

**POSTULATES OF CULTURAL MATERIALISM AND
NEW HISTORICISM IN THE SELECT NOVELS OF
SINCLAIR LEWIS**

A Thesis

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award of the degree of

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in

English

By

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Preface

The thesis entitled *Postulates of Cultural Materialism and New Historicism in the Select Novels of Sinclair Lewis* explores the plight of the middle class Americans who remained rigid and insensitive to the social and cultural changes brought about by science and technology after the World War -1 in the United States of America. The massive cultural transformation after the World War-1 brought about the growth of money culture and people became crazy to make easy money, flouting all the ideals of the American Dream. Scott Fitzgerald highlighted the mood of the age and the money mania in his famous novel *The Great Gatsby*. The main focus of this study is on the emergence of the middle class consciousness and the pervasive vogue of the virus of greed and hypocrisy that infected the middle class Americans living in the small villages and towns of America. The study explores the evolution of “New Historicism” and its dialectical relationship with the growing middle class consciousness in the “Jazz Age” of America. This study relies on the forces of cultural materialism to explore and investigate the novels of Sinclair Lewis who got Nobel Prize for Literature in 1930 for his significant contribution made to the middle classes of America. Lewis had philosophical vision about the American society as he evolved new ideas and themes to depict the middle class consciousness of the Americans. He realized that there were two Americas: the first, living in New York, Chicago and Washington populated by the elite class and the business tycoons. The other America lived in the small towns and villages like Gooper Praries and Zenith. Lewis found the middle class Americans infected with the virus of rigidity; conformity; meanness; greed and orthodox ideas. America was emerging as a super power in the world but 80 percent Americans who lived in the small towns and villages resisted all changes. Lewis published *Babbitt* and exposed the Babbitt culture;

published *Arrowsmith* and exposed the greedy and meanness of the medical practitioners who were crazy to fleece the patients and make money. He published *Main Street* and exposed the mean and backward main street mentality of the middle classes. The titles of all his novels became catch phrases and found resonance in every home and office of America. This study is focused on the mind and sensibility of the middle class Americans exposed and ridiculed by him in his novels; their greed; meanness and their main street mentality; wretchedness and dehumanization. Sinclair Lewis became the trend setter as in all his famous novels he articulated his serious concern about the uncertainties, challenges and fears of survival of the middle-class Americans. He was not interested to depict the absurdities and challenges confronted by the elite Americans deviating from the American tradition established by Henry James, Melville, Hawthorne and Mark Twain. He wrote about the life and beliefs of the middle class Americans trapped in the bog of rigidity; meanness and orthodoxy. Sinclair Lewis's novels demonstrated the small-minded conformity of the conservative folk of the Mid-West and lashed at their smug self-righteous ignorance. According to James Lundquist, "Lewis was ultimately concerned with the question of how to live in American culture of the 1920s rather than with what that culture was like." (Lundquist, *Sinclair Lewis* 35) In the modern times, the popularity of the theories of New Historicism and Cultural Materialism has increased manifold as the modern critics are taking active interest in historical documents from the perspective of social vision. New Historicism is a literary theory which was propounded by Raymond Williams and revised by Greenblatt. They argued that literature can be evaluated with the lens of social ideas. Society, people and culture have great significance and no one can ignore the impact of these forces. Stephen Greenblatt propounded the theory of New Historicism and contended that literature is dynamic in

nature. Its relevance is felt in all times and in all ages. For example Shakespeare wrote Othello in the 16th century but the theme of jealousy is relevant even today. Greenblatt opined that a work of literature is influenced by its author's times and circumstances. Moreover, the beliefs and prejudices of the critic also influence the evaluation of a work of art. A New Historicist looks at literature in a wider historical context, examining both how the writer's times affected the work and how the work reflects the writer's times. According to John Brannigan, "the historicist critics realized that the kind of history which we constructed in the present , represented as much a view of ourselves in the present as of those in the past" (Brannigan, *New Historicism and Cultural Materialism* 30). New Historicists believe that past becomes available all times and past has social relevance for the present. Sinclair Lewis's novels have thus social relevance as they open new vistas of knowledge about the middle-class Americans. New Historicism is associated with the philosophy and ideology of Cultural Materialism. According to Brannigan, power includes subversion and all attempts at subversion: "Power can only define itself in relation to subversion, to what is alien or other, and at the heart of power is therefore the production and subsequent containment of subversion" (Brannigan 31).

In this study, all the major novels of Sinclair Lewis are investigated through the lens of Cultural Materialism and New Historicism. His earliest novels were published in Yale University's magazine. Lewis was a passionate journalist who pursued his career as a writer and earned money by writing for the *Cosmopolitan* and *The Evening Post*. Lewis was not comfortable with his journalistic career and devoted himself to the writing of fiction and in 1920 he published his debut novel *Main Street* and soon became an international celebrity. Lewis's *Main Street* became the first American best sellers of the 20th century and got him the prestigious Pulitzer Prize in

1921. Lewis became famous in America as a staunch critic of capitalist system of America and the critics and reviewers expressed their divergent views about his radical vision. This novel was followed by *Arrowsmith* (1926) and *Babbitt*(1922). In the *Main Street*, Lewis chronicles the plight of a newly married couple Carol Milford and Will Kennicott who begin their life in a small town Goopher Prairie. The novel is a critique of the stagnant life of the “small-town people” greedy, rigid and conformist. Lewis depicts the growing cultural obsession of the people at a time when America is emerging as a Super Power in the world with her tremendous achievements in science and technology. Lewis’ critique of American capitalistic ideas and critical observation of American capital system is a landmark in American literature. Lewis’ *Babbitt* is considered as a literary parody exposing and ridiculing the emotional vacancy of the American middle-classes. Lewis has virulently attacked the greed of the business tycoons of America who resorted to fraudulent malpractices. Novelists like John Dos Passos Lewis launched a militant attack on the capitalists who exploited and oppressed the poor farm workers and fruit pickers of America. Lewis got Nobel Prize in 1930 for his passionate interest and his humanistic ideals expressed in his famous novels such as *Main Street*(1920), *Babbitt* (1922) and *Dodsworth* (1929). In this study the idealistic and radical vision of Sinclair Lewis is explored relying on the theories of Cultural Materialism and New Historicism. It is averred that the novels of Lewis brought social and cultural awareness among the middle class Americans and the growth of middle class consciousness; and the emergence of new enlightened American society was a positive contribution of Sinclair Lewis.

Chapter : One

Brief Candle

The thesis entitled “*Postulates of Cultural Materialism and New Historicism in the Select Novels of Sinclair Lewis*” is focused on the social and cultural vision of Sinclair Lewis who used art of writing fiction to chronicle the sufferings of the poor and the downtrodden middle class Americans living in small villages and towns. Harry E. Maule and Melville H. Crane observed in their book *Sinclair Lewis* (1973) that “Sinclair Lewis perhaps exerted a more profound influence upon the United States of America than any other writer of his time” (35). It is a historical fact that the novels of Lewis roused a better understanding of America and ushered in an era of change and cultural transformation propagating new social and cultural ideology. The ideas and thoughts of Sinclair Lewis changed the mind and sensibility of the American social and political thinkers of his age. Matthew Arnold observed that literature should be a criticism of life and John Milton observed that literature should teach human beings how to live in this world. The characters of Lewis openly ask the question: “What is life really all about?” Lewis was dissatisfied by the answers provided by the society. He found the pervasive vogue of materialism, consumerism and conformity; and people were crazy to achieve material wealth and ready to flout all the norms of the American Dream. The American society had grown a valueless society and the contagion of meanness, conformity and rigidity had infected the middle classes. Lewis emerged as a social critic and he exposed and ridiculed the growing malaise of the age. He sought to condemn the mean and rigid mentality of the Americans living in small towns and launched a crusade against the business tycoons who amassed wealth by fraudulent means. His novels depict the dynamic social vision as all his characters struggle to change their environment.

What is Materialism?

Materialism means the lust for material goods and the material comforts of life. As the civilization develops it is natural for man to run after the material prosperity. George Simmel in his book *Philosophy of Money* (1900) observes that money plays vital role in the society and in human relationships. George Simmel is a prominent economic philosopher as he believes that money is the basic need of man and it is the money force that governs all social, political and economic relationships. In the postmodern society, money is an important factor bringing about changes in the society. Simmel believed that people created value by making objects, then separating themselves from those objects and then trying to overcome that distance. He found that the objects that were too close were not considered valuable and objects that were too far away for people to obtain were also not considered valuable. What was also considered in determining value was the time, sacrifice, and difficulties involved in getting objects. In the pre-modern era, beginning with bartering, different systems of exchange for goods and services allowed for the existence of incomparable systems of value, land, food, honor and love. Materialism means love for money and the faith in the material comforts of life. In the capitalistic society of America, materialism became very popular as money culture gripped the psyche of the Americans.

The Role of Media in American Capitalism

In America, the role of media had been tremendous and with the growth of print media , a large army of journals and newspapers appeared. Many colleges and the universities were set up during the time of Sinclair Lewis; and newspapers and journals also appeared. With the growth of democracy, the media became very

popular and proved as a powerful tool to spread the waves of cultural materialism. The novels of Sinclair Lewis brought about tremendous cultural transformation as his novels were widely read by the Americans living in the remote villages of America. The senators and the political leaders realized that the villages and the towns of America needed renovation and it is no wonder that the efforts of the media brought many changes in the society. New schools were set up; new industry was set up and many new companies emerged in these backward towns because of the reportage of the media. Frederic Jameson also talked about the positive role of the media culture in the development of modern society.

The Role of Women in the Capital Society of America

Sinclair Lewis's novel *Ann Vickers*, published in 1933, and it was surprising to find in its story the concepts and rhetoric of a feminist movement as contemporary as the current ideas and expressions being espoused by the various women's liberation and rights groups. The question of women is well discussed by Lewis. I got interested in Lewis's fiction because he was from the Midwest, wrote about middle-class people, and remains a severe critic of American towns and cities as well as of its social institutions and values. A study directed towards examining the images of women in his novels, which cover a period of about thirty-seven years of our history, would, not only shed light on who the Midwestern woman is, but also on who we are all becoming. Over a period of thirty-nine years, Sinclair Lewis published twenty three novels, two collections of short stories, three plays, essays, reviews, and ephemera. He recorded middle-class America through periods ranging from the suffragist movement, prohibition, the depression, and two world wars.

D. J. Dooley comments on Lewis is looking outward rather than inward, he attempted to analyze the forces which affected the behavior of his fellow citizens in a confusing transitional period; he tried to discover what were the sources of hope and frustration in the lives of typical young women, white collar workers, engineers, and garage mechanics of his time. Dooley adds that he was influenced by H. G. Wells, G. B. Shaw and Thorstein Veblen; his themes were: (1) the barriers of provincialism; (2) the waste of mis-education; (3) the possibilities of socialism; (4) the promise of science and technology; (5) the precariousness of marriage in modern society, especially as it is affected by job security. Writers Carl Van Doren and E. M. Forster use such adjectives to describe Lewis's ability to record the ambience of the social scene as seismographic and photographic respectively. The subject of this work is the image of women in Lewis's novels; the original intention was to examine the American woman portrayed by a writer whose method of writing lent itself to the socio-cultural approach of criticism or examination, but after the novels were analyzed, some of the portrayals were found to function aesthetically within the structure of the novel, as well as thematically as specific social types, so that the approach varies from the social cultural to the formal.

Role of Religion in the Novel of Sinclair Lewis

Lewis, perhaps because of his own pilgrimage, made much use of both religious and secular faith as themes in his novels. In two novels, in particular, the loss of religious faith is dealt with at length. Elmer Gantry, the spectacularly successful and controversial 1927 novel about a corrupt and self-serving minister, presents several characters whose faith in God fades away. The God- Seeker, written in the last years

of Lewis's life, was a critical and popular failure. It sold only 30,000 copies and was never reprinted. While it was certainly not one of Lewis's great achievements, he put more time and effort over the years into the planning and writing of *The God-Seeker* than any of his other works. He first conceived the idea of writing a great novel about the labor movement in 1910, ten years before the success of *Main Street* brought him recognition as a novelist. Over and over the "labor novel" is in the background of Lewis's other activities. He wrote elaborate plot outlines and genealogies of his characters. He conceived it as a trilogy which would trace the involvement of an American family in the labor movement over a century, from 1830 to 1930 a movement to socialism as a secular faith.

Cultural Materialism

Cultural Materialism is a theory connected with the left wing ideology. Marvin Harris propounded this theory in his book *The Rise of Anthropological Theory* (1968). There are two important ideas in the theory: culture and materialism. Culture is a wider term containing social structure of society; law, religion, politics, art and literature. The development of culture is important for the development of any society. The history of mankind is a long story of development and growth of civilization. When man lived in the forest he was not cultured but with coming of the science and technology cultural development took place in the world. Harris observes that art and literature develop culture and in the process, infrastructure also develops. Marx observes that when the culture develops it also leads to material growth of the country. Materialism is not linked with spiritual development, religion and intellect but is closely linked with materiality that is money, infrastructure and means of production. For Marx, there are three levels”

- 1) Infrastructure: labor, industry and technology.
- 2) Structure: education, production, rules and laws.
- 3) Superstructure: Government and production.

