

Chapter 1

The Ideal of the American Dream: Concept and Background

1.1 The Evolution of the Ideal of American Dream

Ideal refers to an idea, imagination or mental activities of a person that exists beyond this material/physical world. Idealists define ideal as a belief, thought, perception and that so-called physical things are manifestations of mental activities. In *The Republic*, Plato presents the concept of ideal as the perfect forms of goodness, truth and beauty and that are cultivated, and everything repugnant to that is excluded. He views the world of sense perception as “inferior to the world of ideal entities that exist only in a pure spiritual realm” (1). These ideals, or forms, had been perceived directly by everyone before birth, and then dimly remembered here on earth. But the memory, even dim as it is, makes it possible for people to understand what is perceived by the senses despite the fact that the senses are so unreliable and perceptions are so imperfect. This view of reality has long been important to philosophers because it gives a philosophical basis to anti-materialistic thought. It values the spirit first and frees people from the tyranny of sensory perception and sensory reward.

The Cambridge Advanced Learner’s Dictionary supports the notion defining ideal as it is regarded as “without any fault, or the best possible of the things or perfection” (621). So, ideal is a concept or a form existing only in mind which can not be faintly perceived or grasped through our sense perceptions but can be reasoned. Similarly, *The Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary* explains ideal as “desirable by all and perfect but exists only in the imagination” (442). It refers to the idea of mind based on perfection, beauty, happiness, prosperity or the like that is worth trying to

achieve by everyone in one's life. It is ontological being different from epistemological knowledge.

In this regard, since the beginning of the civilization having the imagination of ideal/perfect world pursued for happy life of riches, gold, spices and valuables. Their ideal was to live happily, equally and freely avoiding hardship, sorrow, war and toil. Later during the Fifteenth century, some early Europeans searched for a land where they could live happily and could get riches, gold, spices and valuables. Their ideal thought was to be fulfilled when they found a virgin land America. Such ideal later turned into the phrase – The American Dream – an ideal shaped by the infinite hopes and possibilities of the early Europeans and later immigrants in the new found land of opportunities, riches, equality and prosperity as perceived by different groups of settlers at different times. In connection to the evolution of the ideal of the American Dream, Robert E. Spiller et al. write:

Ever since the early days of Western civilization, people had dreamed of a lost Paradise, of a Golden Age characterized by abundance, absence of war, and absence of toil. With the first accounts of the New World, it was felt that these dreams and yearnings had become a fact, a geographical reality fraught with unlimited possibilities. (192-215)

They had an ideal of lost paradise of a Golden Age characterized by abundance, absence of war and absence of toil, and it was felt when those early Europeans and later settlers found America. The American Dream suggests yearnings and unlimited possibilities consisted of three components: all men are equal, man can trust and should help his fellow man, and the good, virtuous and hard working are rewarded. Regarding to the concept to the ideal of the American Dream, Dan Rather opines that it is “older even than the nation and the words that give its name (XII). He

further says, “The land promised infinite possibilities equally to the Puritans and the early European immigrants, and there were no challenges for them to fulfill their dreams” (10).

The myth of the American Dream promised them that human beings are self-made creatures regardless of one’s origin/root is merely a false idealism. Hence, their ideal is connected to the notion that it is possible for anyone in America, no matter what his or her root/origin, background, and tradition to win success and wealth in their life as long as they have own skill, courage, determination and hard work. In accordance with the definition of *Webster’s Third New International Dictionary*, the American Dream is “the widespread aspiration of Americans to live better than their parents did” (25). In fact, the Dream turned into a false ideal when manifested into distorted reality, especially after the First World War. *The Great Gatsby* projects the ideal of the American Dream as success and wealth; money and matter; love and sex; pleasure and happiness; illusion and disillusion as well as violence and death. Hence, the Dream is equated with false imagination of mind, and hence fails to materialize into reality.

At the root of it is the sense that America was created entirely separate from the Old World; the settlers had escaped from the feudal, fractious and somewhat ossified nations of Europe and been presented with a chance to start anew – a fresh green breast of the new world. From this blank slate, those first idealistic settlers had created a society where all men were treated equal and everyone had the chance to do the best for themselves as they themselves could. The Dream existed before the actual continent was known as “America”, and this Dream is one of the most powerful ideas in the history of human achievement. It manifested differently in different time. Nevertheless, the ideal of the Dream was used during the era after the

stock market crash and between the World Wars that the historian James Truslow Adams became the first to use the phrase i.e. The American Dream. Thus, he views in *The Epic of America* in this way:

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 the American dream, that dream of a 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)

The origin of the phrase “The American Dream” appears to be from a history book, entitled *The Epic of America*. The term stems from the department in government and economics from the models of the Old World. Additionally, from the American Revolutionary War well into the later half of the Eighteenth-century, many of America’s physical resources were unclaimed and held out the promise of land ownership and lucky investment in land or industry in the Nineteenth-century. In this ideal, “money” is usually associated with “success”. The development of the Industrial Revolution combined with the great natural resources and as yet unsettled by Europeans continent creates the possibility of achieving wealth and transitioning “from rags to riches”.

The living conditions in Europe and the hope of a better standard of living in America led to the migration of hundreds of thousands to the New World. Impoverished Western Europeans escaping the potato famines in Ireland, the Highland clearances in Scotland and the aftermath of Napoleon in the rest of Europe went to America to escape their old life. They had heard about the government in America and hoped for an escape from their old life. Later, Southern and Eastern

Europeans came in search of the same dreams sought after by their northern counterparts. Asian Americans began crossing the Pacific in the Nineteenth century to find work in the American West. Italian immigrants surged in record numbers in the early Twentieth century as Jews escaping religious persecution in the Russian Empire fled to America in search of the liberty offered in terms of religion, riches, equality, safety and opportunity. Presently immigrants from across the globe such as people from Southern Asia, Latin America and the former USSR and countless other lands come in search of the American Dream. However, in context of the history, Harold Clurman says, “The historical American Dream is the promise of a land of freedom with opportunity and equality for all” (212). Thomas Jefferson, one of the signatories of the Declaration of Independence (1776) expresses, “We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their creator with certain inalienable rights, that these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness” (174). The phrase “Pursuit of Happiness” that the signatories promised in the declaration has been considered as an essential component of the American Dream, is felt everywhere. He borrowed insights from John Locke’s concept “Property” replacing to “Pursuit of Happiness” advocating for the equality of all human beings. During the Seventeenth and Eighteenth centuries, “Life, liberty and property” was a subject of political debates in the English-speaking world. However, the Declaration of Independence substitutes “The pursuit of Happiness” for property in the then popular phrase “Life, liberty and property” suggesting that “Pursuit of happiness” was an extension of “Property”.

The Industrial Revolution was one of many great forces that developed the ideal more. The development of big business, the Transcontinental Railroad, and the increase in oil production greatly increased the American standards of living. “Rags

to riches” stories of business tycoons like Andrew Carnegie and John D. Rockefeller led to the belief that if you had talent and worked extremely hard, you were more likely to live a successful life.

The ideal of freedom and opportunity that motivated the Founding Fathers was the spiritual strength of the nation. As a force behind government philosophy, it seems to be interpreted by most users as a combination of freedom and opportunity with growing overtones of social justice. The American Dream builds on the system of American values and especially on the ones that are called equality and future orientation. The term has a precise definition. The real essence of the American Dream is not only “Grab the gold”, but also optimism that things will be set straight that something good lies ahead. In this sense, the American Dream builds on the American value of future orientation.

Politically, the evolution of the American Dream is based on liberty, individual rights and equality. Moreover, the ideal is that human beings are free to live their own lives, to decide what shape those lives ought to take is at the heart of the American political tradition, and what people in other lands focuses on first in their understanding of American history. For a real sense, America is essentially an ideal yet unfulfilled, an ideal of a land where men of all races of all nationalities and of all creeds can live together as brothers. The substance of that ideal is expressed in these sublime words, “We hold these truths to be self-evident that all men are created equal that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights that among these are life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness (Jefferson 8). The founding father of the nation had dreamt the nation to be free from suppression and division within the society. Martin Luther King, Jr., in this context, states:

One hundred years later, the manacles of segregation and the chains of discrimination still sadly cripple the life of the Negro. One hundred years later, the Negro lives on a lonely island of poverty in the midst of vast ocean of material prosperity. One hundred years later, the Negro is still languishing in the corners of American society and finds himself an exile in his own land. (3-4)

One of the first things we notice in this ideal is an amazing universalism. It does not say some men but says to all men. It does not say all white men but it says all men, which includes black men. It does not say all Gentiles but it says all men, which includes Jews. It does not say all Protestants but it says all men, which includes Catholics. This ultimately distinguishes democracy and our form of government from all of the totalitarian regimes that emerges in history. Each individual has certain basic rights that are neither conferred by nor derived from the state. To discover where they came from it is necessary to move back behind the dim mist of eternity, for they are God-given. Very seldom if ever in the history of the world has a socio-political document expressed in such profoundly eloquent and unequivocal language the dignity and the worth of human personality. This ideal reminds us that every man is heir to the legacy of worthiness.

Ever since the founding fathers of the nation dreamed this noble ideal i.e. America has been something of a schizophrenic personality, tragically divided against herself. On the one hand, there are the principles of democracy; and on the other hand, there is anti-thesis of those principles. Indeed, slavery and segregation have been strange paradoxes in a nation founded on the principle that all men are created equal. It has not become a reality devoid of the larger dream of a world of brotherhood and peace and good will. The world in which we live is a world of

geographical oneness and we are challenged now to make it spiritually one. Abraham Lincoln who had ideal vision to see this America could not exist half slave and half free. Explicit in “The Declaration of Independence” and implicit in the original Constitution were first given explicit constitutional authority by the Fourteenth Amendment’s equal protection clause. Equality also had been a powerful American political idea as an actual condition of American life, as a goal toward which Americans aspired or both. And yet the nature of American equality as an actual condition of life and as a national aspiration had always been subject to controversy. One vital question in considering the theme of equality in American history was – “How sincere is the American aspiration to achieve equality for the entire American people including those who differ in race, sex, ethnicity, religion, culture or economic status from those Americans with political power?” This question was posed most starkly by the history of African-Americans’ struggle for legal, political, and social equality, but it was equally challenging when applied to the historical experiences of such groups as women, non-Christians or Hispanic Americans.

Over four centuries, “life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness have long represented the promise of America” (Cullen 19). Touted by poets, pundits, and politicians, the American Dream was the spark that animates American life, the promise held out to youngsters and immigrants that hard work would result in security and prosperity. The reality of that Dream, however, had long depended on the circumstances of the dreamer since many had been effectively barred from pursuing it. America’s complex and evolving social landscape to show the contexts that had shaped the Dream and the patterns of exclusion that had left some dreaming in vain. Jim Cullen further says:

The fullest exploration yet of the origins and evolution of the ideal that serves as the foundation of our national ethos and collective self-image. By placing opportunity and aspiration at the center of the American Creed, the Dream has become a force for expanding opportunity. The ideal to its origins and chronicles its progress to the present day. This Dream's changing content and our broadening sense of who has had the right to pursue it, charting a middle course between viewing the Dream as triumphant ideal and false promise. (4)

Marked by continuity, renewal, and expansion, the image of the Dream had been remarkably constant since well before the American Revolution – an image of a nation offering a better chance for prosperity than any other. Later, that Dream motivated the nation's leaders and common citizens to move, sometimes grudgingly, toward a more open, diverse, and genuinely competitive society. The excessive openness and freedom, however, led Americans to forget their past values and have made the society go without proper social order. The dream of the land also got mutilated because of unmanaged freedom and the decay of moral/spiritual values in America. To disobey the social order was taken as a natural freedom by the Americans that were against the vision of the founders of the American society that individual dignity and the worth of a person can be attained through hard work.

Change in the existing pattern of economy affected not only the national economy but also the emotional aspects of people. The loss of the hopes but quest for the economic prosperity also led to the economic depression. The quest for extensive materialistic luxury was the main factor for the degradation of morality or spiritual decay. The American people forgot their hopes and possibilities of the past that was shaped by the early settlers in the newfound land. They hoped that the land had a

promise of freedom and infinite possibilities for all. They also hoped that the money and matter would bring them prosperity if they could use the money properly.

