines show there is something rupture and only the criticism but nobody can say what exactly but knows only the evil. There is also the difference between appearance and reality. Whatever seems is not real like happy and free. It means whatever they think as happy and free is not in the real sense. There is wrong in the society because no one exactly says what the wrong is. It shows there is impossibility of correction but no one knows the real problem. There is something wrong with everything.

The myth of American Dream promised that human beings are self made characters regardless of one's origin /root. No matter what his/her root or origin, background or tradition which helps to win success and wealth in his/her life as long as they have own skill, courage, determination and hard work. But, in real life everyone cannot achieve this dream and as a result they are compelled to live a shattered life. It means dream is equated with false imagination of mind, and hence fails to materialize into reality. James Truslow Adams views in the *Epic of America* as:

If as I have said the things already listed were all we had to contribute, America would have made no distinctive and unique gift to mankind but there has been also that American Dream that dream of land in which life should be better and richer and fuller for every man, with opportunity for each according to his ability or achievement.(404)

In these lines Adams views that all people in America have dream of free , satisfied and prosperous life and they can attain it through hard work living happy life in peace and harmony with each other was their actual motto. They want to become rich and successful by one's own and there is no any role of the root or the background of the person. Everyone wants to lead successful and satisfied life through one's own hard work but it is not possible for each and every person and this becomes the tragic part of the American life which leads the person towards moral and ethical degradation. In this novel Al Lambart lost his morality and family bound because of American Dream which is seen in the following lines, “Tilton Ledge was glazed with ice and very dark. In the mail chip find an envelope containing a short note from Enid lamenting Alfred's morale failures and a lengthy profile of Denise, clipped from Philadelphia magazine with aslaving review of her restaurant” (132). In these lines he hints about

the moral degradation of the character in the novel. Female character Enid laments about this moral and ethical degradation of her husband. She shows her husband's moral failure and also failure of daughter's morality and ethics. Denise is the chef at restaurant whose photo published in Philadelphia magazine as the object and she has immoral relationship and fails the marriage before that. It shows that for the money or the economic success they don't care about their moral ground. Only the money becomes the key to success, which eliminates the moral and ethical values. Chip also involves with the student and lost his profession of college teaching. He forgets his position of teacher and moral ground. This also indicates the moral and ethical degradation.

The Lambarts are the kind of people who would go on family feud and just end of fighting among themselves. These seemingly normal subordinates are struggling to reconnect after years of separations and it's a lot easier than done. *The Corrections* makes close and personal to the all five characters or the family members, gives multiple perspectives on the moments that define their lives. They never entirely understand each other. In this sense Nolan Millar in his short article also views:

Franzen is a good writer, even at times a brilliant one. Some readers however may find *The Corrections* to be disturbing both as to content and form. For these readers it may seem to be not so much a novel as a case study of dysfunctional American mid western family. It may be even better said that it is not so much about the dysfunctional family as about the five individuals who make up the family, each of whom is dysfunctional in his or her own way. (709)

Miller here tries to show the potentiality of the novelist and also shows the content of the novel as the story of dysfunctional family or five individuals make the family not

the family in itself. He further views, “the dysfunctional attributes each character recognizes the others but not in himself or herself that require corrections” (709). In these lines he shows that there is the inevitability of corrections in the characters. Characters are unknown about their own attributes but recognized others which are really the problem and it is necessary to correct it. Hence, he shows the inevitability of the corrections in the family members because they have a kind of problem which they cannot understand themselves.

All characters have their own lifestyle and they have no anyresponsibility towards family and society. It consists of dreams and ambition of central character Al Lambart. He wants to live a dignified, independent and free life. He is in pursuit of happiness, thrive and self satisfaction in the days to come going through the career of engineering. Regarding American Dream Lyndon B. Johnson opines, “The American Dream has ultimately been about the manner in which our lives unfold the ability of the individual, no matter he/she comes from, to exert considerable control and freedom over how that process occurs. In this sense it is about being able to live out our individual biographies to their fullest extent”(3).For Johnson, American Dream recommends to pursue through hard work. Success is the matter of one's own control. If someone works hard these actions include attaining and education developing a talent working hard and saving money. There is no any role of the biography and their lives itself unfold the ability to lead the free and successful life. It also shows that working hard is the key component of the American Dream, which gives satisfaction and success to the person. There is no role of family and its background so there occurs individualism and disharmony among even family members.