The theory of cultural materialism can be relied upon while examining and investigating the novels of Lewis. He wrote *Babbitt* and brought into the limelight the plight of the middle class people, their rigidity, spirit of stagnation and human degradation. He published the *Main Street* and highlighted the rigidity and backwardness of the middle class Americans living in small towns and villages. His novels promoted new culture and the need for education; seminars; the interference of

the government were felt to educate the backward and the rigid middle class Americans for the growth and progress of the country. Thus, the cultural growth of Lewis was inevitably linked with materialism. New relations were set up and new means of production such as malls, cinema houses, skyscrapers and other big buildings came into existence. Lewis never envisioned that his novels would bring about such transformation in American society.

In this study, the main focus is on the social criticism of Sinclair Lewis expressed in his novels. His novels reflect “the beliefs, values and forms of power” that he observed and experienced. Current R. in his “American History: A Survey” observes that “America experienced and witnessed a bitter conflict between the forces of modernism associated with the new urban – industrial society and the forces of traditionalism associated with the more provincial and often rural communities” (Current 28). Lewis, unlike Hemingway, Fitzgerald and Heller who seemed to be proud of and happy with this change, saw the changing America from another perspective. For Lewis, the new America was even more of a nightmare than the old one had ever been. Lewis gives a vivid picture of the crushing forces of society and the victimization of Babbitt representing the class of tired businessmen. The life of Babbitt is a case study and through his character the American consciousness is investigated applying the theory of New Historicism and Cultural Materialism. Greenblatt observes that the “the fundamental need of infrastructure is the basis of cultural materialism” (13). The learned critic holds that the process of production and reproduction virtually determines the social and political structure. This dialectical relationship also determines the behavioral and mental superstructure. Harris used to call it the principle of “Infrastructural Determinism” but too many criticized him for

being overly deterministic; so, he softened his stance. Karl Marx talks of the production forces and T. Robert Malthus talks of the forces of reproduction. Malthus says: “New Historicism is a development of Historicism and thus shares an awareness of the fact that writing history involves interests far beyond those of retrieving some sort of objective past. History is always reconstructed and rewritten in the present, and is thus a reflection of the culture of society” (Malthus 123). John Brannigan in his *New Historicism and Cultural Materialism* (1998) observes that “the kind of history which we constructed in the present , represented as much a view of ourselves in the present as of those in the past” (30). Lewis wrote in 1930s and the issues he took are relevant today because the middle classes of present time are also suffering from the same bane of conformity, rigidity and greed. Brannigan observes that “power includes subversion and all other attempts of subversion. Power can only define itself to subversion, to what is alien or other and at the heart of power is therefore the production and subsequent containment of subversion” (64).

Marvin Harris in his book *The Rise of Anthropological Theory* opined that Cultural materialism can be defined as an anthropological research orientation, Marvin Harris further developed this theory in his book *Cultural Materialism* (1979) and argued that social change is the result of evolution depending on the infrastructure, structure and super structure of the society. Moreover, literature plays dominant role in changing the graph of society through revolutionary ideas. Cultural Materialism is a term employed by Raymond Williams who is a prominent Marxist. He further talks of the transformation of the social order which exploits people on the ground of race, gender and class. Cultural Materialism takes into consideration both productive and reproductive forces as the primary factors which shape society. The

novels of Sinclair Lewis deal with the themes of rigidity, conformity, backwardness, meanness, the main street mentality, greed and human degradation which hinder the growth of cultural development of society. According to Harris, Cultural Materialism strives to create a pan-human science of society. In the present study, an effort has been made to trace the evolution of the materialistic culture in the small villages and towns of America which were backward and neglected and which got a new uplift and modern outlook after the publication of the novels of Sinclair Lewis.

Harry Sinclair Lewis was born in 1885 in Sauk Centre, a small village with the population of 2800, in Minnesota. In his early age he had a passion to read the books and he kept a diary. Mark Schorer writes that Lewis was a queer boy who led a lonely life and remained always an outsider. In 1914, Lewis married Grace Livingston Hegger who was an editor of *Vogue Magazine*. She gave birth to a son who was named after H. G. Wells. Lewis's son was killed in action and in desperation Lewis divorced Grace in 1925. He married Dorothy Thomson who was a political columnist and purchased a new house in Vermont. His son Michel Lewis turned drug addict and died in 1975. Once again Lewis experienced psychological trauma. Mark Schorer writes that the real career of Lewis began with the clandestine success of his novel *Main Street* published on October 23, 1920. More than two million copies of the novel were sold and Lewis became the hero of the middle classes in America. Schorer puts on record that Lewis made three million dollars and was interviewed by many editors of the magazines and newspapers. By 1921, he had published six novels. He published *The Job* (1917), *Free Air* (1919), *Main Street* (1920), *Babbitt* (1922), *Arrowsmith* (1925), *Mantrap*, (1926), *Dodsworth* (1929), *Cheap and Contented* (1929), *It Can't Happen Here* (1935), and *World so Wide* (1951) In 1930, Lewis

became the first American author to be awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature. He was also awarded the Pulitzer Prize for *Arrowsmith*, but he declined to accept it. Lewis's main focus is on the greed and the mean mentality of the middle classes of America that suffered Wars, Prohibition and the Great depression. D. J. Dooley (1967) comments thus:

Sinclair Lewis depicted their main street mentality; rigidity and narrow mindedness in all his novels. He took up the problems and challenges of the workers, office goers, railroad workmen. and garage mechanics of his time” (Dooley 53).

Lewis seriously took up the issues of the middle class people living in small towns and villages of America. He raised the issue of their job insecurity and the themes of the barriers of provincialism. He put faith in the growing philosophy of socialism and the cause of the labor class. Carl Van Doren and E. M. Forster eulogized Lewis's ability to document the problems of the middle class Americans in a realistic manner. Sinclair Lewis' novel *Main Street* (1920) is a scathing indictment of life in small-town America during the early years of the 20th century. Sherwood Anderson commented thus on the publication of the novel:

“I am writing to tell you how glad I am that you wrote *Main Street*. Hope it will be read in every town in America. As a matter of fact, I suppose it will find most of its readers in the cities. You've sure done a job” (Anderson, *Letter to Lewis*, December, 1, 1920).

Lewis's phrase “main street became so famous in America that it became a synonym for narrow provincialism; it was observed that in every city of America

there was a “main street full of narrow minded people ready to fight at any time with mean mentality and conformity. Lewis was shocked to observe the mean mentality of the middle-class people. Liberty, individual rights, and freedom were bartered for the dictates of the prosperous middle class of business men and merchants. Lewis vigorously attacked the narrow-mindedness, mediocrity, and conformity of small-town America. Carl Van Doren in his book *The American Novel 1789-1939* commented thus after the publication of Lewis’s *The Main Street*:

“In *The Main Street* he sets out to tell a true story about the American village, whether anybody would read it or not, and he was surprised by the tremendous acclamation. He had not reasoned that it was time to take a new attitude toward the village or calculated that it would be prudent. He only put down, dramatically, the discontents that had been sitting in him for at last fifteen years. But there was something seismographic in his nerves, and he had recorded a ground swell of popular thinking and feeling. His occasional explicit comments on dull villages were quoted till they reverberated” (305).

The predominant theme of the novels of Sinclair Lewis is to bring to the lime light the middle-class consciousness, as Lewis ridicules the myth of the goodness of small town-life as a falsehood. Lewis in his *Babbitt* and *Main Street* used all the tools of grotesque and satire to expose and ridicule complacency, nationalism, blind pride, conformity of the American middle classes. His novels brought new awareness in the middle classes of Americans who were lost in the abyss of darkness. In his *Main Street*, Lewis first sets up the town Gopher Prairie, as a small, close minded, ignorant

place where Carol Kennecott feels starved of any culture. Gopher Prairie is a mini America populated by smug, narrow-minded conformists struggling to become rich and throwing liberty and individuality to the winds. Gopher Prairie represents rural America; uncultured, backward, fear ridden and resisting all changes of transformation. Carol meets Vida who is conservative in his outlook and tells her: “Gopher Prairie standards are as reasonable to Gopher Prairie as Lake Shore Drive standards are to Chicago. And there’s more Gopher Prairies than there are Chicago’s” (96). Through Vida, Sinclair Lewis depicts the mindset of the middle classes; the big American cities like Chicago and New York boast of technological advancement; for their metros, clubs, skyscrapers and job opportunities but the real America lives in small towns like Gopher Prairie and their attitudes are the truths of America. This idea that the clannish, conservative, and self-centered attitudes of Gopher Prairie are in fact the attitudes of the nation as a whole is presented originally by Vida in *The Main Street*.

Elizabeth Stevenson in his book *Babbitts and Bohemians: The American 1920s* (1967) commented that “Sinclair Lewis held up a mirror of satire and longing to a whole people and thus provided not only his contemporaries but also the generations to come with a vivid image of what American small-town life was like during the first decades of the 20th century” (Stevenson 23). Sinclair exposes the false illusions of the American democracy since in reality, the rural America was lagging behind. The middle class people were clinging to rigidity and meanness and resisted all changes of culture. People of Gopher Prairie resisted the spirit of change and his novel gives a conflict between the old and new. They looked confused and bewildered but at the end of the novel they do realize the value of their individuality and get

social consciousness. Sinclair exposes their backwardness and begins his novel with the punch line: "This is America..." (15). Sinclair Lewis's introduction sets the tone for the novel "The story would be the same in Ohio or Montana," (1) he continues. Gopher Prairie represents the backwardness and rigidity of thousands of American villages. T. K. Whipple observes that Lewis's "interest is in social types and classes rather than in individuals as human beings" (Whipple 77).

Sinclair Lewis published his famous novel *Babbitt* in 1930 and got the Nobel Prize for literature. He was the first American who got the Nobel for USA. His perspective was fresh as he depicted the plight of the millions of middle class Americans for the first time. George F. Babbitt is a typical American business man dealing with real estate business, rigid, conformist, mean and crazy about money. Conformity is a deadly virus in America that kills and stifles human spirit. Babbitt's life is conditioned and regulated by the values and standards of Zenith. He throws all moral values in the winds to make money in his real estate business. Lewis has depicted a true picture of a middle class business man and highlights the Babbitt culture for the first time through this novel. His novel became so popular that Babbitt culture became a catchy phrase in each home and office of America. He is for society as all his thoughts are controlled by society. George F. Babbitt is a middle-aged man "nimble in selling houses for more than people could afford to pay. There is the high-tech alarm clock and each activity of Babbitt is reported through this clock. His clock symbolizes his high social status. He looks at the rough camp blanket, a symbol of the freedom and heroism of the West" (Sinclair Lewis, *Babbitt* 5) as he dresses for the day, Babbitt thinks over each article his "Solid Citizen" uniform. He takes pride in his

Booster's club button symbolizing his middle-class vanity and pride. Lewis devotes first seven chapters to describe Babbitt's life of a single day.

In *Babbitt* (1922) Sinclair Lewis shows concern for historicity and social consciousness because he believed that the masses of America are living in darkness in spite of the growth of science and technology. America had emerged as a super power in the world defeating Germany and the war brought tremendous social and political changes. The women turned flappers and there was a galore of fashion with the mushroom growth of pubs and clubs in the big cities. The small towns and cities populated by the middle-class people remained backward and orthodox. Lewis directed his attention toward them seriously to bring in them social consciousness. The world of *Babbitt* is the world of the middle class, of fairly prosperous citizens aspiring to climb even higher on the social ladder. Lewis describes Babbitt in the following lines:

“His name was George F. Babbitt. He was forty-six years old now, in April, 1920, and he made nothing in particular, neither butter nor shoes nor poetry, but he was nimble in the calling of selling houses for more than people could afford to pay” (2).

The critics of New Historicism and Cultural Materialism contend that there is no end of the discussion of the text and the issues always remain alive in all ages. Lewis assails the rapaciousness of capitalism and Commercialism in his novel. The forces of capitalism are crushing the individuality even today. Of capitalism, Lewis, in his article "The Passing of Capitalism", asserts thus:

“Babbitt is a prosperous real-estate businessman. Having everything in life, he is supposed to be happy and content. In spite of having everything required to fit neatly into the mold of social expectation – a loyal wife, three children, a modern house that has all modern appliances and an automobile –he seems to be dissatisfied with his life “ (4).

These city dwellers were crazy about minting dollars by hook or by crook. They were lost in the quagmire of lust and greed and confined themselves to a shallow existence. Lewis observed that “the middle- class Americans discarded all the values of their forefathers with false values; they are too much concerned with appearances to worry about the meaning of life, or to consider the value of their endeavors in the bigger scheme of things” (23). Lewis emerges as the leading cultural historian as his novels played vital role in bringing transformation in all aspects of life; in education, infrastructure and in the evolution of modernity and economic prosperity.

In *Arrowsmith*, Lewis gives an insight in the medical profession of the cities depicted in the novels *Main Street* and *Babbitt*. Lewis has exposed the greed, meanness and hypocrisy of the middle-class people living in the stifling American environment. Lewis highlights the fact that there is no space for Martin Arrowsmith and his talent will be rot in the stifling environment of the society. Lewis has exposed the hypocrisy that prevails in the world of medicine. Lewis depicts the world of hypocrisy of Main Street or Boosters’ Club, Lewis’s Martin Arrowsmith represents all Americans struggling to grow but the stifling environment crushes their individuality.