Nevertheless, it appeared as an imperfect and unfulfilled ideal as their thought or imagination. The myth of the American Dream that the human beings are self-made creatures with infinite potentials to achieve wealth, freedom, happiness, love, or whatever they desired for, went wrong. In this context, William Wasserstrom says:

We are members of a generation whose lives are molded by imagination not of mere disaster but of utter ruin: the ruin of whole peoples, of whole nations, of the earth. Ruin, in turn, is a consequence of human criminality so outrageous that not even Genet's art can rival the real facts of ordinary life. (138-147)

Hence, the new generation later was led to the path of nowhere because of the quest for materialistic prosperity. Though in course of history, America generated a race of heroes like Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Jefferson and Martin Luther King, Jr. who all contributed to make the American Dream ideal more intense. Despite their hard work, they could not materialize their ideal dream into reality.

1.2 Different Perspectives on Idealism

Idealism is a philosophy that is concerned with the questions of its meaning about idea and its fundamental features and properties and based on the idea that physical things are manifestations of mind or thought. The view of idealism holds that only the mental or spiritual exists originally. Mind makes up the whole or an indispensable aspect of the ultimate reality as well as the nature and identity of the "mind" which the reality is dependent upon. The doctrine of idealism contrasts with materialism with the question of the idea and the nature of reality. More extreme

version of idealism and materialism refers to the reality to be existed in our mind as idea and that idea determines real existence and vice-versa.

Idealists have argued idealism as an objective mind outside of nature; it is simply the common power of reason or rationality. It is even said as collective mental facilities of society and the minds of individual human beings. In *The Allegory of the Cave*, Plato uses a vivid allegory to explain his two-realm philosophy. He invites us to imagine a cave in which some prisoners are bound so that they can look only at the wall in front of them. Behind them is a fire whose light casts shadows of various objects on the wall in front of the prisoners. Because the prisoners cannot see the objects themselves, they regard the shadows they see as the true reality. One of the prisoners eventually escapes from the cave and, in the light of the sun, sees real objects for the first time, becoming aware of the big difference between them and the shadow images he had always taken for reality. His epistemological idealism expresses that this material/physical world is merely the world, which contains shadows of the real realm as a form (Moore and Bruder 32). Hence, Brooke N. Moore and Kenneth Bruder narrate in *Philosophy: The Power of Ideas* as follow:

Plato's Theory of Forms, what is truly real is not the object we encounter in sensory experience but, rather, Forms, and these can only be grasped intellectually. Therefore, once you know what Plato's Forms are, you will understand the Theory of Forms and the essential of Platonic metaphysics. What you encounter in the physical world is always some object or other (32)

Plato locates real existence in what he calls "Forms" or "Ideas", rather than in the world of "appearance" that we experience through the senses. Plato expresses "The objects that we perceive through the senses are merely copies of the ideas and

our rational powers acquaint us with the ideas and with truth” (12). Further, he intends to imply that our sense perception fails to perceive the real world, as the real world does not exist in material/physical world, and similarly Socrates views this world saying as merely a collection of copies of copies of the ideas/forms. Plato further opines:

This world that appears to the senses has no true being, but only a ceaseless becoming; it is, and it also is not; and its comprehension is not so much knowledge as an illusion. Men are firmly chained in a dark cave; see neither the genuine original light nor actual things, but only the inadequate light of the fire in the cave, and the shadow of actual things passing by the fire behind their backs. Yet they imagine that the shadows are the reality, and that determining the succession of these shadows is true wisdom. (15)

Plato explains his two realms by the use of allegory – one is mental as an idea i.e. ideal world or the world of sunlight representing the realm of Forms, and the other which is physical representing the world we see and experience with our senses. He proposes idealism as a solution to the problem of universals. A universe is that in which all things share in virtue of having some particular property. The wall, the moon and blank sheets of a paper are all white; white is the universal that all white things share. He argues that it is universals, the forms, or ideals that are real, not specific individual things because this idea asserts that these mental entities are real.

Subjective idealist and phenomenologist George Berkeley believes on only idea that can have reality and the minds and their experiences, constitute existence. This gives rise to static perception and the individual’s mind is paramount for them. On the contrary, objective idealists hold that either there is ultimately only one

perceiver who is identical with what is perceived, or the thought makes possible the highest degree of self-determination and thus the highest degree of reality. Leibniz carries that all objects of experiences though very different from the consciousness of animals. In seeking to find out what we could know with certainty, George Berkeley decides that our knowledge must be based on our perceptions. This leads him to conclude that there is indeed no “real” knowledge object behind one’s perception that what is “real” and is the perception itself.

A separate doctrine epistemological idealism is also known as “way of ideas”, asserts the mind to be aware of or perceive only its own ideas, and not external objects. Berkeley’s argument for his metaphysical idealism is built around the difficulties in Locke’s epistemological position. But other influential metaphysical idealists such as Plotinus, Leibniz, and Hegel, are not based primarily on epistemological considerations. So, “idealism” in general i.e. metaphysical idealism is defined in a way that makes it depends on epistemological considerations. Epistemological idealist such as Immanuel Kant insists that the only things that can be directly known for certain are ideas.

In *Critique of Pure Reason*, Immanuel Kant describes idealism as such:

We are perfectly justified in maintaining that only what is within ourselves can be immediately and directly perceived, and that only my own existence can be the object of a mere perception. The existence of a real object outside we can never be given immediately and directly in perception, but can only be added in thought to the perception, which is a medication of the internal sense, and thus inferred as its external cause. (7)

In the true sense of the word, external things can never be perceived but only can be inferred their existence from own inter perception, regarding the perception as an effect of something external must be the proximate cause. Therefore, an idealist is someone who denies the existence of external objects of the senses; all he does is to deny that they are known by immediate and direct perception.

In much of Western thought, the ideal relates to direct knowledge of subjective mental ideas or images. It is juxtaposed with realism in which the real is said to have absolute existence prior to and independent of our knowledge. According to Rene Descartes, it is possible to doubt the reality of the external world as consisting of real objects. He further says, "I doubt, therefore I am" (Van Doren 204) is the only assertion that cannot be doubted because self-consciousness and thinking are the only things that are unconditionally experienced for certain as being real. Descartes, in this way, poses the issue of epistemological idealism, which is awareness of the difference between the world as an ideational mental picture and the world as a system of external objects.

In *Monadology*, Baron Von Leibniz expresses ideal as the theory of monads. He holds Monads are the true atoms of the universe, and are also entities having sensation. They are "substantial forms of being" and are indecomposable, individual, subject to their own laws, un-interacting, and each reflecting the entire universe (105). Monads are centers of force; substance is force while space, matter, and motion are phenomenal. For him, there is an exact pre-established harmony or parallel between the world in the minds of the alert monads and the external world of objects. God, who is the central monad, established this harmony and the resulting world is an idea of the monads' perception. In this way, the external world is ideal in that it is a spiritual phenomenon whose motion is the result of a dynamic force. Space and time

are ideal or phenomenal and their form and existence is dependent on the simple and immaterial monads. Leibniz's cosmology, with its central monad, embraced a traditional Christian Theism and was more of a personalism than the naturalistic Pantheism of Spinoza.

Moreover, regarding idealism and reality, Immanuel Kant says that the mind shapes the world as we perceive it to take the form of space-and-time. He focuses on the idea on the mental impressions, or phenomena, that an outside world, which may or may not exist independently, creates in our minds. Our minds can never perceive that outside world directly. This Kantian sort of idealism opens up a world of abstractions i.e. the universal categories minds use to understand phenomena, to be explored by reason; we cannot approach the "noumenon", the "Things in Itself" outside our own mental world. His idealism goes by the counterintuitive name of transcendental idealism.

Similarly, one of the great idealists George Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel argues in *Science of Logic* that finite qualities are not fully "real" because they depend on other finite qualities to determine them. Qualitative infinity, on the other hand, would be more self-determining, and hence would have a better claim to be called fully real. Similarly, finite natural things are less "real" because they are less self-determining than spiritual things like morally responsible people, ethical communities and God. So any doctrine, such as materialism, that asserts that finite qualities or merely material objects are fully real, is mistaken. His philosophy on idealism is closely resembles to Plato and Plotinus because none of these three thinkers associates their idealism with the epistemological thesis that what we know are "ideas" in our minds (3). Hegel contributes to a philosophical tradition beginning with Plato that has been

obscured by the modern preoccupation with the epistemological problem of the subject's access to the "external world."

In "On the Fundamental View on Idealism", Schopenhauer defines the ideal as being mental pictures that constitute subjective knowledge (27). The ideal, for him, is what can be attributed to our own minds. The images in our head are what comprise the ideal. He emphasizes that we are restricted to our own consciousness. The world that appears there is only a representation or mental picture of objects. We directly and immediately know only representations. All objects that are external to the mind are known indirectly through the mediation of our mind. His history is an account of the concept of the "ideal" in its meaning as "ideas in a subject's mind". Thus, he does not refer to the other meaning of "ideal" as being qualities of the highest perfection and excellence. Here, Arthur Schopenhauer notes the ambiguity of the word "idealism" by calling it a "term with multiple meanings", as he says:

True philosophy must at all costs be idealistic; indeed, it must be so merely to be honest. For nothing is more certain than that no one ever came out of himself in order to identify himself immediately with things different from him; but everything of which he has certain, sure, and therefore immediate knowledge, lies within his consciousness. Beyond this consciousness, therefore, there can be no immediate certainty There can never be an existence that is objective absolutely and in itself; such an existence, indeed, is positively inconceivable. For the objective, as such, always and essentially has its existence in the consciousness of a subject; it is therefore the subject's representation, which belong to the subject and not to the object. (29)

Schopenhauer's "idealism" is based primarily on considerations having to do with the relation between our ideas and external reality, rather than being based on considerations having to do with the nature of reality as such.

The dictums of all genuine idealism are based on different perceptions and views, and they are merely based on in terms of idea, belief, imagination, thought, perception and mental entities.

1.3 An Overview: Disillusionment of an Ideal of the American Dream

Disillusionment is an act of disenchanting, especially to disappoint or embitter by leaving without illusion. It causes disappointment from discovering that something is not as good as one believed it to be. In *The Great Gatsby*, the dichotomy between the ideal they believed it to be and the real manifestation in reality, is the main cause of disillusionment. This clarifies the lack or loss of faith or hopes previously held. It is civilization that governs love, peace, brotherhood and spiritual relationship among people, but in the absence of it, human beings get corrupted, and they collapse their real essence as in *The Great Gatsby*. It portrays the spiritual decay, superficial love, selfish motive, hypocrisy, violence, death and corrupted mentality of modern people of 1920s' America.

The theme of *The Great Gatsby* is based on the ideal of the American Dream correspondences to the story of the history of America. It was made its fiery inception during the American War of Independence (1776-83), when it became the central theme of it. It states, "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by God, Creator, with certain inalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness" (Dream I). But such ideal or the dream to have equality, happiness in their life could not be fulfilled when they had hostile relationship with Native Americans and immigrants from Asia and

Africa. Along with the hostility between the immigrants and the Native Americans, slavery too played a vital role in proving that the American Dream was a concept founded on baseless grounds.

With the increment in the colony and expansion of agriculture, the Americans needed more labor. At that time, they could not make a vision of advancement but could not make a sound decision of justice, equality and impartiality. The Americans deprived other fellows as slaves to work for them in their plantations, and they were deprived from the rights of “life, liberty and pursuit of happiness” (*The American Dream I*). On the one hand, America professed the great principles of democracy; on the other hand, she sadly practised the very opposite of those principles. America went into war against her colonizer, Britain, and gained freedom. During this war, the black Americans too were idealists or dreamers. Their ideal was that they would get equal rights and opportunities after the country gets her independence. But that did not guarantee their equality, opportunities and freedom and so they were disillusioned as they find contradiction between their idealism and its manifestation into reality.

The attitude was bred into the bone of America and in various, often distorted ways it has lasted. Perhaps that was where the trouble begins for if these virtues of the American imagination have the elements of greatness in them, they call immediately for discriminating and practical correctives. The reality in such an attitude lays in its faith in life, the illusion lies in the indiscriminating multiplication of its material possibilities.