As other character, Chip is indifference towards family. He invites the family to lunch but he himself becomes absent. Consequently his mother cannot become

happy. Her dismay is shown in the lines:

The first cabinet that Enid opened contained a cartoon of wine bottle corks and nothingness. I don't understand why chip invites us here if he was not even going to eat lunch with us conceivably Denise said he didn't plan on getting dumped this morning. Denise's tone of voice was forever informing Enid that she was stupid. Denise was not Enid felt a very warm or giving person. . . . Few weeks ago Enid had done shameful things that she was now in serious need of confessing to somebody, and she hoped Denise might be that person.(39)

These lines show that there is not family bonding at all and too much individualistic thought. There problems are also seen in the Denise's character. She informed that she is stupid and her mother knows she does some shameful thing and it needs confession. Enid is unknown about Chip's character and behavior. Horkheimer argues, "Bourgeoisie liberalism promoted conformity through self interested success in the free market. This means that individuality is only the pursuit of material well being as its' goal" (139). He also shows that only the value of material well being and individuality is in the center and there is no role of the family members. It is the self interested success in the free market. Individuality is the key component for material well being and it's only their goal which helps to forget social norms and values.

American Dream continues heavy emphasis upon economic prosperity and financial security along with other ambitions as well finding and pursuing a rewarding career, leading a healthy and personally fulfilling life, and being able to retire in comfort. But regardless of time or place America has always been about hope and promise to free and good life. Of course, the American Dream has never guaranteed that hard work will ensure economic and personal success but it has been strongly

suggested. In this way, the characters face the failure of dream is shown in the lines, “Denise I called his company last year after dead fell down on the lawn mower and you know what they wanted for cutting our little lawn? Fifty five dollars a week! I am not opposed to profit; I think it is wonderful that Deans successful I told you about his trip to Paris with honey I am not saying against him. But fifty- five dollars a week” (44). In these lines Gary only talks about the money economy, profit and success no any morality and business ethics. Business is only for the profit and money, there is no any role of ethics. They are running after the money economy to get success in the contemporary America. But it does not ensure the successful, satisfied and free life.

Jeniffer L. Hochschild talks about American Dream as a central ideology of Americans for decade and perhaps century. It is also associated with the right to get rich. It mainly concerns to money economy. Character Enid is also guided by money economy and wants more than five thousand dollars. She says:

I am thinking we would ask for ten thousand, not five thousand, Enid said.

when does that patent expire? Gary said

“in about six years” they must be looking at big money, otherwise they'd just go ahead and infringe”

. . . . what you need to do now is write back to these guys and ask them for a \$ 200000 licensing fee up front.(92)

They define everything as the right to get rich. As a result humanity also becomes the matter of money for them. They never care about what is human ethos and values.

Even they politicize the corpse to make money. They want more and more money but forget the social responsibility. Corpse doesnot get proper burial because of money.

Hochschild further defines American Dream as follows:

The American Dream is and has been, for decades if not centuries, a central

ideology of Americans. By the American Dream I mean not merely the right to get rich, but rather the promise that all Americans have a reasonable chance to achieve success as they define it in material or otherwise through their own efforts and attain virtue and fulfillment through success. As an ideology it is a brilliant construction as a guide for practice its defects may match or even outweigh its virtues. (XI)

She argues that American Dream inspires every American who tries to acquire the success which they define as a material one through their hard work. They try their level best to attain virtues and fulfillment through the cult of success. Hardwork and continuous effort eventually turned their economic system into capitalistic system and money becomes life blood of it.