Scientists and doctors were engaged in making money flouting all norms of society. At the University of Winnemac, Martin realizes that scientists and doctors are given to “getting and spending” and accumulate money for fame, and prestige. Lewis exposes the money culture of the big institutions and compares the University of Winnemac with “a Ford Motor Factory turning out beautifully standardized” products, that is, students” (Sinclair Lewis, *Arrowsmith* 7). Dr. Roscoe Geake, “professor of otolaryngology sums up the philosophy of the university; Knowledge is the greatest thing in the medical world but it’s no good whatever unless you can sell it, and to do this you must first impress your personality on the people who have the dollars” (83). The main motive of the doctors is not to cure and heal the wounds of the patients but to make more dollars; they are not interested in the life of the people but in self aggrandizement. Martin complains about “his fellow students and their attitude toward medicine”. They are learning a trade and the doctor’s trade will “enable him to cash in” (24). In his opinion, “they are plain commercialists” (29). In his novel *Elmer Gantry*, (1927) Lewis continues his theme of middle class consciousness; greed and stifling environment of the people living in small towns. He emerges as an idol-breaker lashing at the hypocrisy of the religious places. The plot of the novel begins thus:

“Elmer Gantry was drunk. He was eloquently drunk, lovingly and pugnaciously drunk. He leaned against the bar of the Old Home Sample Room, the most gilded and urbane saloon in Cato, Missouri” (Sinclair Lewis *Elmer Gantry*, 1).

When the novel opens, Elmer Gantry was a senior at Terwellinger College in Kansas. Jim Lefferts, a very riotous young man, was his sole friend and room-mate. Elmer was class president but his reputation was very bad. He wanted to grab his office by hook or by crook and used all his Machiavellian tactics. He hated the church but joined it as one joins a racket just to make dollars. He is a crooked guy and knows the weakness of the people as he uses religion as a weapon to grow rich resorting to greed; hypocrisy; exhibiting his base traits of character. For Elmer Gantry love can be used to be rich and prosperous:

“Love is the magician, the enchanter that changes worth less things to joy, and makes right royal kings and queens of common clay. It is the perfume of the wondrous flower—the heart--and without that sacred passion, that divine swoon, we are less than hearts; but with it, earth is heaven and we are Gods” (57).

Lewis describes a series of ugly ventures of Elmer Gantry depicting his greed, sexuality, corruption and degradation. His first church -was at Schoenheim, a country town. But he soon leaves this charge after he had sexually assaulted a young, innocent girl and placed the blame for the misdeed on Floyd Kaylor, one of his country lovers. His next church is lost because of his drunkenness. His license of a clergyman is scrapped and he is on road again struggling for survival. He becomes a salesman and comes in contact with a woman Sharon Falconer. He remains with her for several years but when she dies Elmer Gantry goes to New York in desperation and becomes a partner of Mrs. Evans Riddle. But he does not remain here for a long time, because of his theft of money from the collection plate. He has no money and has to sell his

sermons to make money. A school mate lends him money to travel back to the West, where he becomes a minister again in the Methodist Church. The novel ends when he marries an honest woman, in spite of his graft, dishonesty and immorality. The checkered career of Elmer Gantry depicts his long journey of greed, avarice, degradation and treachery. He emerges as a wolf in sheep's clothing.

Lewis's novels *It Can't Happen Here*, *Dodsworth* and *Ann Viskers* deal with the problem of liberty threatened by the false democratic ideals of the American leaders. The terrorizing forces of Fascism, Nazism and Sovietism shook the whole world and spread in America the fear psychosis and anxiety of the future. The rise to power of Mussolini, Hitler and Stalin were merely different versions of the same despotism. America, then was at the cross-roads. Her ideals were being shaken because of the rise to power of Mussolini, Hitler and Stalin in Europe.

The threat to American democracy from despotic forces disturbed Sinclair who wrote *It Can't Happen Here*. The despotic rulers concentrated absolute political power in one individual who put shackles on the liberties of the people. Article Eight of the Fascist regime declared: "Mussolini is always right." The main protagonist in the novel is Berzelius Windrip who crushes liberty, individuality of the middle class people to rule and to subjugate them. He brings tyranny to America, based upon force and oratory. a newspaper editor, Doremus Jessup is the eye of the camera who narrates all the events of force and power and the spirit of human degradation in the novel. The novel is packed with the events of cruelties; Windrip's men kick and slash innocent wives and mothers; the jobs are usurped and the middle class is seen confused and bewildered. They are fear ridden and struggle to survive in small towns

and cities. Sinclair's *Dodsworth* depicts the virus of Philistinism, boosterism and bootlegging infecting the middle classes of America. People are given to making more dollars and throwing away all the values to the winds. They are rigid, orthodox and narrow-minded resisting all changes of transformation. They have slavish mentality and believe in the ideology of conformism. The journey of Sam Dodsworth and his experiences of Europe reveal the mean and greedy attitude of the middle-class Americans. Sam is an engineer and inventor who sold his automobile manufacturing plant. Sam is in his forties, begins to wonder whether he is not missing something and feels that there is void in his life and is disgusted to find growing greed and human degradation in America. The middle classes are directionless and are not in a mood to change their attitudes. Fran takes Sam to Europe for a change but she finds European middle classes rude, egotistic, rigid and greedy. Sinclair takes a cosmic view of the middle classes who are the same everywhere in America and in Europe.

To conclude, Sinclair Lewis brought new awareness in the society through his novels. His novels were read by millions of people in America including the political leaders and social reformers. Lewis depicted the problems of the people living in the small towns and villages and he became a mouthpiece of the poor and the neglected Americans. All the major novels of Sinclair Lewis deal with the theme of consciousness of the middle classes of America who were in the abyss of darkness. It was ironical that after the World War America had emerged as a super power of the world; but the majority of the Americans who lived in the small cities and towns were growing greedy, mean, rigid, orthodox and conformist. The individual liberty was crushed by the forces of capitalism and bureaucracy. The middle classes had lost interest in growth and transformation and Sinclair Lewis depicted the rusted spirit of

the middle classes and for his efforts to bring consciousness in the middle classes. Lewis did not know that in a way he was pursuing the policies of cultural materialism propagated by Raymond Williams and Harris. His novels brought about cultural transformation in the small cities and villages of America. In this study the mind, the sensibility and the rigid attitudes of the middle classes is explored through a fresh perspective relying on the theories of New Historicism and Cultural Materialism.

Texts taken for research;

The Novels of Sinclair Lewis

- 1) *Main Street* (1920),
- 2) *Babbitt* (1922),
- 3) *Arrowsmith* (1925),
- 4) *Dodsworth* (1929),
- 5) *Elmer Gantry* (1951)

Objectives of the Proposed Research

Many research scholars have explored different aspects of Sinclair Lewis's writings including areas of philosophy and psychology. They have analyzed the themes and the narrative techniques of Lewis. But in this study the main focus is on the exploration of the middle-class consciousness with a view to fill the research gap. The main objectives of the study are:

- 1) To trace the socio-economic and political forces that brought transformation in culture and brought the capitalism in America.

- 2) To explore the rigid and orthodox mind and sensibility of the American middle class lost in the abyss of darkness; the causes and consequences depicted in the novels of Sinclair Lewis.
- 3) To apply the sociological theories of the middle-class culture of Weber and Emile Durkheim to explore the mind and sensibility of the middle class Americans.
- 4) To investigate the quest of the middle-class protagonists of Sinclair Lewis for money and their eventual degradation.
- 5) To apply the theories of New Historicism and Cultural Materialism of Raymond Williams while contextualizing the growth of middle class consciousness of the Americans.

Importance of the Proposed Research

The study is significant as it explores the mind-set of the middle-class Americans living in small cities and towns of America and resisted all changes of growth and transformation. The novels of Lewis brought cultural transformation and contributed to the growth of education, infrastructure and modernity in America as the political leaders and the social reformers expressed their concern for the backwardness of the middle class Americans living in small towns and villages of America. In New York and Chicago, the growth was tremendous but there was no change visible in the small towns and cities. Sinclair Lewis has explored the cultural backwardness in his novels and this study is cultural in nature. The role of money and morality and the causes of the growing trend towards dehumanization; lust for money and greed are some of the

important themes of the novels of Sinclair Lewis. This study will add new dimensions in the area of research in cultural study.

Review of Literature of Past and Present

After having done an intensive study of the prominent critical books and research papers which appeared in reputed International Journals, it is found no full length study is available on the consciousness of the middle classes of the Americans depicted in the texts of Sinclair Lewis.

Alexander Meiklejohn in his book *What Does America Mean?* (1935) discusses the "exploiters and the exploited" relationship of the business tycoons and the labor class relying on the Marxian ideology. In this book, there is no reference to the growing decadence of morals depicted by Sinclair Lewis in his novels.

Van Wyck Brooks in *America's Coming of Age* (1924) discusses in detail the factors that led to the growth of America in the world and the causes of the growth of democratic ideals. He observes that Sinclair Lewis took up the themes of democratic ideals in his novels and the learned critic doesn't take up the middle-class consciousness.

Andre Siegfried in his book *America Comes of Age* (1927) and discusses the socio-political forces prevailing in America and the interest shown by Sinclair Lewis. In many of the novels, Sinclair Lewis expressed his concern for the ideals of American democracy and observed that in spite of opposing forces he puts his faith in American democracy.

James T. Adams wrote *Our Business Civilization* (1929) describing the money culture prevailing in America. He observes that the Americans are inspired by the American Dream ideal and value the identity of man by his potential to make dollars in the land of opportunities. In the big cities like New York and Chicago, the growth potential is much higher than the backward cities of America. Sinclair Lewis depicted in his novels the mood and temperament of the middle-class Americans.

Harry Earfcwiok in his book *The Foreground of American Fiction* (1934) discusses the stylistic techniques of Sinclair Lewis and observes that Lewis revolted from the traditional style of writing and evolves his own colloquial style. However, there is no reference to the middle-class consciousness.

Regis Michaud in his book *The American Novel Today* (1931) talks about the transformation of American culture in the Jazz age and the contribution made by Scott Fitzgerald and Thomas Heller in propagating the ideas of change. Sinclair Lewis did not follow the ideology of Scott Fitzgerald and Thomas Heller and focused on the problems and challenges of the middle-class Americans.

H. Quinn in his book *American Fiction* (1936) describes the growing forces of despotism in America and threat to individual liberty. There were trends in America to follow the slavish conformism and this led to the political and cultural crisis.

John Brannigan in *New Historicism and Cultural Materialism* (1998) realized that the history can be useful in understanding the past is an interpretive act.

Elizabeth Stevenson in his book *Babbitts and Bohemians: The American 1920s* (1967) observes that Sinclair Lewis “held up a mirror of satire and longing to a

whole people” and thus provided not only his contemporaries but also the generations to come. Walter Lippmann, in *Sinclair Lewis: A Collection of Critical Essays*, (1962) observes that the attitudes depicted in the *Main Street* of Sinclair, reflect the mood of the younger generation living in Gopher Prairie. Mark Schorer, *Sinclair Lewis: An American Life* (1961) observes that Lewis wanted to challenge his readers and their preconceptions about small-town life. Lewis picked up their torch, determined to expose the hypocrisy and narrow-mindedness.

D. J. Dooley in *The Art of Sinclair Lewis* (1967) observes that Sinclair presented the limited vision of Carol who is the main protagonist in the *Main Street* of Lewis. She is an outsider and her perspective on small-town life is biased. She does not give a rational view of the middle classes of Gopher Prairie. Lewis’s attitude toward the Middle West is as ambiguous as his attitude toward the middleclass.

Martin Light in *The Quixotic Vision of Sinclair Lewis* (1975) observes that the heroine of *Main Street* is the one who has to compromise herself and her ideals and that the villagers refuse to meet her half-way.

James Hutchisson in *The Rise of Sinclair Lewis: 1920-1930* (1996) observes that Lewis has given the callous attitude of the bankers, shopkeepers, lawyers, doctors in his novels and the plight of the poor people living in small villages. The Americans living in villages resist all changes and believe that the changes symbolize socialistic ideas.

Franz Alexander in *The Social and Cultural Life of the 1920s* observes that the new times have come with a new pace. Farm life with its trudging on in the same old rut has been replaced by city life with its racing onwards to conquer the next new

thing on the market. These city dwellers do not dare to bring changes in society and are living in the old style observing the old values. They believe that life is full of struggles and that their hurrying and scurrying is futile. Lewis's *Babbitt* is thus the archetypical American of the 1920s.

To conclude, May Sinclair in *The Merrill Studies in Babbitt* (1971) contributes an interesting point of view when she asserts that in *Babbitt*, the minor characters are lifelike and true to reality. Lewis did not receive a lot of praise for his realistic characters. On the contrary, his characters are perceived as types; they do not strike the reader as real. Ashild Tangen in *The Quest for Self in Sinclair Lewis'* (1998) discusses in detail the cultural changes that impacted the Americans after the Great War. Lewis concentrated on the life and attitudes of the Americans living in small cities and towns and expressed his concern about them in his novels. T. K. Whipple in *Collection of Critical Essays* (1968) observes that In *Arrowsmith*, Lewis takes his reader on a journey through the medical profession as well as on a journey through America, revisiting the locations he had portrayed in *Main Street* and *Babbitt* the small town and the middle-sized town, and their attitudes are exposed.