The post-War American Economic boom was also the cause to disillusioning reason of the ideal of the Dream of America. America experienced an enormous industrial and agricultural expansion after the First World War. With the change in economic order in America, the American society saw a change in the patterns of diet,

dress, entertainment and even thought. The “chicken-in-every-pot notion of material prosperity” widely regarded in the society caused the crumbling of the Utopian concept of the American Dream (Peppetone 2). The economic growth led America to urbanization and materialism, and thus economic factors rather than idealistic motives were emphasized that time. The earlier Americans’ Dream of “life and liberty” resulted in sexual orgies and drunken bouts and “pursuit of Happiness”, characterized by material desire and business ethics. Robert Darnton views that the Civil War, the closing of the frontier, the Jazz Age in 1920s, the great depression, and the antiwar activists of the 1960s represent the other multiple stages of disillusionment with the ideal of the American Dream (44).

In the 1920s, America had just come through the first great European war in which she had taken part, and the fruits of victory were already turning sour. There was a spirit of disillusion in the air. Not only old ways of life and ideals had been disrupted and shattered, but also new orders were coming in, and there were many who dreaded its impact. Millions of young men who had gone out to battle for “democracy” and the rest, were now putting off their uniforms and seemed to have no higher objective than to have a good time before they had to settle down to the harsh reality of getting a living. Not only men but also millions of women were experiencing an intoxicating feeling of emancipation and relief from the conventional restraints that still wrapped round their mothers. They had just granted the suffrage, but most of the new voters were much more interested in what they called “life” in politics.

Prohibition had just come in, and a great new industry sprang up almost overnight. Vile gin was manufactured in bake houses, “speakeasies” blared and blazed in almost every street, and the bootlegger was added to the list of American

occupations. Men who had never taken a drink before now gloried in becoming “criminals”, and young women who wanted to be “in the swim” made a boast of the number of times they had been “blotto”. Since by no means everybody had an automobile, and so a ride in a car was something of an event, and it became quite the recognized thing after a session at the movies watching Chaplin or Mary Pickford to spend an hour or two on the back seat of an open car “necking” with the latest boyfriend, who might be expected to have had the foresight to bring with him a bottle of “rye” (Bush 34). Francis Scott Fitzgerald called the period “the Jazz Age”.

This was the age of youth saw the glittering gold to be everywhere around them. As the attitudes towards life altered, the sense of culture and morality also changed. The past had been nearly destroyed in the spasms of war, and the future looked uncertain. Many people, feeling cut off from past and future welcomed the spirit of jazz and decided to live for the moment. The feelings of people have been shattered. Their expectations and inspirations have been damaged. The relationship between individuals has been cut off. Modern men were disillusioned because they did not find order, peace, progress, hope, optimism, unity, enthusiasm, and creativity in the post-war period. Their minds were filled with frustration, hopelessness, faithlessness, degeneration, immorality, cynicism and carnivalism. *The Great Gatsby* representing the same history of 1920s and the corrupted mentality of the American Dreamers, projects the corrupted ideal of people in America and their lives. The period determines concealed boundary that divides the reality from the illusions. The illusions seem more real than the reality itself. Embodied in the subordinate characters in the novel, they threaten to invade the whole of the picture. On the one hand, the reality is embodied in *Gatsby*, and as opposed to the hard, tangible illusions, the reality is a thing of the spirit, a promise rather than the possession of a vision, a

faith in the half-glimpsed, but hardly understood, possibilities of life. In Gatsby's America, the reality is undefined to itself so that the mere idea or belief of American Dream causes disillusionment. Hence, Nick Carraway, the narrator, states in *The Great Gatsby*:

Through all the said, even through his appalling sentimentality, I was reminded of something – an elusive rhythm, a fragment of lost words, that I had heard somewhere a long time ago. For a moment, a phrase tried to take shape in my mouth and my lips parted like a dumb man's, as though there was more struggling upon them than a wisp of startled air. But they made no sound, and what I had almost remembered was incommunicable forever. (142)

Fitzgerald chronicles the life of Jay Gatsby desiring to be guided by the ideal of American Dream ignoring moral values and ideal love of spirituality. He believes to achieve success, love, past, happiness and pleasure by solely material prosperity. Gatsby, for the sake of marrying his beloved Daisy, indulges into immoral and illegal activities. He wants fame, riches, parties, mansions, but most of all his past love of Daisy. When Gatsby has Daisy with him, he is happy but he does not have money, and when he has money, Daisy is not with him to make him happy. Gatsby tries to regain his past with the help of wealth that he earns in his life. Though he succeeds to materialize all worldly matters, he fails to win Daisy's heart in truly. So, to get her love as in past, Gatsby tries to attract her with his worldly possession, and even induces Daisy to ensure it in front of her husband, Tom. Gatsby insists her to admit that she never loved Tom. But Gatsby's such attempt is farther than she is willing to go. She denies agreeing to follow Gatsby's urge this time because she had loved once Tom too, but she loved Gatsby too. Daisy screams, "Isn't that enough?" . . . "I can't

help what is past” (123). By her such speech, Gatsby’s ideal is crushed in no time; he is completely disillusioned. His belief or assumption goes wrong into reality. Even if Gatsby is an ardent lover of Daisy, Daisy does not assume Gatsby as an ardent lover of her.

Throughout the novel, disillusion in relationships remains a recurring theme. It is seen in several places, specifically in Gatsby’s relationships with Daisy due to the misled by misconceptions and false beliefs of the American Dream. Daisy is so selfish that she lets the car accident be accused to Gatsby and Gatsby is so crazy that he is ready to take risk of Myrtle’s death caused by Daisy. Gatsby lives in an illusory world of make-believe having believed that money can purchase or regain everything in one’s life. He was unaware about the mistaken notion he had been considering as an ideal from long back. His personal notion is closely connected with the American Dream as well as the prevailing cultures of America in 1920s’ decadence of moral values, thereby causing disillusionment.

Gatsby thinks money is the answer to anything he encounters. He has the best of everything – the fanciest car, the largest car, the largest house, and the finest clothes except the ideal love he most desires, Daisy. He believes he can win Daisy over with wealth, and can achieve the ideal she stands for through his material possessions.

Regarding this, Matthew J. Bruccoli critiques here in connection of Americanism with *The Great Gatsby* itself:

An essential aspect of the Americanness and the historicity of *The Great Gatsby* is that it is about money. The Land of Opportunity promised the chance for financial success. Gatsby, who makes his

fortune in ways never envisioned by Benjamin Franklin, does not understand how money works in society. (1-13)

Hence, the history of Americanness and the novel itself is based on the fantasy than an individual can achieve success regardless of morality, origin/root, and tradition simply by working hard enough. In this dream, “money”, “matter” and “success” are frequently equated with the fortune that the independent and self-reliant individual can win. In *The Great Gatsby*, Fitzgerald examines and critiques Jay Gatsby’s particular ideal representing the scenario of 1920s America, and Fitzgerald himself is associated with the excesses of “The Roaring Twenties” or “The Economic Boom” of the contemporary America (Bewley 49). Fitzgerald is successful to project the era of decayed social and moral values evidenced of overarching cynicism, greed and empty pursuit of pleasure. The social phenomena of the reckless jubilation that led to decadent parties and jazz music – epitomized *The Great Gatsby* by the opulent parties Gatsby throws every Saturday night – resulted ultimately in the corruption of the ideal of American Dream as the unrestrained desire for money and pleasure surpassed more noble goals. In *Gatsby* Nick narrates Gatsby’s personality:

If personality is an unbroken series of successful gestures, then there was something gorgeous about him, some heightened sensitivity to the promise of life, as if he were related to one of those intricate machines that register earthquakes ten thousands miles away. This responsiveness had nothing to do with that flabby impressionability which is dignified under the name of the ‘creative temperament’ – it was an extraordinary gift for hope, a romantic readiness such as I have never found in any other person and which it is not likely I shall ever find again. (10)

Yet at the same time guided by the ideal of the American Dream, he comes to see social standing and high society as the most important aspects of personality rather than morality and truth which lead to disillusionment as well as to his eventual downfall and tragic death of Gatsby and retrospectively by a glance at history at the end of the novel.

Chapter 2

Fitzgerald and the Scenario of the 1920s

2.1 High Modernism of 1920s and Fitzgerald

After the First World War, the decade of 1920s was High Modernism based on the change from personal to impersonal as well as the misuse of inventions of science.

The feelings of people had been shattered. Their expectations and inspirations had been damaged. The relationships between individuals had been cut off. The War devastated world as well as people's ideal resulting in the erosion of morality/spirituality, religion, optimism, enthusiasm and creativity. That made the generations after post First World War shattered, confused and misled towards negative direction forgetting the previous norms, values, culture and assumptions. Many critics agree that it involves a deliberate and radical break with some of the traditional bases not only of Western art, but also of Western culture in general. Important intellectual precursors of modernism, in this sense, are thinkers who had questioned the certainties that had supported traditional modes of social organization, religion, and morality (67 Abrams).

Modernism is an atmosphere with a spirit of depression, gloom, frustration, disillusionment and foreboding. The real causes of this mood of frustration and disillusionment lie much deeper. There was a breakdown of ideals and values, and absence of sustaining faith. Gale Carrithers remarks that, "There is skepticism and doubt, apathy and indifference, towards spiritual problems. Man needs a sustaining faith, but such a faith has vanished after the First World War" (303-321). This "Jazz Age" showed considerable enthusiasm for cars, travel, telephone, and the other technological advances. At the same time, prohibition, the ban on the sale and consumption of alcohol mandated by the Eighteenth Amendment made millionaires out of bootleggers and encouraged organized crime. Fitzgerald idolized the riches and glamour of the age with the unrestrained materialism and lack of morality that went with it.

World War I inflicted a moral blow upon the comfortable old world of European culture; and in America even millions of women were experiencing an

intoxicating feeling of emancipation from the conventional restraints that still wrapped round their mothers. Their skirts got tighter and raised a few more inches toward the knee. They dabbed powder on their faces, and puffed cigarettes, when they took them out of their mouths, were marked with a “tale-tale ring of crimson” (Boyer et. al.77). “Skirts length crept up; make-up appeared on many female faces, and the elaborate and confining armor of petticoats was drastically reduced” (899). The subsequent events were the cataclysmic upheavals and avant-gardists embraced it. The failure of the present status quo seemed self-evident to a generation that had seen millions die fighting over scraps of earth. Exhibition, theatre, cinema, books and buildings all served to cement in the public view the perception the world was changing. Hostile reaction often followed, as paintings were spat upon, riots organized at opening of works, and political figures denounced modernism as unwholesome and immoral.

Embracing change and the present, modernism encompasses the works of thinkers who rebelled against Nineteenth century academic and historicist traditions believing the “traditional” forms of art, architecture, literature, religious faith and even daily life were becoming outdated. They directly confronted the new economic, social and political aspects of an emerging fully industrialized world. People felt a growing alienation incompatible with Victorian morality, optimism and convention. The decade of 1920s for the United States was the age of rapid growth in economy and change in social and cultural values. The nation centered on business, economic expansion, technological advancement and the speed of the consumerism. Change was everywhere as the economy boomed. Wealth spread, more altered, the texture of life changed. The economy shifted its centre from productive to consumption; the

focus moved from country to city and personal spending grew. The pace of change grew faster and faster. Malcolm Bradbury comment on the decade of 1920s:

The 1920s was an age of Puritanism and Prohibition, but also of psychoanalysis and flappers, Jazz and film. The age that challenged innovation and looked back nostalgically to the rural past also saw massive new technological advances: the airplane, the interstate highway, sound in movies, and the highly raised sophisticated excitement of the cities. (73-122)

Hence, the age advanced in many areas of entertainment business besides massive technological parts. The inner psychological thinking appeared open as a fundamental study of human psychology. It was the age of youths who saw the glittering gold to be everywhere around them. They were inclined to accumulate as much as possible by any means and rejoice with its consumption. They assumed that they were free from the conventional restraints, and turned to alcoholism, noisy parties and jazz clubs. Life was sought through money and luxury. It was the age when the century ceased to be English and Scottish and when the children of later immigrants moved forward to take their place in the national life. The age changed the focus and American culture became more urban than rural. New York set the social and intellectual standards that were set by settlers from southerners and Mid-westerners.

As the attitude toward life altered, the sense of culture and morality also changed. Besides, the talk of love, kiss and sex became ordinary to discuss among friends, guardians and parents. Female sexuality was acknowledged widely and openly. Love transformed into sexual gratification. Man became a material thing without any soul within him. Even love was bought and sold in the market place.