Similarly, in the case of Lambert and his children they move from one place to another in search of pursuit of happiness. It is because they feel that they get success by hard work and they also want free from the social and family boundary to get success in real life i.e. material well being. American Dream is not attainable to everyone because every person does not have equal chance to get success and opportunity to hard work so sometime get frustrated and becomes unemployed, too. These things are interpreted in a contradictory way, too. American Dream is deeply rooted concept of American identity. Melaine E.L. Bush argues:

Deeply rooted in the concept of American identity is the notion of uniquely democratic values, idealized principle of freedom, equality and individualism and the belief that nowhere around the globe do people care so much about justice, popular discourse convey implicit beliefs and contradictory interpretation of these ideas. (142-43)

In this excerpt he argues that the Americans have uniquely democratic value, equality,

freedom and individualism and also the contradictory interpretations of these ideals. These ideals are not only interpreted in a singular way rather multiple ways. It also interprets in negative waylike freedom to fail and unemployed also. In the novel also we find the contradiction of these ideals Gary and Chip have problems in health as well as in the work. Gary utters, “Chip had concluded that he was behaving like a depressed person. Chip surprised himself by laughing what’s going on is that I have lost my job” (48). Chip uses his freedom and individuality but at last get depressed and unemployed. Because of his freedom and compromise with social norms and values, he becomes frustrated and depressed. He makes mistakes by his own which leads him towards the failure. He faces unemployed condition because of his unbounded freedom. It shows that American Dream that is freedom and happiness no guarantee to get success and its failure gives people depression and mental illness.

In the same way, another character Gary feels difficulties in his life. As depicted in the novel’s line, “Gary has been worrying a lot about his mental health but on that particular afternoon, as he left his big schist sheathed house on Senimole street and crossed his big back yard and climbed the outside stairs of his big garage, the weather in his brain was as warn and bright as the weather in Northwest Philadelphia” (85). Here, Franzen clarifies about the mental condition of the Gary, the eldest son of the family and successful bank investor. It means he is not in the normal condition. He feels quite difficult to handle the condition. American Dream not always leads one to succeed but also the drags towards of failure. In this regard Melaine E.L. Bush further claims, “For millions of Americans without health insurance, jobs or housing, freedom means being free to be sick, unemployed or homeless” (143). American Dream is quite different for those who are not getting the things. In spite of the fact that all men are created equal there is quite different definition of freedom-to be sick,

unemployed and homeless. Freedom itself has manifold interpretations. It clearly shows that American Dream is not always about the success but also about failure.

The failure of American Dream is mainly because of its inherent cause. It excessively focuses on the importance of money. Money determines who are you and it is valued over everything. And it is justified by any means. It is considered as more money more prestigious in the society. In the same way Franzen's characters are guided by money economy. They even think that a man without money is hardly a man. Without the money, human values and ethos do not matter. The one without money has no any value in the social matter. Social Prestige and humanity are measures in monetary value. He writes, "The problem was money and the indignities of life without it. Every stroller, cell phone, Yankle cup, and Su V he saw was a torment. He wasn't covetous, he wasn't envious. But without money he was hardly a man" (66). Above lines show how much money minded society is functioning there in the contemporary America. Only the money has value in this society, without money there is no existence of man. It indicates that to become a man you need money. Money becomes the epitome of human being. All the human values are measured in the form of money and materiality.

The novel illustrates that, spiritual things like love and affection are also measured in money and materiality. Love is not in the true sense but fascination towards the material things like rings and ornaments etc, so far as Chip's relationship with Julia is concerned with matter. He loves her not by the soul but for material well being. Love is spiritual matter but here it changes with materiality. The present socio-economic context derives the character from reality and makes them hollow man. Emotional relationship changes into material one. There is relationship with married woman which is not the matter of shame but they take it easily. Chip is lately

involved with Julia. He is fascinated by the rings not by the spiritual love. Franzen writes, “And Chip was not. Indeed at first he not only mined didn’t that Julia is married, he adored the fact. He fascinates by her rings he talked her into wearing them in bed. . . .He had been excited by the idea of marriage as the right of property” (56). It proves the material love between Chip and Julia devoid of emotional attachment. And Julia also loved him not for emotional intimacy but only for the apartment. All things go bad to worse, nothing is as it is. Only material things are in the center even in human relations. Marriage is the right to property rather than the unity of spirit and emotional attachment. Extra marital affair is also acceptable to them for materiality like: ornament and apartment. Materiality is the epitome of prestige in the society.