Chapter : Two

Resistance to Change and Rigidity of Ideas in Sinclair Lewis's *Main Street*

The year 1920 was a period of turbulence in America; the World War-1 ended in 1919 with the treaty of Versailles but the cultural transformation; the emergence of the Jazz and the flappers and money mania brought new challenges for the Americans. The Germans were demonized as rapists and the civil liberties were threatened. With the rise of technology and industry there was growing trend of rural migration to big cities like Chicago, New York, Los Angeles and Washington. The people after the World War flourished as there were many opportunities in business and industry and this was the surge of capitalism in American society. America was growing urban; its way of life was shifting under the pressure of new technology through the spread of radio, telephone and motion pictures. But, the small towns and cities and villages, in which more than seventy percent of population lived, were backward and underdeveloped. There were few schools and colleges and the people had to send their children to big cities for higher education. The middle class Americans were afflicted with the cancer of complacency and rigidity. The ban of alcohol and the Bolshevik Revolution of Russia were other causes that created an environment of insecurity in America of 1920s. Sinclair Lewis was a keen observer of human nature and he closely watched the mood of the people and the growing trends of cultural transformation. He was appalled to observe the rigidity, narrow-mindedness and conformity in the people of the small towns and villages. It was quite ironical to find that, on the one hand, America was emerging as a super power with

massive changes in the big cities with the growth of colleges, universities , malls , transportation and communication; but on the other hand the people living in small towns and villages were backward, rigid and narrow minded.

Elizabeth Stevenson (1967) in her book *Babbitts and Bohemians: The American 1920s* observes that in his novel *Main Street* Lewis “held up a mirror of satire belonging to whole people and provided not only his contemporaries but also the generations to come with a vivid image of what American small town life was like during the 1820s” (68). This rigidity, backwardness and conformity are the main themes of Lewis’s novel *Main Street*. William E. Lenchtenburg (1972) wrote an article “A Paradoxical Generation” published in *The Social and Cultural Life of the 1920s* observing that the “inhabitants of small towns were struggling to reconcile their own values and standards with those of a new age. They were clinging to their own customs and traditions what seemed familiar and safe” (126). Malcolm Cowley (1951) observes thus:

“The attitudes we find in *Gopher Prairie* need to be contrasted with the experience of a younger generation, that is, the people who came of age during World War-1 and thus were shaped by it, the people whose reality was that of a world in which the old values no longer seemed suitable to provide them with a framework for their lives” (Cowley 19).

Mark Shorer (1962) states that “the People of *Gopher Prairie* are simply trying to cope with the demands of a new age. It is the never ending struggle between the old and the new” (Shorer 90) The young people are dissatisfied with the values of the

present generation and they migrate to other big cities for a better future. But the old are satisfied with the present culture and traditions and are reacting against the changing wave of transformation. They express their rigidity to change as they are unable to move forward with the currents of change. They have witnessed so many changes and are fed up with the new culture and no longer able to keep up the pace. They “represent the conformist Americans as they cling to old beliefs because they need a feeling of stability and permanence” (Herzberg 12). Max J. Herzberg (1962) state that “the main aim of Lewis in this novel was to capture the American small town; its pretensions, its fake gentility, its commercial values, its groping and hypocritical search for culture” (21). Lewis belonged to the small town Sauk Centre and he presented Gopher Prairie as the model of the American small towns where life was backward and people were rigid and narrow minded. The environment and the people depicted in Main Street of Lewis are representative of every small town across the country. Bradley and Richmond in their book *The American Tradition in Literature* (1962) observe that “Sinclair Lewis was a liberating force upon the literature of the 1920s, with an inventive and courageous critical mind; he was a stalwart crusader against the encroaching materialism which tolerated moral slackness, vulgarity, ignorance, and narrow bigotry in conformity with a pattern of superficial success cheaply won (1072). Lewis expresses his onslaught against the “village virus” that infected the mind and psyche of the middle class Americans of the 1920s. The novel examines the stifling influence of small town life, how it kills cultural diversity, and how hunger for money blocks the cultural growth of its residents. The novel *Main Street* deals with the struggles in developing a new relationship and the compromises necessary for growth and prosperity. T. K. Whipple

comments thus: “Lewis’s main interest lies in the depiction of social types and classes rather than in individuals as human beings.” It is interesting to note that the voices of the minor characters blend and voice of the individual character is not heard but the voice of conformity is heard. Lewis’s portrayal of America is comprehensive as he wrote about the middle class for the middle class and he deviated from his contemporaries such as Hemingway and Fitzgerald who celebrated the heroism of the war heroes in their novels. Being a social critic, he exposed and ridiculed the rigid and mean mentality of the middle class Americans.

Application of the Theory of New Historicism and Cultural Materialism

Marvin Harris (1927-2001) was the father of the theory of Cultural Materialism. He was a student of anthropology in the College of Columbia. He entered the Columbia University, where he propounded his theory of Cultural Materialism. Lewis never knew he was bringing a cultural and historical revolution through his novels such as *Main Street*, *Babbitt*, *Arrowsmith*, *Elmer Gentry*, *Dodsworth* and *It Can’t Happen Here*. History is always rewritten in the present and is often a reflection of the present culture. John Brannigan in his book *New Historicism and Cultural Materialism* (1998) contends that “the kind of history which we constructed in the present represented as much a view of ourselves in the present as those of the past. They are interested in the significance of the past for the present” (Brannigan 30). The historicist critic finds a cultural difference between himself and the past but the encounter of two cultures inspire him to find a new meaning of life. He can better understand and evaluate the present culture through the lens of the past. In this chapter the *Main Street* of Lewis is explored and examined relying on the theories of

New Historicism and Cultural Materialism. Brannigan further avers that “The New Historicists constantly question and examine the assumptions behind their own interests in the past” (Brannigan 31). The New Historicists express their concern for power relations and they believe that power is a force in society. It pervades all human activity including the production of art. Brannigan further observes thus: “Power includes subversion and all attempts at subversion. Power and resistance are inter-linked} (31). Lewis’s America was ruled by a capitalist society but in the villages and small towns there were no signs of capitalism. However all his major novels are concerned with the power relations of the past societies. His texts can be interpreted understanding the beliefs and ideologies of the 1920s. No wonder, the texts of Lewis are documentation of the beliefs, values and forms of power of the society of the Gopher Prairie. Literature “exposes the ideological and political interests operating through literary texts” (Brannigan 11). In this chapter, the main focus is on social criticism of Lewis as his novel *Main Street* reflects the beliefs, values and forms of power of the American Society of 1920s. It is argued that in many respects, the modern society is similar to the society depicted by Lewis. The people of the modern age are more or less tied up with material prosperity; they are hungry for money having no moral scruples and values are fast declining. Most people strive toward that same goal: to be well off in terms of material goods. Max Weber observes thus:

“There is no point of equilibrium at any place. And that not infrequent version of historical materialism whereby the economic factor represents something final in the series of causes, this view is to my mind scientifically completely discredited” (Weber, 456).

The majority of people like the people of the 1920s desire a high standard of living and express their rigidity for a change in cultural values and if an individual fails to live up to that standard, he is labeled as a failure. It is fair to say that the society depicted by Lewis in the novel *Main Street* is the same as in the 20th century: the attitude of rigidity, conformity and the criteria for success is the same. Daniel Aaron in his article: “Sinclair Lewis: *Main Street*” observes that *Main Street* has historical and cultural significance because it helped Americans to understand themselves. Lewis was at once a part of his nation, too deeply involved with its hopes, too impatient with its failures, to treat it simply in a tender or simply in a clinical way” (177). The application of the theories of New Historicism and Cultural Materialism would be a new approach in understanding and examining the texts of Lewis. Dorothy Thompson observed thus:

“Although Lewis was not one of those few stupendous novelists who revealed the human condition for all places and all times, he would always be an ineradicable part of American cultural history. No one seeking to recapture and record the habits, frames of mind, social movements, speech aspirations, admirations, radicalism, reactions, crusades, and Gargantuan absurdities of the American demos during those years,, will be able to do without them” (Thompson 123).

The portrayal of the Americans is true as the characters presented in the novel *Main Street* are conventional and inclined to react against the new moralities of the postwar age. He observed the men and their manners living in the lobbies of side street hotels, in athletic clubs and in a thousand junky streets. He watched and listened

and then portrayed them in realistic style. In his novels he did not chose a subject, or a situation but a social area that can be studied and mastered. He did good home work before writing a novel. The detailed maps of the city in which the story is set in and planned the houses in which his actions would take place. In his novels, there is always a central character who realizes the emptiness of life and struggles to break out the mechanical boredom of the suffering suffocating environment. The revolt of the protagonist is short lived and leads him nowhere. Lewis elaborates his vision of life through this pattern.

The main plot of *Main Street* revolves around Carl Milford who graduates from a small mid western college and is passionate about socialistic reforms. She is young, energetic and an idealist. She is presented in the opening section of the novel : “ A girl on a hilltop; credulous, plastic, young; drinking the air as she longed to drink life” (Sinclair Lewis, *Main Street* 1). Carol had the “ability to act, to write, to manage organizations” (3). She is an orphan and she has used most of the money of her father and now she is determined to earn as a librarian. Most of her class mates want to be teachers; but, Carol had no interest in “beastly class rooms and grubby children” (4). She comes under the influence of a sociology instructor and decides to reform the society. A class mate named Stewart Snyder proposes her but she rejectes the proposal because of her socialistic idealism. She has an ambition to work for village improvement, tree planting as she sighs: “That’s what I’ll do after college! I’ll get my hands on one of these prairie towns and make it beautiful” (6). Carol was born in Minnesota and has no experience about a prairie village. Her father was a judge in a big city. Carol has read Balzac, Thoreau, Marx and Rabelais and she was always fired with an ambition to create a beautiful town. She is beautiful as “half dozen young men

who were ready to fall in love with her” (10). In second chapter of the novel, she is introduced to Dr. Will Kennicott of Gopher Prairie; a village of the population of three thousand. He soon fell in love with her and proposes her for marriage. Dr. Will Kennicott shows her the pictures of Gopher Prairie and excites her ambition of village improvement: “You say a doctor could cure a town the way he does a person. Well, you cure the town of whatever ails it, if anything does, and I’ll be your surgical kit” (22). Carol goes to live in Gopher Prairie situated in the heart of Agricultural America. She marries Dr. Will Kennicott because she finds an opportunity in Will Kennicott's proposal of marriage to use Gopher Prairie as an experiment in reform. Carol lives in the world of romance and wonder and her knowledge of sociology is limited. She is shocked to find the dreariness of Main Street. When she walks through the streets everything strikes her as dull, gray and filthy. The rosy picture of Gopher Prairie turns gloomy as the ideas of “village charm” (47) turn delusive.

Her first walk down Main Street is a disheartening experience which sets the pace for her future disillusionment. The town is “a fly-specked, drab, repressed, dirty hamlet. The disorder of the town, however, is not what discourages her. Carol is dismayed at the hypocritical and prejudiced attitude of the people. They discourage her attempts to help them look toward finer things, smirk at her modern clothes and liberal viewpoints. They are narrow- minded as they cling to their own narrow way of doing things when she tries to offer suggestions. In desperation, they label her as a radical and snoop behind her. They are even ready to strike when she acts natural and happy, and finally turn the tables on her and dictate the way to rear her children, conduct herself and run her household. Her husband Will does not share her gloomy ideas: “But you’ll come to like it so much life’s so free and best people on earth” (44).

Harry Hartwick in his book *The Foreground of American Fiction* (1934) observes that Carl's husband also proves to be a dolt with a "rubber-stamp mind, good natured and well meaning, not a smug, optimistic provincial can she be herself" (259). Carol takes keen interest in the landscape of Gopher Prairie as she watches the land: "She realized the vastness and the emptiness of the land. The skeleton iron windmill on the farm a few block away, at the north end of the Main Street, was like the ribs of a dead cow" (43). Carol was disgusted to watch the dullness of the villagers who take great pride in their town. Mrs. Perry was the early settler of the town: "And don't you think it's sweet now? All the trees and lawns? And such comfy houses, and hot-water heat and electric lights and telephones and cement walks and everything?" (153). It is shocking to Carol that the villagers do not perceive any kind of backwardness and are sure that after some time Gopher Prairie will emerge as a great town as the progress is going on in the town. Daniel Aaron in his book *The American Novel: From James Fennimore Cooper to William Faulkner* (1965) observes that *Main Street* is basically the story of "a romantic half-educated middle Western girl, tinged with vague" Carol is a zealous woman, she is depicted as selfish and restless who has her own set rules and ideas. Regis Michaud in her book *The American Novel Today* (1931) observes that "restlessness is her pet defect." She is coquettish at times and her chief ambition is reform; she is fired by her own convictions which clash with the middle class Americans resisting the growth of new culture. She lacks patience and fails to understand the psyche of the people of Gopher Prairie. Carol's view of Gopher Prairie is biased and her perspective is that of an outsider. Vida Sherwin, the teacher does not agree with Carol as she does not find anything wrong with the town. Lewis uses the weapons of irony and satire to ridicule the biased attitude of Carol and seems to suggest that "we must be careful to make a balanced assessment of the small town"

(Dooley 32). Mr. Shorer observes that “his attitude toward the Middle West is as ambiguous as his attitude toward the middle class: both drawn as hopelessly narrow, the first is shown finally as somehow the only sensible place, and the second as somehow the only sensible people” (295). Carol has the knowledge of psychology and sociology but she fails to understand their instincts; likes and dislikes and their love for their town. Her critical sense is deficient as she fails to understand human nature. Lucy Hazard in her book *The Frontier in America* (1927) states that Carol too is branded as essentially a part of *Main Street*, “rather more unprofitably and unpleasant than free more genuinely earthy of her neighbors” (281). The critics observe that Carol has no significant role to play; she enters into the world of Gopher Prairie as an outsider; makes some unpleasant remarks and then leaves the town and soon she is forgotten. F.L. Allen contends that Lewis is depicting the ugliness of the American towns which were backward and neglected and in *Main Street* he depicts “the cultural poverty of its life, the tyranny of its mass prejudices and the blatant vulgarity and insulator of the booster” (Allen 229). In his Introduction to *Main Street*, Lewis expresses his main focus “to expose, our comfortable traditional and sure faith... to betray himself as an alien cynic... and to distress the citizens by speculating whether there may not be other faiths” (Lewis 2). Lewis attacked the Gopher Prairie through Carol because the people of the small towns were denied life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness and material prosperity. They were dull, backward and underdeveloped and he wrote with the cultural purpose to awaken the political leaders inspiring them for remedial measures. Lewis was not much interested in the characterization but his main motive was to bring into the lime light the backwardness of the American small towns that needed special attention.