Americanism got identified with the mechanical production of pleasure. There seemed cultural inferiority in between the New World and Old. However, the machine age burst into culture challenging the older restrictive morality, communal values and conventional gender roles. The whole decade flashed the moral decadence, materialistic attachments, changes in moral values, and lack of faith and purity.

2.2 Roaring Twenties and the Economic Boom

The early effort of First World War upon the United States was much like that experienced during the period of French revolution and the Napoleonic wars. There ensued a five-year-period of enormous industrial and agricultural expansion caused in the first instance by increased European needs and later augmented by American participation in the War. Harold Underwood Faulkner states as the “Europeans turned from peace time pursuits the gap had to be filled elsewhere, and the United States a century earlier, served as a source of raw materials and food supplies” (582). During the War, America played an important role as an exporter of minerals, semi-manufactured goods, and munitions. It also entered the war but the increase in foreign trade was enormous. “It was the result not alone of the war needs of Europe but also of an increase in trade with Latin America and Asia where the United States was able to fill the gap made by the elimination of Germany and the preoccupation of Great Britain” (583). The excess of exports over imports, along with the prosperity in America and the destruction in Europe, helps to explain the shifting of the world’s financial center to New York. For the first time in American history it became a creditor’s nation.

The War also introduced major changes in the lives of millions of ordinary workers, farmers, blacks and women. The social, political, economic and

technological impact of the war extended beyond the battle-field. The conflict brought marked advancement in technology. America had productive capacity rested on the solid industrial ground. The automobiles, radios, electrical appliances, and other consumer goods brought a glow of prosperity to the nation's economy. The economy boom rested on the automobile fuelled by new consumer goods including wealth and electrical products, contributed to the general product. American business in the 1920s affected wage policies as well as production and organization.

“Rejecting the conventional economic wisdom, many enlightened business leaders began to argue that employers should not pay lowest wages possible rather higher wages should generate higher productivity” (832). This enabled even the factory workers to consume sophisticated consumer goods.

The automobiles, electrical appliances and myriad of other products flowed from the assembly lines reflected more than a change in the technological order. They heralded a new social and cultural era. “Not only did these products themselves change America's everyday lives, but also the standardized mass productions that spawned them proved as adaptable to the realm of ideas as to the realm of roadsters and refrigerators” (841). The America venerated the magnates of business and the new world of material comfort they had created. The 1920s census confirmed that the United States had become a nation of cities. For the first time, the urban population became a kind of “melting pot” and outnumbered the rural. This urban growth had wide cultures as one historian has written, “in the case of its mind, in its ideals and in its folk ways” (842).

Radios, the movies, corporation, advertising agencies and mass magazines powerfully shaped the society. These modern consumer goods made the life more luxurious in the urban areas. Technological and marketing innovations affected the

daily life of the city dwellers in innumerable ways. Vacuum cleaners supplanted brooms, dust pans, and carpet beaters. The time consuming task of firing up a wood stove became a memory. Store bought clothes replaced laboriously sewn homemade apparel. Even the refrigerator saved labor and electricity altered laundry routines. Many urban housewives had patronized commercial laundries to relieve themselves of the onerous chore of home laundering. With the arrival of electric washing machine and iron, this task moved back into the home. Food preparation and even eating patterns also shifted under the impact of electric and technological change. Most of the housewives used commercially backed bread; much of it trucked in from other countries. In earlier time's fresh fruits, vegetables and salads had vanished from American tables in the long winter months. With the "advent of refrigeration, supermarkets and motor transport, fruits and vegetables became available year-around significantly improving the national diet" (845).

There were traffic jams and the accident rate was soaring as the automobile increased in American society. Family vacation, virtually unheard of a generation earlier now, enjoyed a great vogue. The automobile helped break down the isolation of rural life and gave farm dwellers far easier excess to the city for shopping and entertainment. The young people lived with friends and peers for entertainment without the permission of their parents or guardians. Alice Rivlin states:

While the automobile brought the family together for excursions and vacations, it could also erode family cohesion. Young people welcomed the freedom from parental oversight that is offered. As the Lynds observed, young persons could now jump into a car with friends and drive to dance in distant city on a whim, with no one's permission asked. (843)

In contrast to train passengers compelled to follow a predestined route and schedule; car owners could travel where they wished and also when they wished. The automobile dramatically accelerated the standardization of American life. “Millions changed around in identical black vehicles. The one-room school-house was abandoned as buses carried children to consolidated schools. Neighborhood shops and markets declined as people drove to more distant chain stores” (603). New magazines were published and even the world of book selling saw major changes. The old-style book-stores declined as book publishers increasingly marketed their products through department stores.

As work became more scheduled, its psychic rewards diminished. Life on the assembly line did not foster pride in one’s skills and specialized knowledge that came from years of farming or mastering a craft, nor did the assembly line foster much prospect of advancement. These changes in nature of work contributed to the rising interest in leisure time activities in these years as workers sought in their free hours as the fulfillment jobs that often failed to provide; so entrepreneurs offered standardized amusement. The magazines with variety of themes were published such as sex, violence, and true confessions along with the evolvement of motion-picture business. These mass-produced fantasies helped shape popular behavior and values, especially those of the impressionable young.

Everything could be sold, bought and exchanged with money. America highly practised the principle of materialism but not guided by the principle of Plato’s virtuous ideal. People did not value spirituality/morality in front of materialism and advancement in technology, which occurred in the history during 1920 in America.

2.3 Idealism versus Materialism

One of the oldest debates about the materialism/physicalism is functioned by means of idealism that lay inside mind and materialism outside physical phenomena. In terms of singular explanations of the phenomenal reality, materialism stands in sharp contrast to idealism. The view has dominated that idealism is different from materialism representing a special set of categories whose "essence" exists only in mind. Associated particularly with the philosophy of Plato, Moore and Bruder view, "rational understanding of the essence of life is philosophically impossible since by definition the categories of each unique species exist not in the material world but only in the nonmaterial, essentialist categories conceived by the Creator" (11). Further, idealists do not deny the material reality of physical organisms but it claims that the essence of physical organisms can never be absolutely understood by epistemological knowledge. Our perception or understanding varies according to time, space and situation, according to Immanuel Kant.

Most idealists saw essence as originating from a special mental process of creation by a nonmaterial being. What he considered everything he thought he knew in the light of one or the other of these two bizarre possibilities is that he could doubt, therefore he says, "I think, therefore I am" (93). According to Descartes, to doubt is to think and to exist for him. By this, what Descartes meant is that any attempt to doubt one's existence as a thinking being is impossible because to thinking determines our existence. He poses, "The self that doubts its own existence must surely exist to be able to doubt in the first place" (93). Descartes had found certain truth in his inability to doubt his own existence. Descartes went much further than Augustine. Having supposedly found certain knowledge in his own existence as a thing that thinks, he reasons as follows:

I am certain that I am a thing; but do I not then likewise know what is required to make me certain of a truth? In this knowledge of my existence as a thinking thing there is nothing that assures me of its truth, excepting the clear and distinct perception of that which I state, which would not indeed suffice to assure me that what I say is true, if it could ever happen that a thing that I conceived so clearly and distinctively could be false. And accordingly it seems to me that already I can establish as a general rule that all things that I perceive very clearly and very distinctly are true. (55)

The diversity of living organisms observed in the world was always viewed as a product of the creation of separate essences known as species, which were absolute and immutable. The biologist's role was to try to understand the essence as much as possible by examining individual representatives of the species and determining their common or essential features. Variation among individual members of a species was recognized of course but was viewed as natural deviations from the "essence" in the same way that any given piece of pottery can be viewed as a deviation from the potter's mold. The Platonic tradition, thus, became the basis for the Western idealistic view of "life" in the biological sense, informing questions not only about the functionality of organisms but also about their origin.

Idealism continued to form a backdrop to discussions of the nature and origin of species in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth centuries in the works of the taxonomist Carolus Linnaeus, the anatomist and paleontologist Georges Cuvier, and others who continued to see species as fixed entities formed by special creation. The "scientific creation" movement in the United States and "intelligent design" arguments in the early twenty-first century are yet more manifestations of idealistic thinking because

they are based on the claim that creation by nonmaterial processes has occurred and is as theoretically valid as theories of descent with modification by material processes such as gene mutation, selective agents of the environment and differential fertility. “Intelligent design” is idealistic in that it postulates a supernatural model to explain the structure, function, and diversity of organisms.

Materialism, on the contrary, is that form of physicalism that holds that the only thing that can truly be said to exist is matter; that fundamentally all things are composed of material and all phenomena are the result of material interactions; that matter is the only substance. As a theory, materialism belongs to the class of monist ontology. As such, it is different from ontological theories based on dualism or pluralism. Materialism denies that living organisms have any special status in the physical world maintaining that they are material beings, more complex than other entities in the universe but not immune to rational study. To materialists, the same processes – known at present or knowable in the future – can potentially understand all aspects of living organisms that govern all physical systems. Materialists have generally rejected all accounts of the origin of life by mental processes or nonmaterial “Creators”. Historically the study of living systems has been characterized by the gradual retreat of idealistic in favor of materialistic approaches to understand the nature of life. Thomas Hobbes says that all things are made of material particles and that all change reduces to motion. Accordingly, the basic premise of Hobbes’s metaphysics is that all that exists is bodies in motion; motion being a continual relinquishing of one place and acquiring of another. As he says, “there are two main types of bodies, physical bodies and political bodies; there are two divisions of philosophy, natural and civil” (Moore and Bruder 55). Here he is concerned with natural philosophy.

The view is perhaps best understood in its opposition to the doctrines of immaterial substance applied to the mind historically, famously by René Descartes. However, by itself materialism says nothing about how material substance should be characterized. In practice, it is frequently assimilated to one variety of physicalism or another.

Arthur Schopenhauer describes in *The World as Will and Representation* about materialism that is “the philosophy of the subject who forgets to take account of himself” (9). He clarifies that an observing subject can only know material objects through the mediation of the brain and its particular organization. Hence, the property of ideality exists in consciousness or thought. The way the brain knows determines the way that material objects are experienced. He further adds:

Everything objective extended, active, and hence everything material is regarded by materialism as so solid a basis for its explanations that a reduction to this can leave nothing to be desired. But all this is something that is given only very indirectly and conditionally, and is therefore only relatively present, for it has passed through the machinery and fabrication of the brain, and hence has entered the forms of time, space, and causality, by virtue of which it is first of all presented as extended in space and operating in time. (7)

Materialism is often associated with the methodological principle of reductionism, according to which the objects or phenomena individuated at one level of description if they are genuine must be explicable in terms of the objects or phenomena at some other level of description – typically, a more general level than the reduced one. Non-reductive materialism explicitly rejects this notion. However, taking the material constitution of all particulars to be consistent with the existence of

real objects, properties, or phenomena not explicable in the terms canonically used for the basic material constituents.

2.4 Material Desire and Degeneration of Moral Values in *The Great Gatsby*

The Great Gatsby is a critique on moral decay in contemporary American society of 1920s. The idea of corruption of values and the erosion in spiritual life and disillusionment are directly tied with the American Dream. The novel is connected with the idealism from the early settlers who focused America, and Fitzgerald relates Gatsby's dream to the early Americans. Besides, he further comments on the light-hearted vivacity and the moral degeneration of the American social, political and cultural scenario after the First World War. The aimlessness and shallowness of the guests, the crazy extravagance of parties, and the bootlegging business – all represent the period and the American setting and it also describes the degradation of the American Dream. Their ideal differed with the actual social conditions that exist in that contemporary society. Politically, even though the American constitutions stood for freedom and equality among people, the truth in society was still discriminating and the grouping among the classes could never be overcome.

In *The Great Gatsby*, Gatsby is more linked to his idealism having strong belief in happy and prosperous life. His ideal is to influence Daisy by riches, great mansion, shirts, automobile and so on. But even after he earns all desired material things in his life, he could not materialize his ideal. Daisy is so superficial that she could not understand Gatsby's true and pious love, rather she is more attracted to his shirt, mansion and all material objects that he possesses.

She never realizes Gatsby's devotion and love towards her. She even forgets humanity and morality in front of money and matter. She is hypocritical, selfish and opportunist in her behavior and manner. Therefore, Gatsby fails to materialize his

ideal which is much more frightful to him as any larger dream's failure turns out to be. His whole objective, confidence in life and himself is completely smashed when he fails to win Daisy's love. His death is nearly meaningful with the defeat of his ideal because he is already spiritually murdered and he would lose all faith in life. Daisy is so indifferent to Gatsby's death; hence, she does not remorse in Gatsby's demise.