In *Bait and Switch; the pursuit of American Dream*, Barbara Ehrenreich views that American Dream is associated with Liberalism. It is also democratic wish which is associated with commitment of people for their pursuit. It has been developed in the midst of several distinct political cultures. Ehrenreich argues:

Some describes American Dream as liberalism others describe it as a democratic wish or a jumbled accretion of commitments. But despite powerful claim that Americans have developed several distinct political cultures, I’m in good company in asserting that they all must deal with, even if they do not all accede to, a dominant ideology in which the American Dream is Central element. (XVIII)

Ehrenreich claims that American Dream is concerned with a democratic wish or a jumbled assertion of commitment. It is a dominant ideology in which lies the core component of American ideology.

American Dream has contradictory interpretation and elements within itself because the American cannot get neither freedom claimed by constitution nor right to

property ascertain their dream. The emphasis on money and material gain makes the person greedy and at the same time morally and ethically corrupted. There is unnecessary and unhealthy competition among people for money and materiality. In other words to have, American Dream one should have commitments since it is associated with due commitment and liberal ideology. Lambert family in the novel seems to have same ideology and practice. They are committed to achieve their dreams and aspirations. They want to earn money more and more. Gitanas says, “they are already sending me money on the basis of little joke I played. Not only sand and gravel, just a mean little joke I played. Tens of thousands of dollars already but I want them to send me millions” (72). They send money to Gitanas but he wants millions means more than whatever they send. Money does not work in this situation. Chip also wants high paid job to establish him in the society. All things are measured in the monetary value. Consequently the characters run after money. In this way Franzen shows, “Chip wants a base salary of a thousand a day plus performance incentive” (77). It also shows the person is recognized by whatever he/she does and earn. He gets business class plans fare too of course Enid says in this way it shows that money measures the personality and prestige in the society. So he needs more money to show him as a good person.

Humanity and human values are not measured. It is money and materiality which makes difference in the society. Social prestige only gains through the money and matter. In this regard Hochschild argues, “American Dream was that everybody was going to make . . . A billion dollars, but it was that everybody was going to have opportunity and chance to live a life with some decency and some dignity and a chance for self respect” (13). Here, she views that every Americans have dream of material success and get rich by money, opportunity and chance to live dignified life.

In order to get their goal, people have to go beyond doing even wrong things to become the self-respected person in the society. Materiality and money economy are their pulling factor rather than humanity, social norms and values, ethics and morality.

Henry S. Nevins Commager argues that dream consists of success in social intercourse and each person has their dream in different ways they have same chance to fulfill it Commager argues:

Everyone can put their own dream in different ways but banded in the same ideas same chance for everyone the same of level, the competition to achieve, and the important thing is the idea of success, individualism and hard work. Everyone must succeed in performance in social intercourse or succeed in collecting money. (156)

According to Commager, American Dream refers to having succeeded in the achievement, performance, social intercourse or success in collecting money. He also links it with money economy by the individuals practice. In the same way, Franzen's characters are going behind the money to gain prestige in the society even by forgetting their moral ground to show the success in their life. They even tell lies to their own mother and family members. This can be seen in the following lines:

So what do you think about Chips new job? Enid asked her brightly

his-?

well at the Wall Street Journal.

Denise studied the tabletop. I have no opinion about it

Do you think he works there full time?

No

I don't understand what kind of job it is.

Mother I know nothing about it

Is he still doing law. (99)

Above mentioned lines suggests how the Lambarts are indifferent towards their parents and relatives neglect them to show their superiority. Mother Enid is curious about Chip's new job and wants to know about the nature of job but could not get true information about it. Chip's brother and sister are disinterested but mother is curious and never gets correct information because Chip exactly works for Warren Street Journal. In order to show his success, he says Wall street journal, which is more prestigious than other and when mother asks about the nature of job his sister pretend to be nothing knows which shows the disharmony among the family member and they lie with mother for the social prestige no one cares about the mother talk but they make her the mockery by misinforming her. It shows how they behave with their parents to show their so called progress and success in their life. These lines also show that there is not the family relation as it is. It is artificial and largely shaped by money rather than love and affection.