The critics of Cultural Materialism consider *Main Street* as a social and cultural crusade of Lewis. Carol is the eye of the camera in *Main Street* as Lewis presents his quixotic vision through Carol who has lived in the cities most of her life before marriage. Her move to Gopher Prairie set up a cultural conflict between Carol and the small minded villagers of the small town. Carol finds herself in a stultifying environment as she imposes her morality and the ideas of change on the poor and the backward villagers. Carol has her own values and style of life; her reformatory mission collapses when the villagers do not respond to her call for change. Lewis has dramatized the conflict between Carol who has a longing to lead a free and gracious life with the backward villagers who are contented and do not find any problem in Gopher Prairie. If the people of Gopher Prairie are backward and bigoted, Carol is equally at fault for her romantic liberal modernism and her clumsy attempts to reform the town overnight. Vida Sherwin aptly remarks: "Carol Kennicott, you're probably right but you're too much ahead of times" (119). Bea Sorenson is "another newcomer in Gopher Prairie who arrived on the same train and is viewing Main Street at the same time: Carol feels that the town is large and she is surprised to observe that there are "so many folks all in one place at the same time" (54). Carol had lived in big cities like Chicago and she looks at Gopher Prairie expecting Main Street to be lovely, glamorous and impressive. She finds that "it was worth while working for nothing, to be allowed to stay here" (55).

The cultural historians will feel satisfied with the growth of Gopher Prairie. But Carol is not satisfied with the growth of the town; she observes the people ugly, illiterate and backward. She lived in St. Paul and Chicago and the town falls short in her expectations. No doubt, "what you see in Main Street will depend on what you

are; it all depends on who is looking at it” (Lippmann 87). Lewis has given open choice to all the characters to evaluate the life of Gopher Prairie according to their perceptions. Carol’s view of life is fundamentally different so she cannot appreciate the life style of the villagers. Gopher Prairie is class divided and there is an obvious division between the rich and the poor. There is “also a clear cut distinction between the native-born and the naturalized” (Stevenson 10). There is an elite class in the town who don’t allow anyone to enter inside their circle. Carol belongs to “the creamy layer of society and her romantic idealism is bound to clash with the farmers, the common laborers and the poor. She observes that they will be cordial to me because my man belongs to their tribe. God help me if I were an outsider!” (67). Carol is dismayed to observe the hypocrisy and the snobbery of the wealthy people of Gopher Prairie. She is shocked to “find that her husband socializes with his tailor, Nat Hicks enquires: “Would you go hunting with your barber, too? The reply of Will is also quite revealing; No, but-No use running this democracy thing into the ground” (57). Will does not like her son to play with lower people like Olaf and he hates Carol allowing her son to mix up with the “low company” (335). Lewis presents the scene of Carols’ welcome party when Carol starts the topic of labor trouble. Snowbody, the President takes pride in saying that “we are not got the labor trouble they have in these cities” When asked: “Do you approve of union labor” (65), the men strongly oppose the concept as they are against the socialistic ideas.

Richard Wilson and Richard Dutton in their book *New Historicism and Renaissance Drama* (1992) observe that the theories of cultural materialism mark the “return to history” in literary criticism. (1). People of Gopher Prairie are confronted with the socialistic problems such as the class antagonism and labor problem but they

try their best to oppose or ignore them the way the capitalists do. The fundamental approach of the critics of Cultural Materialism is that the texts are the vehicles of politics as the texts contain the elements of social, political and economic and cultural formations. Lewis's novel *Main Street* is a cultural document as the villagers of Gopher Prairie are free to express their opinions on life, education, farming, labor unrest and change. They display their different attitudes and give vent to their thoughts independently in a democratic spirit. Carol observes a growing mania of money culture infecting the life of the people of Gopher Prairie. The bankers, shopkeepers, lawyers, doctors and all the rich villagers are crazy to protect their money. They deny that there is poverty in the town claiming that the workers and farmers are slackers who try to exploit their employers. Will Kennicott opposes "socialism fearing that the farmers and workers might somehow get hold of their share of both money and power" (Dooley 140). For a cultural materialist, history is a secure knowledge which can be used to understand the psyche of the people when the texts were written. Shakespeare wrote *Othello* in the Renaissance times but the theme of jealousy is relevant even today according to Greenblatt and Sinfield. New Historicism and Cultural Materialism use past as an impetus for political reformation in the present and making it clear that the study of literature is not removed from the present politics and cultural development. Jean Howard (1986) observes thus:

"A common way of speaking about literature and history is just that way literature and history, text and context. In these binary oppositions if one term is stable and transparent and the other in some way mirrors it, then that other term can be stabilized and clarified too" (Howard 24).

The main purpose of Lewis in his novel *Main Street* is to depict the truth about life, challenges and the backwardness of the people of Gopher Prairie. Nietzsche had his own view of truth; he sees “truth as a mobile army of metaphors” Marxists had a different view of literature as Louis Althusser (1984) claims that “literature gives the knowledge of state power and ideology to the people” (61). Lewis’s *Main Street* is a historical and social document depicting the mind set and the conflicts of the rich and the poor. Bea and Miles are friends of Carol and they reveal their attitude toward prosperity and social status. D.J. Dooley argues that “Miles and Bea Bjornstam are outsiders, and to them no quarter is extended” (69). Bea is a good mother and a friend of Carol but she is not socially acceptable. Miles works hard and becomes the owner of a dairy but he remains an outsider in the town. The people of the village can never forget his rudeness, impudence and silly manners. Bea can never escape her Scandinavian ancestry. People of Gopher Prairie welcome only those people who have lived for generations. Carol also doesn’t enjoy identity as the people are critical of her cynical behavior:

“Got to argue. Well, I’m not going to argue about this in any way, shape, manner, or form. Trouble with you is, you don’t make effort to appreciate us. You’re so damned superior, and think the city is such a hell of a lot finer place, and you want us to do what you want all the time” (123).

In Gopher Prairie, people are always reveling in gossip and wasting their precious time and digging out dirt. Lewis has depicted the manners; hobbies and petty way of thinking of the people of Gopher Prairie in realistic manner. His verisimilitude

is excellent and a fine juxtaposition of wit and humor. They enjoy and make fun of the weaknesses of others; they laugh at the follies of others and are jealous of the good fortunes of others. The mindset of the people of each village is the same today and whatever frailties are found in the people of Gopher Prairie are found in each village of the world. Human nature is universal and so are the frailties of the people of the villagers. Lewis's novel *Main Street* is cosmopolitan and the theme is universal. There is an obvious irony in Mrs. Bogart's question, "Don't you think it's awful, the way folks talk in this town?" (203), before she launches straight into town gossip. At "Sunday dinner with Aunt Bessie and Uncle Whittier, Carol observes, Isn't it wonderful how much we all know about one another in a town like this" (353). Carol feels embarrassed when she finds the villagers criticizing her ways of correcting them. Vida observed this and she urged her to be cautious: "I wonder if you understand that in a secluded community like this every newcomer is on test? People cordial to her but watching her all the time" (11). The presence of Carol created sensation in the world of Gopher Prairie and Vida comments thus the reaction of the villagers: "Of course the illiterate ones resent your references to anything farther away than Minneapolis. They're so suspicious-that's it, suspicious. And some think you dress too well" (112). But, most of the people think she is "showing off" that she is "too frivolous", "patronizing" (112), too "chummy" with Bea, "eccentric in furnishing this room" (113). The villagers feel threatened by her presence; they have double face. They gloss everything over and pretend friendship with her but at the same time they secretly backstab her. They are very critical of her and think that she considers herself superior and she always downgrades them. She always tries to show that she can do things better than others. This superior attitude of Carol makes them defensive and

hostile. They are intent on preserving their customs and don't find any problem with them. In her experience, the American village does not remain "the one sure abode of friendship, honesty, and clean sweet marriageable girls" (283). Carol tries to explore the meaning of life in Gopher Prairie. She complains that it is "the contentment of the quiet dead, who are scornful of the living for their restless walking" The key word for her is "the mechanical living of the villagers in the town" (284)." To her own dismay, she finds that "along with these foreigners, she felt herself being ironed into glossy mediocrity" (285).

Carol spent six years in Gopher Prairie, disillusioned and finally she feels sick of the life of the small town and all her reforming zeal vanishes as she feels she is becoming like her neighbors. Her mood is repulsive and she always feels restless. She summons up the courage and rebels, leaves the town and her husband to lead her own independent life far away from Gopher Prairie. She goes to Washington to find an "indefinite space." She gets the job of a clerk there in an office to provide for her son and herself. Carol spends several months enjoying the company of her new friends who discuss with her issues such as socialism, revolution and guild socialism. She has few worries and much freedom of thought. One day her husband visits her and although he doesn't ask her to return to Gopher Prairie; but, she resigns and leaves all her friends for she knows her husband needs her. Once again Carol finds herself in the company of illiterate people; "in cheap cars, telephones, ready-made clothes, silos, phonographs and land deals..." (264).

Carol is a reformist at heart as she knows the values of liberty and equality. She hates the prim attitude of the people toward progressive ideas. Carol always feels

concerned about the happiness of the people of Gopher Prairie who place no value on their education and government. She does not admire the village even after her return; she gives up her hope for reform of the town and tries her best to understand the people. Her futile attempts to bring transformation in the village and in the mind-set of people are pathetic. People always condemn her for her visionary ideas and the main charge against her is “she is ahead of times.” The people show their distrust and bitterness towards her as they are rigid having main street mentality. At the end of the novel Carol realizes that she has been a failure in life; she could not succeed in any of her projects. Lewis had never imagined that his novel *Main Street* would become a part of American culture because he attacked the hypocrisy and narrowness of society. The indifference towards progress shown by the people of Gopher Prairie became a subject of discussion with the leaders and political thinkers after the publication of his novel. The Democrats realized that the backwardness of the small towns of America may be a great retarding element in American democracy. The need to bring concrete changes in the life style and thinking of the people was felt and this cultural materialistic growth is historical. The critics of the cultural materialism believe that literature is an integral part of culture and good literature can bring positive transformation of society. The Marxists firmly believe that the function of literature is to bring about the transformation of society. Lewis had firm opinion that small towns of America must be reformed; the standard of living of the small towns was the very essence of American civilization. Carol is a defeated woman but is proud of her mission and the spirit to reform as she says to Will that she has fought a good fight and kept the faith.

Lewis has depicted his loathing of the petty tyranny in America after the Great War which reduced people to dummies particularly in small towns. He had experienced this when he lived in Sauk Centre, Minnesota. He had got the knowledge of ugliness, meanness and pettiness of the people who resisted change and transformation. He used the same material for the plot of the novel *Main Street* which became a cultural icon in the American society. F.L. Allen says: "Lewis depicted the cultural poverty of its life, the tyranny of its mass prejudices and the blatant vulgarity and insularity of the booster" (229). Carol's virulent attack is on the contemptible qualities of sham, hypocrisy, dullness and mediocre existence. She found an oligarchy of opinion prevailing in Gopher Prairie which made the community hostile to human values and to change. Carol is democratic to the core of her heart as she believes that the issues that affect human welfare should be decided by collective reason and never by authority of a class. The first principle of democracy is equality and not tyrannical oligarchy. In Gopher Prairie, only Mrs. Bogarts, Jack Elders and Dave Dyers have any right to show what they could do. They were dominating and authoritarian in their behavior which Carol disliked. Carol along with the servants, foreigners and farmers was kept in her place and was not allowed the liberty of thought and action. For the people of Gopher Prairie, freedom meant adhering to standardized formula of existence. All the people of the town were from the same pattern and acted in a conventional, stodgy manner. They were not sensitive to human beings and their desires. They were always suspicious or at war with intelligence and insight shown by Carol Milford. They would not praise the efforts made by Carol to bring beauty, liberty and happiness for all; but, they were engaged in mud throwing, backbiting, smugness and sham. They rejected liberty, equality, good values and never tried to

encourage service and achievement for all. They discouraged happiness, fellowship and high values. In the town of Gopher Prairie, human happiness was bartered for sham, hypocrisy, convention and dullness. Lewis exposes the mean attitude of the people of Gopher Prairie thus:

“They had an imaginatively standardized background, a sluggishness of speech and manners, a rigid ruling of the spirit by the desire to appear respectable. It is contentment...the contentment of the quiet dead who are scornful of the living for their restless working. It is negation canonized as the one positive virtue. It is prohibition of happiness. It is slavery self-thought and self defended. It is dullness mad God” (265).