The immoral activities of the characters for the sake of money and matter are the most common theme throughout the novel. The corrupt immoral things they do are directly represented the high society lifestyle of that time. The characters continued to cheat on their spouses, let money become their obsession, and debated the American Dream for the hopes of obtaining happiness one day. But the fact remains when they have no true morality and humanity. These are a group of people who – no matter how bold and self-confident they seem – have absolutely no idea of what they are doing.

Out of Fitzgerald's presentation and analysis of the lives of Gatsby, Nick comes to the final theme that American idealism has been corrupted by adoptive materialism as its means. The substitution of attractive but false goals represented by Daisy as the fulfillment of the historical promise of America, has changed the new world from a "fresh, green breast" to a grotesque "waste land", where only the morally irresponsible can hope to survive. Gatsby's destruction shows that those who try to maintain idealism based on purely materialistic values are doomed by their self-delusion, and so George Wilson's unfortunate career illustrates the fate of the common man in the wasteland because he remains faithful in the end to the "provincial" moral values of the Middle West. Nick is able to avoid personal

destruction but he is also unable to continue living in the East and must return to the traditional moral environment of his home in the West.

The corruptive effect of wealth is shown by the conflict between the established rich and the newly rich represented by the East Egg and West Egg. Hypocritical and morally careless, the East Egg naturally regard any change in the social hierarchy as a threat to the entire structure of society. Unlike that, the West Egg live in a world of showy vulgarity, resulting from the adoption of wealth as their only standard. While society is changing, the nature of the change is that the lower orders are trying to adopt the values and standards of the privileged classes that are false to begin with.

Fitzgerald projects that ideals and hopes are needed to boost a man's efforts in meeting a purpose. Pushing towards an ideal is how a man can feel a sense of his own value and existence. Obviously, Jay Gatsby, with the great gift of hope, placed in comparison to the aimlessness of Tom and Daisy, reaches heroic nobility. It is also that the corruption of the American Dream itself is inescapable not only because reality is never the same as the greatness of ideals, but also because the ideals are flawless which is not possible in the real world. Gatsby is naïve in that he dreams that impossible attempts to repeat the past setting him up for the predestined failure that inevitably comes with great expectations.

Chapter 3

Portrayal of Spiritual Decay in *The Great Gatsby*

3.1 East Egg versus West Egg

F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* is the representative work of art that depicts the cultural, political and social life of America. The novel brilliantly captures

not only the gilded existence of the super rich and social climbers of the 1920s but also the cold-hearted selfishness and romantic illusions that ruled their lives. He found the cultural turbulence of the 1920s a creative stimulus.

The Great Gatsby develops in a series of sharply focused scenes. The first three of Fitzgerald's scenic chapters work together, particularly as a novelistic unit. All of the principles appear in these chapters, and the reader is introduced to their background and situations as they are defined by the three distinctly separate social spheres to which they belong: East Egg with its affluence and prerogatives, the valley of ashes where the lower middle class has a hazy existence, and the West Egg, an upper middle class suburb. Fitzgerald's minute examination of Gatsby's dream reveals the hollowness that lies at the dream's center. *Gatsby* illustrates on a personal scale what has become of American Dream in general. Those who thought monetary wealth the fastest and most direct route to happiness has corrupt the idealism of the new country.

Gatsby, who has the higher goal to win Daisy, accumulates wealth on an illegal ground. The substitution of attractive but inherently worthless goal, such as Daisy represents, has led to the disappearance of America's historical promise and the creation led into hopelessness as in *The Waste Land*. In the desolate 'valley of ashes' only those without aspirations and with no sense of moral responsibility can hope to survive. Gatsby's idealism, however, is noble, is based on a purely materialistic ideal that he likes others is doomed to disillusionment and destruction. All the characters have some kind of deficiency in common to lead a degenerated life discarding the values of previous generations. Nick alone remains untainted by the effects of corrupted East and he is able to do this largely by remaining true to the Mid-western values of his youth. Yet even he fears for his personal morality, he is also under the

corrupting influence of the wealthy Buchanan. After Gatsby's death, Nick realizes he cannot remain true to himself if he remains in the East and so he returns to the traditional morality of his hometown.

Two different social circles, the East Eggers and West Eggers, demonstrate the corrupting effect of great wealth. East Egg is home to wealthy people who regard any change in social hierarchy as a direct threat to themselves. But their life in their hierarchy itself is not smooth and without disturbance. The West Eggers live in a world of ostentatious vulgarity resulting from their adaptation of the idea that the measure of a man lies in the amount of money he has. The loss of America's early promise is implicit in the general movement of the characters from West to East, a reversal of historical move from Europe, in the East to the New World in the West. The fading of America's once bright promise has led the central characters to follow a shiny but worthless goal the sophistication and wealth that flourishes in the East. It is Nick Carraway who notes "Tom and Gatsby, Daisy and Jordan and I, were all Westerners who chose to leave the familiar world of traditional values in pursuit of happiness supposedly found in the East" (161).

The plot of the novel portrays East Egg and West Egg symbolically so as to show the spiritual barrenness of the people in that time in the novel. In *The Great Gatsby*, the setting stretches in different locales. The valley of ashes is a deserted land where ashes grow like wheat, and the New York City has become a hideous place where social, moral and sexual perversities get prominence. The "valley of ashes" lies in the midway of West Egg and New York. There are only two visible features in the desolate landscape. An old billboard advertising the services of an eye-specialist, Dr. T. J. Eckleburg adds a bizarre touch to the ugly surroundings. The sign depicts an enormous pair of blue eyes staring sightlessly ahead. The other is a

service station and restaurant complex across the road from the billboard. George Wilson believes that Dr. T. J. Eckleburg's eyes symbolize God's watchful eyes over mankind. If it is true, then it is a very cruel God blind to the suffering of mankind. It is a God who sees only the moral decay that the ash heap represents.

Fitzgerald contrasts the strong moral standards of the Midwest with the destructive carelessness of the East. Tom, Jordan, Daisy and Gatsby were all originally Westerners. But they gave up responsible moral behavior in favor of the pleasure-loving life of the East. This moral rootlessness is expressed in their collective restlessness and inability to settle in place for long. Nick is aware of this weakness of his friends but gradually he is also seduced by their glamorous lifestyle. When Nick comes face to face with the moral carelessness of the East, he realizes his real responsibilities and leaves the East for the Midwest and the traditional values of the past. Fitzgerald not only compares the values of the East and the West, but in contrasting the West Egg with the East Egg, he also gives his concept of the differences between newly acquired wealth and wealthy establishment. He further adds:

The West Eggers, represented by Gatsby himself lacks the tradition and taste of those who have been long accustomed to great wealth. On the other hand, the East Eggers, represented by Tom, Daisy and Jordan, are purposeless and inert with inactivity because their wealth has taken care of their needs. The show of different wealth in East Egg and yet money in both places leads to certain incompleteness in the human being. (VII-XXV)

The East Egg, situated at the east coast of Long island, is a place of rich people. It glitters with its heretical property where life is valued with the glow of wealth, riches and luxury. Nick narrates:

Across the courtesy bay the white palaces of fashioned East Egg glittered along the water and the history of the summer really begins on the evening I drove over there to have dinner with the Tom Buchanans. Daisy was my second cousin once removed and I'd known Tom in college, and just after the War I spent two days with them in Chicago.

(15)

It seems that Fitzgerald's choices of the place and people to live there are very much likely to bring out the theme of the novel. It is a place where Tom Buchanan can win Daisy with his immense wealth, where love is bought and sold with precious diamond, where high-class people keep human relationships on the basis of social and economic status.

3.2 Valley of Ashes

The phenomenon of valley of ashes shows for the upper middle class people of the time and their cultural advancement. The behaviors of these characters are perfectly uncivilized though they claim they are highly civilized and highly cultivated. When we move ahead in the novel, we find some more instances of the cultural dominance in their behavior. In the second chapter, we are given the specific description of the status of characters in terms of their financial condition. In the opening part of the chapter, there is the description of the "valley of ashes" that lies between West Egg and New York. This scene is the echo of the Twentieth century society. People are involved in the activities that do not represent the moral principles. This spiritual drought of the contemporary society is not only echoing in

Fitzgerald's but also in some other prominent literary figures like T. S. Eliot. Eliot's *The Waste Land* is also the epitome of the Valley of Ashes.

Death, desolation, decay, infidelity, selfishness and spiritual barrenness of the society are clearly portrayed with the help of the story and characters of *The Great Gatsby*. They are associated with death and destruction rather than creation. In this regard, T. S. Eliot opposes the very idea of creativity in his *The Waste Land* as follows:

April is the cruelest month, breeding
Lilacs out of the dead land, mixing,
Memory and desire, stirring
Dull roots with spring rain. (346)

This is the reason why Dr. T. J. Eckleburg who is staring sightlessly ahead being deaf to the man's suffering. People are spiritless and do not pay any attention to God. This is because the culture of Jazz or the youth culture has transcended these moral principles and are guided by materialism. This is how they judge everything in terms of wealth. Tom and his wife Daisy have the strong desire of wealth and party. They are proud of being rich even by birth and therefore express their hatred against those who are newly wealthy and involved in this false strife. These people whether they appear in *The Great Gatsby* or in *The Waste Land* of T. S. Eliot have lost decent of life. In spite of their married life, Tom and Daisy involved in adulterous relationship with another person but they are not ashamed of this. Instead they reveal their relations very openly thinking that it is an act of virility on their behalf.

Tom one afternoon arranges for Myrtle to join Nick and himself in New York where further light is thrown on them and their behavior. They drink quite a lot and it is clear that Myrtle Wilson has been drawn to Tom simply because of his wealth. She

is beautifully dressed this time. The way her dress rustles as she sweeps about the apartment, her vitality, her sensuality, her passion and the way she drinks have truly caught the spirit of upper middle class people of the time. She is the prototype of the flappers of the time as she openly flirts with the married man Tom and complains that the greatest weakness of her husband is his poverty as even the suit he was married in was of his friend's. She is attracted to Tom because of his suit and leather shoes.

The racial culture and the gap between rich and poor are widely shown. Their life is carefree. They spend the whole night in drinking and merrymaking is the outcome of Jazz culture or the past of the mainstream American culture in the Twentieth century. The description given by Nick about Tom's mistakes to prepare herself for going to New York gives us the living examples of the fashionable flappers of the time.

The valley of ashes is a sharper commentary on contemporary civilization. Nick Caraway describes this desolate landscape thus:

This is a valley of ashes – a fantastic farm where ashes grow like wheat into ridges and hills and grotesque gardens, where ashes take the form of houses and chimneys and rising smoke and finally, with a transcendent effort, of men who move dimly and already crumbling through the powdery air. (29)

This wasteland symbolizes the lifelessness and this is the most conspicuous death image in the novel. This is a dumping ground where “ashes grow like wheat” (29), but ashes are not fertile like wheat and the phrase merely reinforces the implication of infertile life. Ironically, it is close to Independence Day when Caraway enters this forsaken area as his own words make clear: “it was a few days

before the forth of July, and a gray, scrawny Italian child was setting torpedoes in a row along the railroad track” (32). The valley of ashes, at the approach of July, is the novel’s comment on the new republic and the society it has fostered. There is chaos in *The Great Gatsby* and that chaos assumes many forms. “Foul dust” finds its greatest extension in “the valley of ashes” that is deliberate extension of Eliot’s *The Wasteland*. “Here spiritless man becomes indistinguishable from the spiritless landscape; the non-human defeats and absorbs the human” (8). It is from this landscape that Myrtle Wilson, Tom’s mistress symbolically appears for she is body without spirit”.