Enid, the mother of the family also prioritizes money for upward mobility. It indicates that, money is the motto of people in such type of society. They become irresponsible to others if there is no relation with money or matter. Enid says, "And I am saying you are being irresponsible you are being selfish if you want to eat peanut but and pinch pennies that's your business but it is not fair to mom and it's not fair to - I don't give a damn what you and your mother think" (93). Man becomes more irresponsible and selfish due to the business and materialism. Materiality and money economy make them only the physical man. They are the hollow men without human spirit. They do not have any human ethos and values.

As depicted in the novel, there is neither the business ethics nor the morality of Enid. Only her concern is how to get money and make benefit. Hochschild argues,

“Mere wealth may actually impede true success, the attainment of which requires a long list of virtues” (23). She argues in the sense the wealth itself does not become the key of true success but it demands the long list of virtues. They forget their human relationship. All relations are measured in the monetary value in capitalist society. Husband wife relation also changes in the monetary relation and most of them are getting frustrated and depressed because of lack of emotional attachment with family and society. They commit mistakes and pay cost for it.

The novel illustrates that the quest for money ultimately leads towards depression. As Franzen writes, “Being depressed and he was afraid that if the idea that he was depressed gained currency he was forfeited his right to his opinions. He would forfeit his moral certainties; every word he spoke would become a symptom of disease; he would never again win an argument” (99). Gary become depressed and his all words show his irrecoverable state. At the last line it is hinted that he never wins his argument. In other words, he never recovers from his mental illness i.e. depression. Gary commits mistakes and these mistakes cost him. They want to become one's own boss and self dependent. So they have right to decide what to do. He utters, “Dad that's my decision its final, Caleb it doesn't matter through Caroline said Gary does not matter because he has got his own money he can spend it however he wants right Caleb?” (100). These lines also show that if you get the money it is your property and you can do whatever you want. You are free to make decision and imply it accordingly. There is no one's objection and recommendation, thereby leading towards moral anarchy.

The failure of American Dream emerges out of the seed of the dream itself. It means American dream invites its failure too. It is because American Dream refers to the upward mobility, the suggestive of success and prosperity. It encourages everyone

to win but it does not encourage losing. In this way people try to get success for better happy and prosperous life. In the name of getting success people begin to compromise with social norms and values, ethics and morality. In other words people violate social norms values ethics and morality. In this race of violating social norms and values people begin to surpass on another. In this regard what has been conceived the incantation and slogan of American Dream not to hollowness and futile resulting into decay, degradation, dismay and downfall equipped with alienation, frustration, disjunction, family disintegration and so on. American Dream turns out to be failure of people's wrong tendency to get success by any cost for better and dignified life, personal liberty and pursuit of happiness. The novelist also shows these things at the last part of novel as:

He was wrong to attempt to hang himself with bed sheets in the night. He was wrong to try to slash his wrist with dinner fork. Altogether he was wrong about so many things that, except for her four days in New York and her two Christmas in Philadelphia and her three weeks of recovery from hip surgery, she never failed to visit him. She had to tell him, while she still had time, how wrong he had been and how right she'd been (346-347).

Aforementioned lines provide the information about the characters' wrong doing tendencies. Characters make severe mistakes in their life but few things are positive, which are not sufficient to correct them. Only the exception is few days in whole life. They still have time to differentiate right and wrong but not time to correct it. This sort of wrong tendency is prevalent throughout the novel among the characters. Al Lambart and his family have the dream of upward mobility through hard work in their respective field. But in course of achieving success through hardworking, they cannot refrain from compromising social norms and values. They do the actions which are

socially considered to be the matter of stigma. To get success in life, Chipgets married to a married woman and damn care about the parents, involved with student this action makes him morally and ethically degraded.