The villagers were poor and backward and their knowledge of the outside world was limited. For them, respectability in Gopher Prairie was almost synonymous with want of knowledge. Lewis has exposed and ridiculed the deadening attitude of the community which seemed proud of ignorance and dullness. In a democratic and progressive nation, dullness and conventional rigidity are cancerous for the growth and prosperity of the society. Lewis comments thus: ”To be intellectual or artistic or in their own word to be “highbrow” is to be priggish and of dubious virtue” (266). Lewis uses many instances to satirize their pettiness and meanness in his novel. The conflict between Carol and the community of Gopher Prairie is between science and ignorance, between progress and stagnation; and, between reform and rigidity of ideas. Carol is a modern woman of Lewis who uses all her ideas and reformatory zeal to bring cultural transformation in the community of Gopher Prairie but the forces of

dullness, conventionalism and smugness kills her innovative spirit. Lewis has given a fine analysis of the backwardness of the community of Gopher Prairie thus:

“Large experiments in politics and in cooperative distribution, ventures requiring knowledge, courage and imagination, do originate in the West and Middle west, but they are not of the towns, they are of the farmers. If these heresies are supported by the townsmen it is only by occasional teachers, doctors, lawyers, the labor unions, and workmen... who are punished by being mocked as cranks or “half-baked parlor socialists”. The editor and the rector preach at them. The cloud of serene ignorance submerges them in unhappiness and futility”
(266)

The passage is full of humor and pathos as Gopher Prairie is depicted as a source of annoyance. Lewis gives many examples to highlight the widening gap between the reformative spirit and stagnation prevailing in the small towns after the Great War. The people of small towns like as Gopher Prairie clung to mediocrity and outmoded conventions in America and Lewis hated this suffocating attitude of the people. He wrote the novel *Main Street* to bring awareness among political leaders and the members of the Senate who were ignorant of the life of the small villages and the towns. Most of the funds were pumped into the big cities for their growth and modernization but these towns and villages were completely ignored. The publication of the novel and his winning of the Nobel Prize for this novel brought new cultural awareness in the masses as he was hailed as the messiah of the middle class Americans. Carol entirely differed from the villagers as she stood in sharp contrast

to the stodginess of the backward community. She is the personification of individual liberty, growth and prosperity. Will and the villagers were repulsed by Carol's new – fangled ideas. Carol surprised everyone in the village by her modern idea about the divorce as she regarded it amoral. She makes historical and revolutionary observations thus:

“The illegitimate children do not bear any special and guaranteed form of course, that there are ethical authorities outside of the Hebrew Bible; that men drunk wine yet not died in the gutter; that the capitalistic system of distribution and the Baptist wedding ceremony were not known in the Garden of Eden; that mushrooms are as edible as corn-beef hash” (244).

Carol hated stodginess as she was energetic and spirited woman physically and mentally alive fired with fresh ideas. She had socialistic mission to reform the backward towns like Gopher Prairie but the stodginess of the villagers dampened her spirits. Lewis points out that the majority of people of Gopher Prairie were dead in spirits; there were twenty dead people to every living one. The majority did not know what was going on outside the world and nor did they care. At the club meeting of women, Carol confronted the people infected by the virus of prejudice. Women were surprised when she told them that she paid six dollars to her maidservant. The town had fixed the wages of the hired girls from three dollars to five dollars and any one paid more than the fixed wages violated the traditional wage code of the town. They believed such practice would create labor unrest as the hired girls would start demanding more wages for their unskilled labor. Juanita Eaydock was the voice of the

town, she condemned Carol but Carol defended her position saying that “A maid has one of the hardest jobs on earth. She works from ten to eighteen hours a day. She has to wash slimy dishes and dirty clothes. She tends the children and runs to the door with chapped hands” (90). Carol was dismayed to observe the inequality prevailing in Gopher Prairie. The foreigner, the common workmen and the radical thinkers were objects of condemnation. They were supposed to follow the code of the town and had no liberty to violate the conventions. They had only a license to be in Gopher Prairie. Carol protested against this inhuman inequality, thus:

“Yes, I’m probably a yahoo, but by gum I do keep my independence by doing odd jobs, and that’s more’n these polite cusses like the clerks in the banks do. When I’m rude to some slob, it may be partly because I don’t better; I’m no authority on trick forks and what pants you wear; mostly its because I mean something. I’m about the only man in Johnson County that remembers the joker in the Declaration of Independence about Americans being supposed to have the right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness” (266).

Cultural Stagnation and the Rule of Ignorance

Lewis gives one more important example to depict the ignorance and lack of knowledge of the people of Gopher Prairie. The entire town was hostile to Carol’s intelligent interpretation and progressive ideas and she was opposed from every side. In her first meeting with the women’s study club, she was shocked to observe that in half an hour the whole range of English poetry was finished. She was virtually upset

when the papers were read by the members of the club who just read the dates of birth and death of the poets. In thirty minutes the people of the town finished the history of English poetry and finished discussion about all the great poets from Shakespeare to Tennyson. Carol expresses her surprise thus:

“Five or ten minutes were given to each poet. Gopher Prairie had finished the poets and was ready for next week’s labors English Eviction and Essays, Carol was in panic. She said to herself: “They’re so self satisfied. They think they’re doing Burns a favor. They don’t believe that they have belated quests. They’re sure that thy have culture salted and hung up” (127).

Lewis gives one more example of cultural stagnation in *Main Street* to alarm the rulers of American society. Carol expressed her desire to perform a drama on the stage. She organized a dramatic club and proposed that they should present a play in Gopher Prairie. She received another hard blow from the reading committee. One of the active members suggested that *The School for Scandal* be staged for the entertainment of the villagers. There was no seriousness as most of the members started giving petty suggestions to subvert the plan. Carol wanted to perform the play of Bernard Shaw but her proposal was turned down. Two names were suggested; “*His Mother’s Heart*” and “*The Girl from Kankakee*” Carol realized that the town was populated by the ignorant and stupid people who are rigid; traditional and culturally backward. They hated any progressive idea and dullness, malice and narrowness ruled them. The ending of the novel is full of irony and paradox. Carol comes back with her husband to Gopher Prairie shifting her interest from social reform to an interest in the

welfare of her child. The novel closes with Carol praying that her daughter will be both happier and more successful than her mother had been. Carol becomes peaceful and like other people of the village gives up her utopian ambition to reform the village. Lewis reveals her inner strength thus:

“She felt strong. Whenever she was restless she dodged her thoughts by the familiar vagabond fallacy of running away from them, of moving on to a new place, and thus she persuaded herself that she was tranquil. In March she willingly agreed with Kennicott that it was time to go home. She was longing for Hugh” (530).

Carol represents all those reformers who have to confront strong oppositions. “Ideas are weapons” , says Max Muller but it requires inner strength and strong mind to use these weapons. The history of man’s civilization is full of examples of the leaders and philosophers who had to resist strong opposition to bring about cultural transformation. Marx wrote *Das Kapital* - brought about Russian Revolution; Rousseau faced tough opposition and he brought about French Revolution, Socrates wanted to change the society but he was poisoned as people rejected his ideas that were ahead of time. Carl Von Doren (1921) observed that Lewis’s *Main Street* has become a synonym for narrow –provincialism. The phrase “main street” has become a part of the American culture; people talk of main street mentality and pettiness and dullness. The phrase “main street” has gone deep into the consciousness of the Americans. The last speech of Carol is quite interesting as she looks calm and satisfied by her fight against ignorance, dullness and stodginess:

“But I have won in this. I’ve never excused my failures by sneering at my aspirations, by pretending to have gone beyond them. I do not admit that Main Street is as beautiful as it should be! I do not admit that Gopher Prairie is greater or more generous than Europe! I do not admit that dish-washing is enough to satisfy all women! I may not have fought the good fight, but I have kept the faith” (591).

Lewis’s *Main Street* became as a cultural icon of American society; its publication led to many reforms of the villages. Huge funding from the Federal government was planned to uplift the small villages and towns. The private players set up factories and the schools and colleges were opened to bring cultural transformation in the small towns. Fashion, malls, and other changes started as many workers took keen interest in the growth of the small towns. Gopher Prairie represents all the small towns and backward villages of America. Lewis emerges as a socially conscious novelist committed to the cause of upliftment of the small towns and villages. He employed the techniques of satire to lend his novel an air of objective reality and psychological authenticity in the process. His main focus was to protest against inequality and ignorance of the small towns. His novel contributed to the growth of new culture as his heroine is dedicated to eradicating social vices such as ignorance, dullness and meanness. She also expresses her socialistic ideas to fight against prejudice against foreigners; she raised the voice against discrimination and supported the cause of life, happiness and prosperity for all. In *Main Street*, America is criticized for lacking “the scientific spirit, the international mind, which would make it great” (267).

To conclude, in the postmodernism Cultural Materialism is a theory which views culture as a productive process. In this chapter Lewis's socialistic novel *Main Street* is examined through the lens of cultural materialism. Lewis believes that art can be used as a social force of material means of production. He has considered fiction as an instrument for social development, and for cultural transformation. William Hall in his essay "Culture is Ordinary" observes thus: "a culture is a whole way of life, and the arts are part of a social organization which economic change clearly radically effects" The Marxists took inspiration from Raymond William of Frankfurt School who linked cultural materialism with capitalism investigating literature socially and economically. The world of *Main Street* is dominated by materialism as there are many instances in the plot of the novel where Kennicott prefers money to the welfare of his patients. Carol is a modern young girl, fond of beautiful and elegant things. She even thinks of having "stated amount-be business like system" (74). Dr. Kennicott makes money in the town and asks Carol to "keep the trade in the family"(103). Lewis has clearly given references to the growth of automobiles and the rise of industry in the novel. Dr. Gould always drives the auto most of these people were anxious to buy new cars. Paul Gagnon connects Ford's cars, the symbol of modernity with the dissolution of moral values. Modernity is what Carol wants for the people of Gopher Prairie and in a way the novel contributes to the growth of culture.

Chapter : Three

Emergence of Babbitt Culture in America in Sinclair Lewis's *Babbitt*.

In this chapter, the main focus is the investigation of Sinclair Lewis's famous novel *Babbitt* which has become a popular phrase in the history of American cultural study. The plot of the novel is investigated relying on the theory of Cultural Materialism propounded by Harris and Raymond William. A fundamental element of materialism is that social being which determines consciousness and that social practice defines consciousness. Raymond Williams (1989) was a Cambridge Professor and he came in contact with many learned people; it is not surprising that the themes of working class culture dominate his works. His "cultural work was linked to his conception of a democratic long revolution" (Williams x). Williams was influenced by the relationship between technology, social change and the role of literature in the transformation of culture. He formed a link between idealism and materialism. In most of his writings, Williams exhibits an "understanding of, and commitment to a radically transformed social order (x) which was integral to his visions of life and society. His main focus is always on cultural change and he believes that literature plays a positive role in cultural transformation. The word culture refers to "not only a body of intellectual and imaginative work, it is also essentially a whole way of life" (311). Society is viewed not as a homogenous but as a composite group. Culture deals with social consciousness, the learned reservoir of thoughts and actions. In his essay "Culture is Ordinary" Williams observes that "every human society has its shape, its own purposes, its own meanings. Every human society expresses these, in institutions and in arts and learning" (4).

The term “materialism” refers to the value system operating in a society; it refers to the foundation upon which law, religion and arts operate. The theory of cultural materialism refers to sense of materiality of culture. He is also critical of Marxist Communism and defines his theory as the study “of relationships between elements in a whole way of life, the analysis of culture is the attempt to discover the nature of the organization which is the complex of these relationships” (63). Milner (1993) observes that “materialism is grown by many influences and is “stubbornly resistant to the lures of idealism” (Milner 5). It is not concerned with history or with the future. In the Western democracies materialism has strong association with capitalism. Cultural materialism recognizes that culture and society are in a state of constant change. In this chapter, the theoretical framework of cultural materialism is used to investigate the growth of Babbitt culture depicted in Lewis’s novel *Babbitt*. Williams observes that “we live in an expanding culture and all the elements in this culture are themselves expanding” (13).

Sinclair Lewis’s *Babbitt* (1922) appeared at a time after the Great War; a period characterized by economic, industrial and technological growth and significant for cultural transformation. Joseph Wood Krutch commented thus: “Lewis’s *Babbitt* was a self-satisfied person who conforms readily to middle class attitudes and society” H.L. Mencken, E.M. Forster, and Alfred Kazin celebrated Lewis's prose as "genuine realism" (Gollwitzer 7). Lewis’s unconventional tone, and powers of satire were praised by many critics. Indeed, many reviews tried to undermine *Babbitt*'s literary merits. Generally, Lewis's fiction was repeatedly criticized for its "rigid narrowness of range" and his obsession with "the thriving, philistine, middle-class society from which he sprang" (Dooley 236). *Babbitt* was considered to be too

ambiguous and the novel was condemned for its lack of narrative coherence (Doctorow 451). Mark Schorer notes that "in some ways *Babbitt* is hardly a novel at all" ("Afterword" 320). He even states that "there is no real plot or connected march of events from the beginning to the end" (320). Grant Overton "criticized Lewis for what he called his anti-fiction." Overton refused to call Lewis a novelist, instead he sees "a strain in Sinclair Lewis which allies him to the statistician and the census-taker" (qtd. in Dooley 244). In his essay, "Sinclair Lewis and the Methods of Half Truths" (1963), Schorer concludes that in *Babbitt* "The fact that there is never any real opposition of substantial values to 'convention,' or false values [...], is what makes Lewis's world so blank and limits so drastically his social realism" (102).