Nick’s vicarious involvement in Gatsby’s destiny has permitted him to see the world for a brief space through the glasses of Dr. T. J. Eckleburg. What he sees is a wasteland without moral sanctions of any kind, anarchy in which romantic idealists like Gatsby, is the most vulnerable of all. The gigantic eyes of T. J. Eckleburg, “which brood on over the solemn dumping ground” (29), also take on greater meaning along with the valley of ashes. When Wilson, after his wife’s death informs Michaelis of his earlier suspicions of her, he gazes out the window and he says:

Wilson’s glazed eyes turned out to the ash heaps, where small grey clouds took on fantastic shape and scurried here and there in the faint dawn wind. ‘I spoke to her’, he muttered after a long silence. ‘I told her she might fool me but she couldn’t fool God. I took her to the window. With an effort he got up and walked to the rear window and leaned with his face pressed against it’, and I said. (147)

Wilson is an institutional figure – there is not enough of him for his wife. He is the inhabitant of the valley of ashes, the figure wandering in the wasteland. He has chosen for his God the unseeing eyes of an advertisement. He is a figure without

spiritual resources that makes his grasp of reality very tenuous indeed. In his world, the eyes of Dr. T. J. Eckleburg might very well be the eyes of God.

The valley of ashes is “bounded on one side by a small four river” (29). This is the place where our narrator meets Tom Buchanan’s mistress first. On their way to New York, Tom and Nick get off their car and go to see George and Myrtle Wilson in the valley of ashes. Nick’s views in this context:

I followed him over a low white-washed railroad fence and we walked back a hundred yards along the road under Doctor Eckleburg’s persistent stare. The only building in sight was a small block of yellow brick sitting ministering to it and contiguous to absolutely nothing. One of the three shops it contained was for rent and another was an all-night restaurant, approached by a trail of ashes; the third was a garage-repairs. (30)

Hence, it elucidates that the valley of ashes is bare, desert-land and lifeless. The inhabitants of the place are also spiritless. The interior of the garage which George Wilson owns is “unprosperous and bare; the only car visible was the dust covered wreck of a Ford which crushed in a dim corner” (30). As Gale H. Carrithers, Jr. says, “The valley of Ashes is an earthly counterpart of Hell” (309). *The Great Gatsby* was one of the very first novels to depict the viciousness of the new commercial culture. Except for Gatsby’s god-like sense of the potentiality of the self, God has withdrawn from this world and is replaced by the commercial billboard with the blind eyes of Dr. T. J. Eckleburg and embodied by the equally blind eyes of the owl-eyed man who appears at Gatsby’s parties and reappears at his funeral. All symbolic forms in the novel have human equivalents with the blind world because there is no source of moral vision. Thus, the world of *The Great Gatsby* appears as

sordid, loveless, commercial, and dead as the ash heaps presided over by the eyes of Dr. T. J. Eckleburg.

3.4 Love, Sex, and Violence

The post-war American society was heading towards degeneration due to the crisis in traditionally established moral and social values. The war and its aftermath brought to full boil the simmering cultural restlessness of the post-war years. The matters of love, kiss and sex were matter of talk and gathering. Female sexuality was acknowledged more. The behavior brought free sex, homosexuality and others sexual perversions.

In *The Great Gatsby* also sex becomes a mere physical pleasure than the means of procreation. It has degenerated into lust. One Sunday, Tom takes Nick to meet his mistress. Myrtle Wilson is the wife of the owner of the service station in the midst of the ash heaps. Tom arranges for Myrtle to join Nick and himself in New York that afternoon. The three meet and proceed to an apartment that Tom keeps in New York for himself and Myrtle. “At the news stand she bought a copy of “Town Tattle” and a moving picture magazine and in the station dry store, some cold cream and a small flask of perfume” (Dumenil 32).

Tom’s insistence that Nick meet Myrtle informs us that what he really wants is Nick’s acknowledgement that he possesses not only a fine house and a beautiful wife, but also an energetic and vital mistress. He makes no distinctions between them because he has lost all sense of descent behavior. Chapter II is used to substantiate our initial impression of Tom as a brutal, self-centered man. His relationship with George and with Myrtle demonstrates the small regards he has for people not of his

class. He manipulates George and leads him on most cruelly into believing he will sell his car.

Tom's relationship with Myrtle illustrates all of his hypocrisy, brutality and lack of decency. He flaunts his relationship in the face of his peers, forcing them to acknowledge that he has a mistress and yet he expected Daisy to act as if nothing is aimless. When he breaks Myrtle's nose for repeating Daisy's name, he is not defending Daisy's honor but rather is behaving in the way he believes is expected of him. Accordingly, Nick narrates:

Some time towards midnight Tom Buchanan and Mrs. Wilson stood face to face discussing in impassioned voices whether Mrs. Wilson had any right to mention Daisy's name – 'Daisy! Daisy! Daisy! . . .', shouted Mrs. Wilson.

'. . . I'll say it whenever I want to! Daisy! Daisy!' Making a short deft movement Tom Buchanan broke her nose with his open hand.
(41)

In fact, he breaks Myrtle's nose in the same way he had earlier bruised Daisy's finger simply from a sense of his own brutal power. As Daisy suggests, he is "a brute of a man, a great, big bulking physical specimen" (14). Tom and Myrtle's relationship is adultery. Tom keeps an apartment in New York on 158th street just to make love but ends in tragedy. This love is not for regeneration but for mere physical pleasure. Myrtle Wilson uses cold cream and perfume and changes her dress many times in the apartment just to attract Tom sexually. This is similar to Mrs. Porter and her daughter washing the feet in Soda water not for their spiritual purification, but to

make their flesh fairer to attract more males, “O the moon shone bright on Mrs. Porter and her daughter. They wash their feet in soda water . . . (Eliot 199-201)

The contemporary disintegration and stalemate in family life arises because of the perversion of sex. Love has degenerated into lust, and so is no longer vital for life giving. Sex is not sanctified only in marriage, and love outside marriage has never brought any satisfaction in the past nor is it likely to result in happiness in the present or future. Thus, both Gatsby’s love for Daisy and Tom’s love for Myrtle does not result in happiness.

A number of critics have connected *The Great Gatsby* with *The Waste Land* in the similarities outcry for attention. Like *The Waste Land*, Gatsby moves between and among people of different classes like the upper class neurasthenic lady in her boudoir, the woman discussing marriage and abortion in the pub, and the woman in her flat waiting the sexual visit of the young man and so on. Actually, *The Great Gatsby* is Fitzgerald’s response to the post-war America experiencing radical change like Eliot’s *The Waste Land* response to a post-war Europe experiencing radical change. Eliot depicts a world coming morally apart that has no principle to hold it together. This sense of exhaustion of romantic possibility was inseparable from the post-war sense of world-weariness that we find in both the story as Nick Carraway tells in *The Great Gatsby* and Tiresias tells in *The Waste Land*.

There is so much of drinking in *Gatsby*, as Fitzgerald himself was such a heavy drunkard at times. That it is tricky to keep in mind the fact that both the story and the telling of it are deep in the heart of prohibition which was as constitutional amendment and which was not yet seen by Fitzgerald as coming to an end. “Time has turned the underworld and internecine wars, the blood and savagery that accompanied prohibition into something close to comedy, perhaps musical comedy” (Brucoli 104).

But Fitzgerald very well knew the shock value he gained by having so much drinking in his novel. It is significant that Jay Gatsby and Daisy meet again, tentative and a little shy at first, in the proper atmosphere of an intimate and wonderfully awkward little tea party at Carraway's cottage. Gatsby is self-disciplined and abstemious which is a rhetorical plus. The fact that Daisy does not drink is viewed ambiguously, more a matter of "an absolutely perfect reputation" than a sign of virtue.

Nick describes Gatsby's fantastic parties where beautiful men and women dance, eat and laugh over the night. The aura and atmosphere of Gatsby's parties is concurred up in a few short sentences. The guests moving like fragile moths in Gatsby's gardens are the very image of a dreamy unreality. Edwin Fussell views in this context:

There was music from my neighbor's house through the summer nights. In his blue Gardens men and girls came and went like moths among the whispering and the champagne and the stars. At high tide in the afternoon I watched his guests diving from the tower of his raft or taking the sun on the hot sand of his beach while his two motorboats slit the waters of the Sound, drawing aquaplanes over cataracts of foam. (244-263)

The party that seemed so glamorous in the opening a description becomes increasingly tawdry the more we look at it. "I looked around, most of the remaining women were now having fights with men said to be their husbands" (54). Nick tells that servants who must labor so hard to clean up after the party are juxtaposed with the machine that turns the crates of oranges into pulp at the rate of two hundred per half hour. The guests are described and their gaiety and conversation seem innocent and joyful. Yet, the introductions of one person to another are "forgotten on the spot"

and the “enthusiastic meetings between women who never knew each other’s names begin to appear artificial and forced. As the earth lurches away from the Sun, the entire party seems not only a glamorous affair but also seems a drunken spectacle” (44). The guests most of whom have not been invited and don’t know their presence to Gatsby, turned Gatsby’s house into a stage set and a splendid illusion of grace and beauty.

As the party draws to a close whatever seems gracious and lovely, vanishes. Young women are drunk and laughing and crying with equal lack of restraint; husbands and wives are arguing and the atmosphere has deteriorated into shabbiness. The episode illustrates the tremendous carelessness of people in general and especially those in cars. This is the age of automobiles that have made people easier to throng to the lavish parties. All people, men and women, equally are drunk. Throng of the uninvited guests in the party is the purposelessness of the contemporary American people who are the degeneration of the contemporary society of America.

3.5 Selfish Motive

The ideal love of Gatsby for Daisy is intensely presented in the novel. Gatsby had fallen in love with Daisy five years back. During the long interval while they disappeared from each other’s sight, Daisy became a legend in Gatsby’s memory, a part of his private past through which he assimilates into the pattern of that historic past through which he would move into the historic future. But the legendary Daisy, meeting after five years, has deemed a little in luster. In this connection, Gatsby expresses:

. . . and she doesn’t understand, he said despairingly. She used to be able to understand. We’d sit together for hours He broke up and

began to walk up and down a desolate path of fruit rinds and discarded favors and crushed flowers. I wouldn't ask too much of her, I ventured. (54)

The American dream stretched between a golden past and golden future is always betrayed by a desolate present. Gatsby had hope that he would be able to win Daisy back that had already completely immersed in Tom's secure world. Gatsby's romantic dream is spiritual, but "at the very height of Gatsby's dream, Nick is made to signal the doomed and hollow nature of Gatsby's and Daisy's idyllic moment" (Carrithers 314). Carrithers further says, "It is only in a meantime in between time moment of extra marital adventure for Daisy, and that rich will get neither richer nor children" (314). Thus, a deeply loved ideal is being confronted by an ultimately devastating actuality. Daisy is a gesture that is committed to nothing more real than her own image on the silver screen. She has become a gesture divorced forever from human reality. But Gatsby is attracted to her because he does not know the emptiness and selfishness within Daisy.

For Gatsby, Daisy is the green light that signals him into the heart of his ultimate vision. Why she should have this evocative power over Gatsby is a question Fitzgerald faces beautifully and successfully as he recreates that milieu of uncritical snobbishness and frustrated idealism that is the world in which Gatsby is compelled to live. The economy with which Gatsby is presented the formal and boldly drawn structural lines of his imagination lead us at once to a level where it is obvious that Daisy's significance in the story lies in her life failure to represent the objective correlative of Gatsby's vision. Daisy becomes an ideal being to Gatsby and his pursuit of her eternal love is described as the "following of a grail" (46). This religious allusion adds an important dimension to Gatsby's dream. We see Gatsby as

a worshipper. His mind is compared to the mind of God just prior to his first kissing of Daisy. The problem with seeing Gatsby's dream as religious in nature is that the object of his deification is so unworthy of his faith. Gatsby's spiritual faith is misplaced, and for Daisy Buchanan he is nothing more than an exceedingly frail being. Fitzgerald seems to be suggesting that the problem with America is misplaced faith in the sanctity of material wealth that is unworthy of worship as Daisy Buchanan.