Family reunion becomes the tragedy for Gary, when he goes to St. Judge for last Christmas. It leads his family towards divorce and his reunion with parents separates his wife. This is the tragic part of the materialistic Gary. They have hope to change their personality which seems in the lines, “what to believe about Al Lambart? There were the old man things he said about himself and the young man way he looked. Life then becomes a matter of waiting for his personality to change” (375). This excerpt shows the dysfunctional family has chance to change the personality but it is quite challenging. This seems as a superficial optimism. Ribbat claims this as, “immensely superficial optimism”(556). At the length of the novel there is no any possibility of betterment of life but Franzen even at the last of the novel:

He moved for nothing and responded for nothing except to shake his head emphatically, once If Enid tried to put an ice chip in his mouth. The one thing he never forgets was how to refuse. All of her corrections had been for naught he was as stubborn as the day she had met him and yet when he was dead when she'd pressed her lips to his forehead and walked out with Denise and Gary into the warm spring night, she felt that nothing could kill her hope now nothing. She was seventy five and she was going to make some changes in her life. (347)

These lines however represent optimism of Enid Lambart, for future betterment and satisfied life. She faces all these things like unemployed and depressed son, daughter without morality but still she faintly hopes for future betterment. In this regard Ribbat opines, “the last sentence of the novel refer to Enid Lambart the mother of three

grown children which lives revolves around adultery , fraud and depression respectively and the wife of a person suffering from dementia and Parkinson's. The novel concludes and she was going to make changes in her life" (565). In this excerpt Ribbat opines that a repressed female character has the optimism to change her life. Her all family members have their own problems and disease like depression, fraud and Parkinson, knows all the problems of the family members. She still has a hope of life, liberty and pursuit of happiness but it is not possible because of their wrong doing and unethical work.

The novel thus presents a dark, even scathing narrative about family power struggle, sharply critique of capitalism and of therapeutic culture, which offers its characters only a qualified and limited redemption and promises nothing better than madness and death at the end of life. As critiqued by Christoph Ribbat, the novel shows, "practically all the possible corrections that American culture offers are satirized in the Franzen's novel: psychodrugs, the boom economy, the internet, the therapeutic academy, postmodern educational philosophy" (565). He shows that there is no possibility of reformation in American culture or in their lives because all the possible ways of correction fail because of their guiding force i.e. monetary economy. Everything and everyone in the novel seems to be connected with subterranean web of money and coincidence.

In this way, the novel is concerned with American Dream and its failure simultaneously as represented by various characters. It moves around the longing of characters for better life and prosperity. But in the name of achieving success each character begins to indulge into cult of forgetting the social norm and value. Consequently they face severe anxiety, perils, and hazard resulting into alienation fragmentation, disjunction, and decay of family value family disintegration and

dismay.

Firstly, the study has revealed that the so called progress as promised by American Dream has appeared as the dreadful situation of moral degradation. The self progress and individualism have rather weakened moral vitality and inner spirit of American society. All the characters, mostly youngsters talk about their job, business and commerce. Excess individualism has wrecked family bond and emotional attachment. Franzen thus, is the social critic and his works attacks on degradation, inducing ethics of late capitalism and myth of American dream.

Secondly, this study also concludes that American Dream is such a dreadful ideology, which only concerns to the money economy and compromise and social norms and values to grab the so called success. Affected by this dreadful ideology of success Gary, Chip and Denise seldom think about the consequences of their activities. Materialism, Freedom and pleasure are their motto. As a result, they lead with moral and ethical degradation.

Hence, Franzen critiqued the American Dream and its failure simultaneously as represented by various characters. It moves around longing of characters for better life and prosperity like that of Al Lambart who has dream of his own life and pursuit of happiness. To grasp his dream of independent and dignified life with essence of due freedom, liberty along with happiness, Lambart works hard, at the length of the novel he becomes the tragic figure resulting into nothingness, hollow and morally degraded. And similar is the case with other character. In the name of achieving success character begins to indulge in to the cult of wrong doing compromising the social norms and values because of which they happen to face severe anxiety, perils and hazards resulting into alienation, fragmentation and disjunction.

Thus, the research also reveals the problematic social cultural values like

obsession for the name and fame, materiality, luxury, disintegration and insecure moral and family values, sexual perversions, extra marital affairs as the primary components for the critiquing the notion of American Dream. In this regard, the novel clearly makes a point that American Dream is residing upon the empty promises of materiality and nearly illusory or mere fantasy.

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