The biographer of Lewis, Mark Schorer observes that "*Babbitt* is a prelude to a decade of dizzying and often mindless economic expansion, the epic of our boom years, and it remains today as the major documentation in literature of American business culture in general" (358). Culturally America witnessed "a bitter conflict between the forces of modernism and traditionalism upheld by the people of small towns and villages like Gopher Prairie and Zenith. In his *Babbitt*, Lewis records the spirit of the age and documented the story of the cultural shifts which happened during the "roaring twenties." His novel gives a realistic account of the formation of new culture and the challenges people faced in adjusting with the new culture. The plot reveals the ugly conditions of life in an industrial and commercial society dominated by money culture. The main purpose of Lewis in this novel is to expose the corruption, hypocrisy and moral degradation of the business community of the small towns. Lewis has lashed at conformity and boosterism of the middle class Americans. He indicts all that is standardized for he believes that it is regressive and not

progressive. Schorer (1979) observes that through *Babbitt* Lewis wants “to show the world of little businessman, and more particularly the middleman who abolishes his own humanity, in the culture of business”(Schorer 358). Joel Fisher (1986) observes that like H. G. Wells and Bennett, Lewis is a “provincial novelist of materialist romances; he is clumsy like Upton Sinclair and over-productive fictionliser of obvious social problems” (1). Mark Schorer (1961) described him as “one of the worst writers in Modern Literature; a victim of literary history writing” (813). Lewis expressed his ambitiousness and seriousness to bring cultural transformation through his novel *Babbitt* as he wrote in his letter to Harcourt, December 25, 1920:

“I want the novel to be the G.A.N. (Great American Novel) in so far as it crystallizes and makes real the Average Capable it except Booth Tarkington in *Turmoil* and *Magnificent Ambersons*; and the romanticizes away, all bigness. *Babbitt* is a little like *Kennicott* but bigger, with a bigger field to work on, more sensations, more perceptions.... He is all of us American at 46, prosperous but worried, wanting-passionately-in seize something more than motor cars and house before its late” (59).

The critics observe that Lewis depicted certain American perceptions of life which had been explored by Thorstein Veblen and H. L. Mencken. Veblen wrote *The Theory of the Leisure Class* (1899) which had great impact on the creation of *Babbitt*'s daily life. Veblen also wrote *The Theory of Business Enterprise* (1904) which gives guidelines to Lewis to create a typical business giant in *Babbitt*. Veblen gave his own theory of money and business deviating from Marxism. He observed

that money plays a vital role in man's life. Money gives power and status to man and this is why each individual struggles desperately to accumulate money. In *Babbitt*, Lewis used the theory of Veblen in creating his Babbitt. He is created as a business man lost in the world of money and money only; moreover, he knows nothing about architecture, landscaping and economics. He is not interested in the local administration, the law and order situation of Zenith, matter of the schools and about other fundamental issues.

The novel opens with the description of the town Zenith symbolizing modernity and urbanity of Midwestern society. The first hundred pages of the plot of *Babbitt* give a detailed account of Babbitt's routine life and his activities of one single day. His world is dominated by gadgets and devices which surround him. Elizabeth Stevenson observes that in the society of Babbitt the infatuation with new gadgets and devices is very common. The city is bigger than Gopher Prairie of Main Street as it is bustling with new skyscrapers, automobiles and factories. Zenith is "built-it seemed for giants" (Sinclair Lewis, *Babbitt* 2). Ironically Lewis remarks that the city is only comfortable for the giants like George Babbitt;

"The hero of the novel. George Babbitt is anything but a "giant, known for there is "nothing of the giant in the respect of the man who was beginning to awaken on the sleeping porch of a Dutch Colonial house in that residential district of Zenith, known as Floral Heights" (2).

Babbitt lives with his wife Myra and three children; Verona, Ted and Tinka. Babbitt has everything modern and standardized but everything is meaningless and is a symbol of his inner void. His big house "like all houses on Floral Heights, an

altogether royal bathroom of porcelain and glazed tile and metal sleek as silver” (5). Every “second house in Floral Heights had a bedroom precisely like this” (15). His house has all the modern appliances and electric gadgets. Babbitt is not happy with the modern life of appliances. The guest-towel in the bathroom “was a pansy embroidered trifle which always hung there to indicate that the Babbitts were in the best Floral Heights society. No one had ever used it. No guest had dared to. Guests secretively took a corner of the nearest regular towel” (6). The house of Babbitt is a good example of the advertising culture started after the Great War. Babbitt is a promoter of advertisement culture as advertising motivated the public to buy the products contributing the standardization of American society. The house of Babbitt does not reflect his individuality in any way:

“Every second house in Floral Heights had a bedroom precisely like this. He had been very careful to provide his family with “the latest conveniences. But there was one thing wrong with the house of Babbitt it was not a home” (14).

His house symbolizes radical improvement in architectural designing and modernism. His living room “was a room so superior in comfort to the parlor of Babbitt’s boyhood. His motor was also superior to his father’s buggy. But the furniture is like samples in a shop, desolate, unwanted, lifeless things of commerce” (88). There were piles of books never read by anyone except his daughter Tinka and the piano is also never used. His house is big but has no soul, no personality and it offers no mental satisfaction. Babbitt is archetype of middle-aged; a “figure of Behaviourist nightmare.” Lewis introduces Babbitt in the following way:

“His name was George F. Babbitt. He was forty-six years old now, in April, 1920, and he made nothing in particular, neither butter nor shoes nor poetry, but he was nimble in the calling of selling of houses for more than people could afford to pay” (2).

Lewis's *Babbitt* is the child of industrial revolution and uncontrolled materialism. He is a modern marketing professional who uses all forms of devices and jargons of the business community of Zenith city. Lewis gives his profile thus: “His shoulders were broad enough, his voice deep enough, his relish of hearty humor strong enough, to establish him as one of the ruling class” (37). Babbitt worships Ford, articulating his passion for luxury and material prosperity. Indeed, he is a “Pious Motorist” (5) whose God “was the Modern Appliances” (5). Babbitt admires “all technical excellences” (387). He believes that mechanical devices are a source of comfort and beauty. For Babbitt “as to the most prosperous citizen of Zenith, his motor car was poetry and tragedy, love and heroism. His office was his pirate ship but the car his perilous excursion shore” (24). Lewis gives the subtle imagery of “pirate ship” to refer to the plundering attitude of Babbitt. His alarm clock is “the best of nationality advertise and quantitatively produced alarm clocks, with all modern attachments, including cathedral chime, intermittent alarm, and a phosphorescent dial” (3). In the opening section Lewis has given all important details to portray the character of Babbitt using all the tools of irony and wit. Babbitt was proud of his shinning modern car; “his motor car was poetry and tragedy, love and heroism” (23). The blanket of Babbitt is a symbol of “freedom and heroism” Joel Fisher observes that Lewis's *Babbitt* is a social construct documenting the growth of cultural materialism:

In *Main Street* and *Babbitt*, Lewis has established the model of cultural materialism. He has sliced into America and into the ways in which the individual American constructs his identity, at a historical moment which he rightly identifies as a crucial turning point; and in doing so, he describes and defines structure, history and society as determines and objects of discourse (Fisher 4). Lewis has depicted the character of Babbitt using all the weapons of realism and satire. He says: “I want to make Babbitt big in his real-ness, in his relation to all of us, not in the least exceptional, yet dramatic, passionate, struggling” (123). Mencken delighted in his satirical portrait:

“The fellow simply dips with human juices. Everyone of his joints is movable in all directions. Real freckles are upon his neck and real sweat stands upon his forehead. I have personally known him since my earliest days as a newspaper reporter, back to the last century. I have heard him make such speeches as Cicero never dreamed of banquets of the Chamber of Commerce. I have seen him marching in parades” (123).

Babbitt is very fond of wearing gray suit which was “well cut, well made, and completely undistinguished. It was a standard suit” (9). His blanket for him is a symbol of “freedom and heroism” (4). The boots of Babbitt “were black laced boots, good boots, honest boots. Standard boots, extraordinarily uninteresting boots” (9). Babbitt is “passionate to buy things he doesn’t need, like the cigar lighter, a priceless time saver. But once he has bought it, he remembered that he had given up smoking and the lighter is lying useless in a corner of the office” (9). But he is not worried

about the wastage of money because the cigar-lighter is still “the last touch of refinement and class” (51) to his car. The problem with Babbitt is he buys things not for use but to brag before his friends; he thinks that the latest purchase helps him to climb up in his social ladder. He lacks understanding of the material gadgets but even he buys new things: “He had enormous and poetic admiration, though very little understanding, of all mechanical devices. They were his symbols of truth and beauty” (65). His one point mission is to make money and moral values are meaningless to him. He represents the new money culture of America and through his character Lewis evinces the harsh reality of American mercantile society. Lewis gives an insight into materialism, conformity and social snobbery. The world of Babbitt is of middle class, of rich people crazy to climb higher in the social ladder. Gorge Babbitt and his business people are leading a shallow existence. They have no aesthetic tastes; they are ignorant, dull, conformist and mean. They have no moral scruples as they have scrapped the old ideals of their forefathers and are leading a wretched life and Zenith Babbitt is a rich real-estate businessman. He reflects that “it was agreeable to have it known throughout the neighborhood that he was so prosperous that his son never worked around the house” (70) but he is upset to know the fact that his son Ted is very lazy. Babbitt is not concerned about reality but he lives in the world of appearances. He is not free to decide as he constantly seeks the opinions and approvals of his peers before taking any action. The irony is Babbitt cannot escape from the mercantile system and structure but he can only lose himself within them the way Willy Loman of Arthur Miller lost his identity in his mania to make money. Willy of Miller commits suicide in frustration but Lewis’s Babbitt suffers moral and spiritual dehumanization.

Babbitt is supposed to be happy in life; he has a loyal wife, three children and all the materialistic amenities of life. Being discontented, he often goes into a romantic dream of having a beautiful girl with whom he could “escape the grind of the real estate business and his family” (4). Babbitt has an inherent weakness to buy new gadgets and he is like a kid in a toy store. In fact, he is charmed by every new gadget and wishes to buy. Babbitt is a materialist as he takes pride in his new material products. He brags about his possessions to his friends. He brags that his yard was “perfection and made him also perfect” (71). Lewis through the character of Babbitt reveals the degradation of culture; the way the Americans were trapped in the bog of materialism, smugness, hypocrisy and greed. Lewis is appalled to observe the growth of social pretensions; he uses fiction as a vehicle to convey the emptiness and moral degradation of the middle-class Americans living in the small towns and cities. Lewis uses all the important weapons of satire and black comedy to expose the growing material culture with wisdom, courage and deep insight. He lashes at the mania for money of the people and attacked many weak and insignificant elements of the society with great aplomb. Babbitt is a significant work of satire of Lewis; it is an honest, vivid and comprehensive account of the life and manners of the people of the 1920s.

Lewis’s *Babbitt* deals with the vital issues of the contemporary society and is suffused with realistic dialogues and real events. The plot of *Babbitt* reveals an intense craving to abolish all misconceptions and malpractices prevailing in small cities. For the people of Zenith, success is measured in terms of material prosperity and wealth. They strive for accumulation of wealth and to achieve this business is the best possible avenue to follow. Lewis has presented Babbitt as the business hero in

the novel and in a business culture material possessions are ends in themselves. They have no regard for emotions, sentiments and intellect. Their clubs and churches offer no emotional stimulation. There are empty creeds and hollow words that are preached only the gospel of boosterism. Babbitt tries to get comfort and gets involved in the club activities. He knows that time has changed and farming is no longer a lucrative business. People are leaving farming and are migrating to big cities in search of making a fast buck. Babbitt joins the basketball club because it is the proper thing to do:

“He honestly believes that he loved baseball. It is true that he hadn’t, in twenty five years, himself played any baseball except back-lot-catch with Ted-very gentle, and strictly limited to ten minutes. But the game was a custom of his clan, and it gave outlet for the homicidal and side taking instincts which Babbitt called patriotism and love of sport” (148).

Babbitt has collected large number of books but he has no taste or passion to read a book. His books are symbols of his “false intellectual taste” and he is not a cultured guy. Examining Verona’s books, he does not find any book interesting: “In them he felt a spirit of rebellion against niceness and solid citizenship. These authors were famous but did not seem to care about telling a good story which would enable a fellow to forget his troubles” (258). Lewis attacks American business culture and its lack of spirituality. The main attack is on the values of commercialism, boosterism, salesmanship and success worship. The people of Zenith have limited vision of life as they behave like average small –town people. They believe that shiny new cars

promote cultural development. The plot of the novel refers to the power of Good Citizen's League exerting pressure on Babbitt to become an active member. Lewis brings the theme of fascism and conformity through the presence of the Citizen League. Most of the members are conservative and rigid and believe in repressing others to preserve the current order of the society. Babbitt is an active business man raised to believe conservative politics, lax morality, and material possessions.. He is very orthodox in his views, dress, gadgets, and aspirations, most of which are taken from local newspapers. Being a real-estate business man Babbitt has lofty aspirations to dominate the Zenith society. H.L. Mencken in his *The American Credo* gives a detailed analysis of his high aspirations:

“The thing which set off the American from all other men and gives a peculiar color not only to the pattern of his daily life but also to the play of his inner ideas is what, for want of a more exact term may be called social aspiration. That is to say, his dominant passion is a passion to lift himself by at least a step or two in the society that he is a part of; a passion to improve his position, to break down some shadowy barrier of caste, to achieve the countenance of what for all his talk of equality, he recognizes and accepts as his better” (78).