Although Gatsby may have misplaced his faith by allowing it to rest on Daisy Buchanan, we nonetheless have added insight into spiritual nature of his love for her. Daisy may have loved Tom when they were first married, and she loved him more even then. According to Gatsby, Daisy's love for Tom is "in any case was just personal" (140). His love is so extravagant that it reaches beyond the level of personal feelings into something transcending the people involved. His love is bound up with the vision of the ideal. We find Daisy equally corrupt, selfish, hypocritical and degenerated as Tom. Nick gives us a critical insight into the spiritual affinity of the Buchanan couple drawing together in their callous selfishness in a moment of guilt and crisis. Nick Carraway states:

Daisy and Tom were sitting opposite each other at the kitchen table with a plate of cold fried chicken between them and two bottles of ale. He was talking intently across the table at her and in his earnestness his hand had fallen upon and covered her on. Once in a while she looked up at him and nodded in agreement. They weren't happy, and neither of them had touched the chicken or the ale – and yet they weren't unhappy either. There was an unmistakable air of natural intimacy

about the picture and anybody would have said that they were conspiring together. (134-135)

Tom and Daisy instinctively seek out each other because each recognizes the strength of the other in the corrupt spiritual element they inhabit. Tom, as a third important male character in the novel, is naturally contrasted with both Gatsby and Nick. Tom's character has neither Gatsby's redeeming idealism nor Nick's personal honesty and high moral standards. As such he is perfectly suited to the Eastern setting. Tom Buchanan is "one of those men who reaches such an acute limited excellence at twenty-one that everything afterward savors of anti-climax" (15). Even his body - ". . . a body capable of enormous leverage – was a cruel body" (16). In the description of Tom, we are left physically face to face with a section of those ruthless generations who raised up the great American fortunes, and who now live in uneasy arrogant leisure on their brutal acquisitions. But Gatsby's youth leaves an impression of interminability. Its climax is always in the future, and it gives rather than demands. Its energy is not in its body but in its spirit.

Tom Buchanan and Gatsby represent antagonistic but historically related aspects of America. They are related as the body and soul when a brutal barrier has risen up between them. Tom Buchanan is Gatsby's murderer in the end but the crime that he commits by proxy is only a symbol of his deepest spiritual crime against Gatsby's vision. Gatsby's ideal is radical failure – a failure of the critical faculty that seems to be an inherent part of American dream – to understand that Daisy is fully immersed in the destructive element of the American world as Tom himself. Thus, Tom and Daisy both are equally selfish.

The selfish motive of the characters is exposed when the time for Gatsby's funeral comes. After Gatsby's death, only Nick assumes the responsibility of

arranging for his funeral. Nick narrates, “I called Daisy half an hour after we found him dead, called her instinctively and without hesitation, but she and Tom had gone away early that afternoon” (151). Daisy is that selfish lady who was responsible for Gatsby’s death because it was Daisy who killed Myrtle Wilson but Daisy silently allows Gatsby to shoulder the crime. Even more than that, the readers are shocked when they know that “Daisy hadn’t sent a message or a flower” to Gatsby’s funeral (160). She belongs to the chaotic materialism that Gatsby strives unsuccessfully to order.

In the funeral of Gatsby, Nick contacts Meyer Wolfsheim but he refuses to get mixed up in the aftermath of Gatsby’s murder. Nick is shocked when he does not get any message from either side. “I was sure there’d be a wire from Daisy before, but neither wire nor Mr. Wolfsheim arrived; no one arrived except more police and photographers and newspaper men” (152). Instead of participating in Gatsby’s funeral, Wolfsheim sends a letter rejecting to be mixed up in death. The letter runs like this:

Dear Mr. Carraway. This has been one of the most terrible shocks of my life to me I hardly can believe in that it is true at all. Such a mad act as that man did should make us all think, I can not come down now as I am tied up in some very important business and can not get mixed up in this thing now. If there is anything I can do a little later, let me know in a letter by Edgar. I hardly know where I am when I hear about a thing like this and am completely knocked down and out. (55)

This passage clearly advocates the selfish nature of people of that time. For Wolfsheim, the death of his life-time helper does not count before his business. Nick has no one to help him besides Gatsby’s father in the funeral. After much interruption

from Wolfsheim's people, Nick Carraway at last meets him but rejects again; he narrates as such:

Now he's dead. You were his closest friend, so I know you'll want to come to his funeral this afternoon I can't do it – I can't get mixed up in it, he said. There is nothing to get mixed up in. It's all over now. When a man gets killed I never like to get mixed up in it anyway. I keep out (157)

Nick begins to comprehend fraud conduct of selfish people of corrupt world hopelessly and surprisingly. Nick's belief or understanding or perception appeared just as an illusion.

3.6 Retreats from Moral World

F. Scott Fitzgerald is able to combine the different types of characters through the convention of the first person narration. Gatsby's fancy ideal is Fitzgerald's subject that causes disillusionment. He exaggerates the idea of society and his dependence upon it in order to provide a field for the activity of his conscience as well as the trial of his self. But his trial of oneself is incomplete one in contrast with the less dramatic of Nick Carraway. Fitzgerald's intention can neither be clarified nor the significance of his achievement be grasped without sharing with Nick the trial of his self and the activity of his conscience in that society of which Gatsby is only the most notable part. Whatever may be Nick Carraway's inconsistencies or whatever may be the limitations of his character, two elements of his being help to redeem him.

Nick is the only character in the novel with an intensity of self and rests of the characters internalize strange and fascinating world that make up Fitzgerald's novel and who takes responsibility for Gatsby's death. Hence, Nick has so internalized

Gatsby's story and also has so identified with Gatsby that he goes about preparing for Gatsby's funeral with a special kind of urgency. Dead Gatsby still speaks to Nick; Nick's projection of Gatsby's subjectivity speaks to him in an imploring way as, "Look here old sport you've got to get somebody for me. You've got to try hard. I can't go through this alone" (151).

The novel is an exercise in retrospective narration and the events have already unfolded when Nick begins his story. The events that begin the novel seem so inseparable from the events that conclude it. From the very first paragraph in which Nick tells about a world that falls short of his moral desires about "what prayed on Gatsby, what foul dust floated on the wake of his dreams, we know that all is not going to end well for Gatsby" (Eble 79-101).

Gatsby is rich to the contrary of Nick but Gatsby is alone, mysterious and obsessed but Nick makes friends easily; his life is ordinary, quite and sane. Gatsby is without conscience except perhaps where Daisy is concerned, and Nick subjects every act and motive to the scrutiny of a lively moral sense. Gatsby learns nothing in the course of the novel or at least until his doom has been secured for. He decided too early what he wanted and strove for it without a determination which subordinated all other demands. Although Nick is thirty years old in the summer of 1922, he is still an adolescent when he settles on Long Island with an adolescent's memory of the war, and he comes to New York to enter the bond-selling business chiefly because other restless young men are doing the same thing. Nick has no purpose; he thinks of no power to realize, and only very gradually does he come to understand what his New York interlude has meant.

Arthur Mizener, whose analysis of *The Great Gatsby* has appeared in several forms and is undoubtedly the most widely distributed, and hence approves

Fitzgerald's choice of form and recognizes the structural importance of the first person convention by means of this narrator Fitzgerald is able to focus his story, but the novel is the story of Gatsby, "a poor boy from the middle west". Besides, Meizer clarifies *The Great Gatsby* as a "tragic pastoral". It is Gatsby who illustrates the difference between the simple virtue of the West and the sophistication and corruption of the East. The moral distance between the two localities may be measured in more profound ways if we take Nick Carraway as our example and his sensibility and intelligence as the recognizable determinants which inform the story with its meaning.

Nick Carraway begins his story with the recollection that his father advised him to reserve his judgment of others because they may not have had the same advantages. Carraway's father has warned him about the difficulties of moral judgment, a difficulty originating in circumstances of origin and inheritance. Nick prepares us for his personal involvement in the action when he reveals his own origins or his reasons for thinking that he had advantages. He came from a family of "prominent, well-to-do people", who have lived in "this middle-western city for three generations" (12). They have enjoyed commercial success, act together as a family and regard the decisions and conduct of their relatives with grave concern. They have inherited the moral seriousness of their Scottish ancestors, sustained their business and social position as a manifestation of their moral superiority, and have passed down to their heirs a strong "sense of fundamental decencies" (11).

Nick Carraway narrates his first visit to the Buchanan household where he meets Jordan Baker. She is also a persistent and obvious liar, and Nick soon perceives this fault. Yet he is interested in her though a scene in which Jordan, only suggests exactly how intimate they become, easily accepts Nick's first attentions. Her

unconcern for any standards beyond those of a frank self-indulgence is evidence enough that he two have become lovers.

The relationship is Nick's most personal involvement in the dissolution that Jordan represents, and the perception of his share in a common guilt comes with his initial revulsion to his summer's experience directly after Myrtle Wilson's death. He is suddenly disgusted by the vicious and now violent life about him but even in his new wisdom and passion for Jordan has not been completely destroyed. In his last conversation with her, he can feel that he might be making a mistake by ending their affair and finally that he is "half in love with her" (17). We learn most about them at this point in Jordan's accusations that Nick is a "bad driver".

He is not the person she thought, not what he pretended to be as she says, "It was careless of me to make such a wrong guess. I thought you were rather an honest and straightforward person. It was your secret pride" (163). For this, Nick answers, "I'm thirty. I'm five years too old to lie to myself and call it honor" (163). It was Nick's pride to feel that he could accept Jordan on her own terms with her cynicism and her irresponsibility and yet that he could escape the consequences of that acceptance. But what was subdued or ignored has now erupted with Gatsby's murder and with the exposition of Daisy and Tom in their terrible selfishness. It can no longer be honorable for Nick to maintain the pretense that nothing serious is involved in his affair with Jordan. "Nick was dishonest because he acted as though he brought no other standards of conduct to judge their liaison with than those which Jordan's hedonism imposed" (65), Thomas Hanzo writes.

In his disgust and self-recrimination, Nick has in fact deceived Jordan. She accuses him of having thought of her all along as he does now when he has given her up. She is right and Nick is the most honest

man as he knows, but he does not accept Nick's understanding of his personal responsibility. When Jordan calls his bluff as Stallman puts it, the effect is to make public Nick's own shame. So, far from being identified with Jordan, Nick is separated from her and from her society. He can no longer lie and he leaves the East without honor perhaps, but with a newfound vision of his own guilt. (65)

Nick is not immoral in his affair with Jordan Baker because he can allow himself to become further involved with Jordan. He feels he must break off an attachment to a girl before back home. Nick has yet another bad aspect in his character. When Gatsby asks to meet Daisy at Nick's house, Nick readily agrees and considers it a very small favor he is doing. Nick is aware of Gatsby's feelings and his intentions regarding Daisy. So, he is contributing to her adultery. Nick is redeemed from this because he favors Gatsby and Gatsby's intention was not pursuing adultery. In chapter two, Nick's involvement with other characters in New York apartment is not to his credit. It indicates a lack of moral judgment when the situation demands a judgment of him. Although he realizes that he should leave, and so tries to separate himself from Tom and Myrtle; he allows to be drawn along as if he has no will of his own.

There is another complication in Nick's discovery of his error. All the Westerners – Tom, Daisy, Gatsby, Jordan, and Nick – possess some deficiency in common which made us subtly unadoptable to Eastern life (161). Though the rest may have become more acclimated to the atmosphere of eastern society than Nick; none is entirely at ease. None can rid himself of that "sense of the fundamental deficiencies" (11), however, attenuated it may have become which their origins have given them. None can finally be comfortable in the hedonism cultivated by the

eastern representatives of his generation or at least by those with money and enough intelligence to be disillusioned by the War. After his revulsion, Nick returns to the comparatively rigid morality of his ancestral West and to its embodiment in the manners of Western society.

He alone of all the westerners can return since the others have suffered apparently beyond any conceivable redemption and a moral degeneration brought on by their meeting with that form of Eastern society that developed during the Twenties. However, the rich behavior of Easterners, they are guided by the selfish motives of personal and sensual gratification. Gatsby acts for good that he conceives almost absurdly as being beyond personal interest. Gatsby's last heroism in protection of the mistress of his dream confirms Nick's judgment. Gatsby does turn out all right while Tom and Daisy, sit comfortably at their family table bound in their private safety. Gatsby had found a way to live as men had once lived with a purpose and meaning which transcended personal fate.

Finally, Nick accepts the probability that Gatsby himself realized the insufficiency of his ideal. The vision was only Gatsby's and his goal only a personal one if someone ennobled as Nick sees it. The structure of appearance erected to impress Daisy, was founded on some illegal traffic that only repels her that she is lost in Gatsby even before the accident of Myrtle's death.

Nick's discovery is that power of will without the direction of intelligence is a destructive power that there must be some real end beyond the satisfaction of private desire. However, desire may be exalted to justify the expenditure of life, but he too believes that except for the anachronistic and fatal insistence of Gatsby, the time when such ends could have existed is now done. We can only "beat on boats against the current, borne back ceaselessly into the past" (166).

Fitzgerald represents past both as a loss and as a source of strength. It is the record of such deeds springing from such dedication as cannot now be expected. In the Carraway family tradition, it confers a discipline and standards, which even as survivals of an old morality may still produce better conduct than Nick witnesses on Long Island. Nick's honesty and his conception of a good existing beyond selfish ends may be only heirlooms he realizes, honored for sentimental reasons but they have been given a contemporary, limited reality in his own life. Nick includes his morality in his description of a graceless modern age and reduces his claims on it to the satisfaction of individual conscience. He has no alternative to the selfishness he condemns in Tom and Jordan. He does not speak authoritatively but while his voice is subdued, it is never unsure. Nick's judgments are firm because he assumes that evil may be clearly enough determined. His hopes are modest because he regards the good only as a private, incommunicable possession. He can assert his criticism and judgment of Eastern society including the revelation of his own guilt, but he affirms no morality of his own accepting the circumstances of his birthright rather than affirming his permanent values.

There is distinction between Nick and Gatsby most conspicuously is their deeply rooted self-identification. Nick is capable of judging Gatsby and so is saved from a similar fate. Nick survives because he possesses knowledge that Gatsby lacks. It is the heritage of traditional moral values that he has learned from his father. He is indebted to Mr. Carraway. Nick says that reserving all judgments that allows him to value his neighbor's romantic idealism and for that sense of fundamental decencies of life (11), which makes it possible for him to see the shabby limitations of Gatsby's dreams. At the start of the story, Nick was ready to reject his moral heritage along with the Carraway name that is Nick refused to take the job awaiting him in the

wholesale hardware business that had been in his family for three generations. He left the “bored, sprawling, swollen towns beyond the Ohio” (162) and came east to take job in a Wall Street brokerage firm. By the end of the novel, it is the values represented for Nick by the image of his father that have saved him from Gatsby’s terrible mistake. Realizing this, Nick further says:

After Gatsby’s death, the East was haunted for me like that, distorted beyond my eyes’ power of correction. So, when the blue smoke of bridle leaves was in the air and the wind blew, the wet laundry stiff on the line I decided to come back home. (162)

After *absolution* appeared in the *American Mercury*, Fitzgerald was accused by some of his Catholic friends of having written a sacrilegious story. Fitzgerald’s first novel *This Side of Paradise* also had been the chronicle of his loss of religious faith. Henry Dan Piper writes on Fitzgerald’s *The Great Gatsby*, “to retain the tree – the residual tradition of moral values represented by the advice given to Nick by his father – without the sectarian dogma” (333). Nick is one aspect of Fitzgerald judging another aspect of himself. Hence, Nick must possess not only sympathy but also moral judgment. As the basis for this judgment, Fitzgerald initially tried to draw upon the framework of his own Catholic childhood. In *The Great Gatsby*, Fitzgerald has presented the degenerated life of America in the 1920s but he is not for it. *The Great Gatsby* became a criticism of the ideal of the American dream. How desperately Nick longed for such a moral absolute by the end of *Gatsby* is suggested by his remark, “when I came back from the East last summer . . . the world to be in uniform and at a sort of moral attention forever” (111). The closest Nick can come to such an absolute, however, is to go back home and take up his responsibilities as a member of the Carraway clan.

Part of *The Great Gatsby's* lasting significance derives from the extent to which Fitzgerald recognizes and grapples with some basic problems of the Twentieth century. His work is strongly influenced by the First World War. Fitzgerald lively represents the post-war America that is economically sound but spiritually bankrupt. It is a satire on the American society of the 1920s. He said, "One should be able to see that things are hopeless, yet be determined to make them otherwise" (Lockridge 4). By presenting the meaningless and rootless immoral society Fitzgerald longs to change this that is embodied in the person of Nick Carraway. What Carraway stands for in the novel is what Fitzgerald desires for.

Fitzgerald's ideal world unfolds with a kind of blindness towards violence and the grotesque. The reality of this narrative fact is believed by Nick who tells us from the beginning that what he wants most is a world of moral absolutes, the world "in uniform and at a sort of moral attention forever" (11). As we know Fitzgerald has intended at one time to write a novel about the gilded age set in New York with a Catholic element. "While he never writes that novel, *The Great Gatsby* in many ways conceptualizes some of these ideas" (123), says Richard Lehan.

As T. S. Eliot's *The Wasteland*, *The Great Gatsby* also is related to religious theme because it has as it is deeply felt spirituality/morality. The whole of *Gatsby's* story including both his ideal and his absurd plan for materializing it are redeemed from corruption and waste. The lackness of morality/spirituality is what Fitzgerald wants to emphasize in the novel.

3.7 The Fate of the American Dreamers

Gatsby has many false conceptions that money can recreate the past, prestige and everything one cherishes for. His notion is exhibited through his house, his clothes, automobile and all material sophistication to pursue his dream. He owns a

large portion of finances due to some mysterious source of wealth, and he uses this mystery source to buy his house, his clothes, and Daisy. His house, as Fitzgerald describes it is, “a factual imitation of some Hotel de Ville in Normandy with a tower on one side, spanking new under a thin beard of raw ivy and a marble swimming pool and more than forty acres of lawn and garden” (Fitzgerald 9). This house, as Fitzgerald fabulously enlightens to, is an immaculate symbol of Gatsby’s incalculable income. “The house he feels he needs in order to win happiness”, is an elegant mansion that of which an excellent symbol of carelessness is displayed and is a part of Gatsby’s own persona.

Every Monday after a party, eight servants keep this house. It has its own entrance gate and is big enough to hold hundreds of people at a time. His careless use for money to impress others is portrayed through his clothes, a gold metallic hat, silver vests and gold jackets. The shirts and clothes that are ordered every spring and fall show his simplicity in expressing his wealth to his beloved Daisy. At the sight of his piles and piles of shirts, Daisy breaks down and says, “They are such beautiful shirts, it makes me sad because I’ve never seen such beautiful shirts before” (89). It seems silly to cry over simple shirts but it is not the shirts themselves that overwhelm her but her tempt towards Gatsby’s wealth. These shirts represent the simple awesome manner of Gatsby’s wealth and his ability to try and purchase Daisy’s love through the use of extensive clothing. Fitzgerald wisely shows how Gatsby uses his riches to buy Daisy, but although his wealth draws Daisy closer temporarily to him, he cannot truly have possessed her heart again.

In the story, we know that both Tom and Daisy are careless people, hence “they smashed up things . . . and then returned back into their money” (24). By this, we know that their main concern is money. Gatsby realizes this and is powered by

this. He is driven to extensive and sometimes illegal actions. He feels he must be rich and so he carelessly indulges into illegal activities to regain his past love. But when he earns enough riches, and expresses Daisy his readiness to spend any amount of money for his love, Gatsby is badly deserted.

Chapter 4

Disillusionment Caused by the False Idealism of the American Dream

The Great Gatsby portrays the false ideal of the American Dream of achieving love, pleasure, happiness and even power by money and matter. Hence, the cause for disillusionment underlines the dichotomy between idealism that they believe it to be true versus manifestation as an unexpected reality unlike their belief. Their idealism is to be happy with affluence of material prosperity and all sophistication with it, regardless of morality/spirituality/humanity, tradition and so on. Thus, idealism appeared as decadence, faithlessness, spiritual barrenness, selfishness,

disillusionment, violence and death. For the sake of gaining worldly pleasure, Gatsby, Tom, Daisy and Myrtle and most of the characters in the novel forget human morality and sacred relationships within them. They are guided by false idealism.

Since there is no culture, no religion, and no faith to hold the things together in Gatsby's world, the characters in the story are ill fated. The symbolic landscape the "valley of ashes" is the manifestation of contemporary life of 1920s in America. The valley of ashes is lifeless, waterless and barren where only those without aspirations and with no sense of moral responsibility like Tom and Daisy, George and Myrtle Wilson can hope to survive. Daisy having affair for five years with Gatsby betrays him because Gatsby lacks material prosperity before, though Gatsby's love for her is not rewarded even if he earns abundance of wealth later. His sacred love does not work to regain with the means of money and all matters he earns in his life. When they had love in the past, they did not have money and when they have money, they do not have love as those of past days. Hence, even after having every worldly sophistication with Gatsby to make Daisy happy is ultimately futile/meaningless. His spiritual love in front of her superficial love is not rewarded, rather he is deserted because he lacks morality. Hence, the ideal of the American Dream - the belief that it is possible for anyone in America, however, poor to win success and wealth by their own efforts, is proven as a false ideal.

Considering other characters, Myrtle Wilson is a sterile woman even though she is married to George for eleven years; but she is not worried about her sterility. Like Daisy, she too has lost all moral and desirable decent behavior. Most of the characters have extra-marital affair including her. Myrtle's relationship with Tom is just to persuade adultery or just to experience the adventures experienced by the upper-class people. There is no word in the novel to justify her affair with Tom as

love. She is exclusively materialist for she hates her husband for not wearing fashionable clothes. This is her moral and cultural degeneration. Tom is equally degenerated character who does not have any genuine regards for Myrtle. He keeps an apartment in New York just to make love with her. Tom and Myrtle's affair is for mere physical gratification than for procreation; their love does not bring any fruit; and hence ultimately brings tragic end.

The novel is about the true love of Gatsby rather than his infatuation for Daisy with the hope that she would accept him. So, Gatsby devotes his entire life for this pursuit of ideal love. Gatsby, the protagonist with a higher goal bootlegs a fortune. Gatsby's goal, however, is physical, is based on a purely materialistic, thereby is doomed to disillusionment to death. He tries to pursue the American Dream like its earlier Europeans and later settlers pursued but he makes a reverse journey instead of creating himself in the sophisticated East and going to raw West, and Gatsby creates himself in the West and goes East. His spiritual fathers, Dan Cody and Meyer Wolfsheim are the pioneer designers of the underworld. Thus, on the one hand Gatsby is a bootlegger, and on the other hand his quest of winning Daisy back is seduced in a loveless and commercial society. The substitution of attractive but inherently worthless goals, such as Daisy represents, has led to the disappearance of America's historical promise and to the hopelessness of the wasteland. Daisy is brutal and cold; she deserts Gatsby at the end and disillusiones Gatsby by giving him superficial love in return of his true love towards her. He had devoted his entire life for Daisy but she coldly allows Gatsby to shoulder the blame for her crime of murdering Myrtle. At Gatsby's death, she neither attends his funeral nor sends a flower, rather she silently and selfishly confides in Tom's world. Thus, Daisy is equally brutal, opportunist, selfish, hypocritical and arrogant as Tom. None of

Gatsby's former party-goers send any message or attend his funeral. They were so selfish that they went to Gatsby when he had something to give them but not at the time of need. Even Meyer Wolfwheim, who was Gatsby's lifetime partner, rejects to get mixed up in Gatsby's death.

All the characters run after money and worldly pleasure. Daisy has communion with Gatsby's shirts; she weeps over piles of Gatsby's shirts as if they were sacred objects. This is her materialistic attitude. The world of Gatsby is rootless and completely imaginative. Gatsby cuts himself off from all of his traditional roots; he discards his physical father and accepts Meyer Wolfsheim and Dan Cody as his godfather. In the novel, none of the characters have love for their origin and tradition. Daisy is not sincere to her daughter Pammy. George and Myrtle's marriage has gone dead. The characters pursue hedonistic lifestyle. They throw noisy parties and drink bootlegged liquor. The American Fitzgerald in *The Great Gatsby* has not even little spiritual coherence that he believes money only is of any matter. The characters are corrupt, selfish, vulgar, and superficial instead of virtuous qualities. As the American Dream itself is based on materialistic values, Gatsby's car represents the same as American society that led such objects in high esteem. The dominance of matter over mankind is Fitzgerald's satire on 1920s' contemporary society.

The characters in the novel have not visited any religious places throughout the novel. The blind eyes of Doctor T. J. Eckleburg symbolize the disintegration and degeneration of modern American. The God is blind to men because they are degenerated. Even Nick is not sincere about his affair with Jordan Baker, and hence he decides to break off the relationship with her and returns home in the Mid-West. The world in *The Great Gatsby* has fallen morally apart. As of morality, Nick alone remains untainted by the effects of the corrupting East, and he is able to do this

largely by remaining true to the Mid-Western values of his youth. After Gatsby's death, Nick realizes he can not remain true to himself if he remains in the East and so he returns to the West of traditional morality, but all other remaining characters in the novel stake into the same tradition that they adopted of modern America, and thus got disillusioned coming out from their previous beliefs.

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