James Hutchisson (1992) argues that problem Lewis tries to solve as he wrote *Babbitt* was “how to humanize a satirical character” (112). Babbitt represents an idea of “Babbittry” of Lewis; a typical American figure of Zenith associated with the culture of conformity and standards, slave to machines and like a cog of the machine of business driven – culture. Babbitt has lot many things but he is not satisfied with

his life. He is jealous of his classmate Charles Mckelvey who is very wealthy in Zenith. He expresses his social frustration and his wife's need to be invited to Mckelvey's party; his strong desire to develop contact with the rich and wealthy Charles Mckelvey is expressed thus:

“Yes, may be-kind of shame to not to keep in touch with them folk like Mckelvey. We might try inviting them to folk to dinner, some evening. Oh! Thunder let's not waste our good time thinking about them” (23).

Babbitt is a materialistic, self seeking man; he is dehumanized soul. On the other hand, his wife “was a good woman a kind woman, a diligent woman, but no one, save Tinka her ten year old son, was at all Interested in her or entire aware that she was alive” (7). Lewis uses the technique of separation in this novel too, like Main Street, to allow freedom to Babbitt. Carol leaves her husband and in this novel Myra Babbitt goes away and the marriage contract is suspended allowing Babbitt to make contacts with Seneca Doane and enjoy liberal life. But, he gets into the abyss of hedonism pretending that he enjoys happiness. In fact Babbitt remains in the abyss of materialism and consumerism struggling to ride on the wave of success. In spiritual terms, his journey of success and material prosperity leads him to alienation and despair. Babbitt is blessed with prosperity and social status, he is a typical business man whose “God was modern appliances” (2) is not happy. He is leading a monotonous, dissatisfied and fabricated life and suffers from many psychological ailments.

Two important events of the plot describe the inner void of Babbitt. First, Myra is admitted into the hospital and the surgeon Dilling operates her. This is a

crucial moment for Babbitt; the operation is successful and Myra is saved. Now Babbitt is kept under control as marriage contract remains solid. In the second episode, Ted Babbitt marries Eunice Littlefield. While, his father wanted him to become a lawyer but the new generation enjoys independence to choose an occupation. Sheldon Norman Grebstein observes that the business ethics of Babbitt are flexible. He can go to any extent; he does not feel shame in “indulging into bribery, bullying and conspiracy” (Grebstein 79). He has no moral scruples and there is a lot of difference in what he preaches and practices. He preaches business ethics but does a shady deal with Conrad Lyte. Babbitt is an opportunist businessman. Babbitt follows what Thorstein Veblen says about what is right or wrong is always determined by what is expedient and profitable, by what brings in a financial return” (80). The profit motive is very strong in the business world and Babbitt follows the ethics of maximum profit in all his commercial dealings.

Lewis’s *Babbitt* is an icon of cultural materialism as the hero shares the fate of the new middle class of America and remains “a continuing reminder of just how insecure and anxious the nation’s middle class is, poised between the threat of falling and the hope of rising” (Milner 89). Raymond Williams in his *Marxism and Literature* points out that “products such as “art” and “literature” are not ideas and theories but elements of the general process called “culture” and “language” and could be approached other than reduction, abstraction and assimilation”(Williams 17).

Raymond Williams in his analysis of Cultural Materialism has focused on theory of the "base and superstructure." He argues that contrary to a development in Marxism, it is not "the base and the superstructure that need to be investigated but

specific and indissoluble processes which was expressed by a complex idea of determinism” (83). Lewis gives the “objective representation of social reality in his novel *Babbitt* and the plot explores cultural radicalism. The novel begins with the glorification and pride of materialism:

“THE TOWERS of Zenith aspired above the morning mist, austere towers of steel and cement and lime stone, sturdy as cliffs and delicate as silver rods. They were neither citadel nor churches, but frankly and beautiful office building” (1).

Mark Schorer observes that the topics of the novel provide a wide range of Babbitt’s milieu including politics, leisure, club activities, class structure and all commercial activities. Lewis has tried his best to understand society from all angles. According to Raymond Williams “society is never the dead husk” but there is an active relationship always going on between individual and society. In this respect, the novel serves as "an exact and mimetic transcription of American life" of the 1920s (Kazin 210). Babbitt is portrayed as a “Grumpy bald man” He is expert in nothing “in particular, nether butter, not shoes nor poetry, but he is nimble in the calling of selling houses for more than people could afford to pay” (2). Like all great satirists of literature, Lewis lashes at the herd mentality of the businessmen. Phillip Allan Friedman observes thus: “Lewis approves of material standardization but abhors the fact that with all their material success too many. Americans in their complacent arrogance are unaware that they concentrate on being like one another” (72).

Like *Brave New World*, in Lewis’s novel religion becomes the gospel of salesmanship. Babbitt’ religion is money and he measures everything in term of

money and material success. He makes huge profits in real estate business and enjoys even bootleg whisky. He represents the typical business man of the modern century, who bully their wives and show interest in other women. False idealism boosts the material progress of Zenith; the drive of success and money is making the people crazy. Babbitt swears faith not to God but to “business efficiency” among other things, upon his reform and return to middle-class conventions (388). In the world of Babbitt even God becomes a commodity, a brand name to be sold through regular commercial advertisement. Babbitt looks “at the Second National Tower from his house and beholds it “ as a temple – spine of the business, a faith passionate, exalted, surpassing common men, and he clumped down to breakfast he whistled the ballad; Oh, by gee, by gosh, by jingo” as though it were a hymn melancholy and noble” (13). Like religion, art is also trivialized by Lewis. All the Babbitts of the Zenith city hate working classes and try hard to establish link with the rich and the aristocrats. When Babbitt takes a young woman out for a dinner and she finds him a bore, he tries to preach morality. Soon, he feels disgusted with the routine mechanical and material life and is grumpy about his kids and thinks of their education and his business rivals who do not allow him rest and peace. Babbitt involves himself in many social and political activities campaigning for a business friend for the post of Mayor of the city. He delivers speeches before the local gatherings and even struggles to capture the seat of Vice Presidency of the Booster Club. His friend rebels and shoots a nagging wife and is sent to the jail. Babbitt tries his best to revolt against social conformity His friend rebels and shoots and develops a love affair with Mrs. Tanis Judique who is a charming widow. Babbitt dreams to develop intimacy with her and her group Bunch. He also refuses to join the Good Citizens’ League, the Zenith prosperous patriots who

believe in unequal wealth yet a wholesome sameness in dress, thinking, morals, and language. He once takes the side of underpaid workers on a strike: “All of them agreed that the working classes must be kept in their place; and talk of them perceived the American democracy a wholesome sameness of thought, dress, painting, morals, and vocabulary” (391).

Lewis gives two examples of successful businessmen who are dissatisfied with life in spite of all the comforts and material amenities of life. Babbitt has everything in life; wife and children a regular income and the spacious house full of modern gadgets and device but he does not enjoy peace of mind. He decides to go to enjoy lunch with his friend Paul Riesling who is his old friend and roommate at the university. Babbitt for the first time opens his wounded heart to Paul. He talks of his turbulent domestic life. He is not having good relations with his wife and is sick of his daily routine. He tells Paul that he got all what he needed but in spite of his success of the American dream, yet he feels that his life is dull and boring and lacking in some way. He expresses his complain to Paul in the following words:

“Here I’ve pretty much done all the things I ought to; supported my family, and got a good house and a six-cylinder car, and built up a little, and I haven’t any vices ‘specially, except smoking-and I’m practically cutting that out, by the way> And I belong to the church....And yet, even so, I don’t know that I’m entirely satisfied” (60-61).

Similarly, Babbitt’s friend and class mate Riesling is also disgusted with life. He belongs to the creamy layer of Zenith and enjoys material affluence. He speaks

about his wife Zilla who is always nagging him. He is fed up with his domestic life. In their conversation both Babbitt and Paul reflect upon their boring and disgusting existence. Veblen aptly states in his *The Theory of the Leisure Class* that money gives an individual only the material happiness and certainly not mental satisfaction. Babbitt had the dream to become a successful lawyer but became a businessman; Paul wished to become a successful violinist but his ambition remained unfulfilled. The unfulfilled dreams and the loss of all their ideals brought despair in their life. Both Paul and Babbitt have given up their personal dreams for a broader dream of social success. They have realized that their new dream does not afford them the happiness they have desired. Following the theory of Cultural Materialism, Lewis depicts the shallow existence of Babbitt and Paul who have all the material goods but live with a void. Marx, Raymond Williams and Veblen propounded the theories of materialism giving the message to the world that high profit and accumulation of money does not lead to real happiness. Lewis follows Veblen and gives the message of destructive impact of money on human life. Paul suggests to Babbitt to go on a vacation trip to escape the drab and mundane existence of their life. Both friends go on a holiday trip to the wilderness of Maine to escape from the tensions and worries of life. Babbitt and Paul enjoy fishing, drinking and playing poker in Maine. But even in the beautiful natural environment of Maine, Babbitt does not feel comfortable and looks restless. They return home after vacation trip with hope that the things would improve; but, contrary to their expectations they confront the same challenges and return to their old dull, drab and insipid life. Babbitt is asked to deliver a speech at a real estate convention; and, in this speech Babbitt supports his support for Lucas Prout who is a leading manufacturer of mattresses in Zenith. The elite class of Zenith is so

much impressed by his speech that they invite him to deliver another speech to the Zenith Real Estate Board. Babbitt is full of enthusiasm as his reputation in Zenith is rising. In his fervent speech, Babbitt claims Zenith as the greatest and finest city in America containing the highest ratio of ideal standardized citizens. He observes that those who call themselves “liberals” are the” worst menace to sound government” (187). Lewis exposes and ridicules the narrow vision of the business people of Zenith who are for standardization because standardization of thought is the real menace in the life of Zenith. Babbitt is jealous of the name and fame of his rival Mr. Mcklevey who represents the peak of Zenith’s social hierarchy. Babbitt suffers from superiority complex as he expresses his disregard toward Overbrooks, a less successful businessman of Zenith. All his acquaintances are conditioned by the social status. Babbitt “spends his lifetime trying to relate to the “status quo” and put himself on a pedestal” By buying and supplying his house with the best and most expensive material goods and throwing invitation to others, Babbitt wants to tell the people of his superior social status. Lewis has exposed the real deceptive nature of Babbitt and his shady deals to make money. He fires a poor salesman Stanley Graff for his dishonesty but he himself has cheated many customers in his real estate business. Lewis has shed light on the moral depravity of Babbitt who pretends to be honest and upright before his juniors. Following the comic episodes of Congreve and Wycherley of Restoration Comedy of Manners, Lewis gives a humorous situation exposing the moral hypocrisy of his friend Riesling. Babbitt goes on a trip with his son Ted to Chicago. He is shocked to find his friend Riesling with a woman May Arnold in a big hotel of Chicago. Babbitt reproaches him preaching the values of fidelity and honesty. He urges him to keep high morals and good social standing in the community. Babbitt

is the new vice-president of the Booster's Club. But soon the ugly news reaches him that Riesling shot dead his wife Zilla and is sent to the prison. This tragic episode makes Babbitt restless and he struggles to find meaning in his hollow life. Babbitt's moral hypocrisy comes on the surface when he enters into a liaison with a beautiful widow Tanis Judique. He tells a lie to his wife that he has an urgent business in New York and enjoys sexual relationship with Tanis. Babbitt feels insecure because he feels that his status is at the stake. He does not want to "endanger his security and popularity by straying from the Clan of Good Fellows" (397). He is sick of his son Ted who marries a girl and goes against all the traditions of the family. He tells his son: "I've never done a single thing I've wanted to in my whole life! I don't know I've accomplished anything except just go along" (401). Babbitt gives full freedom to his son Ted because he feels helpless and tells him: "Don't be scared of the family. No, nor all of family. No, nor all of Zenith. Nor of yourself, the way I've been. Go ahead, old man! The world is yours" (401).

Michael B. Schiffer in his book *American Antiquity* (1977) observes that "laws of culture change and diversity form the core of what most archaeologists believe in theory in archaeology" (848). Cultural Materialism is an inevitable part of archaeology and its growth is a continuous process. Literature is also an important medium to bring drastic changes in culture. Sanders and Price (1968) observe that "culture change is a result of internal processes going in the society." (58). All major novels of Lewis deal with the cultural evolution of American society after the Great War. He has given a true picture of the changing force and the evolution of the business ethics of 1920s. Schiffer calls this wave of cultural evolution as diffusion in literature. The novels of Lewis have social and cultural significance because like

Charles Dickens he depicts the cruelty, moral hypocrisy and human degradation of the business class people. Babbitt, Riesling and Paul are the representative of such monsters who can go to any extent for accumulation of money. Modern satire remains a way of heightening our awareness about social ills, an antidote to absurdity and despair, and an essentially human way of confronting the evils of modernity. Its open-ended nature makes it more of an inquiry and provoking thought. In the present society the same evils of moral hypocrisy and lust for money exists; rich people go to the hotels to enjoy sexual pleasures and puncturing the morality enshrined in the marriage code. The double standard of morality; shoddy deals in business and cheating of innocent people is a common practice. So, the novels of Lewis have modern relevance and deal with the framework of Cultural Revolution. Lewis has given the son- and- father relationship in his novel Babbitt which is universal. Ted represents the youth of 1920s and his rebellious spirit is modern and found almost in each society. The satirical body of fiction of Lewis is a sign of his social commitment relevant even today. Lewis has addressed social vices of 1920s the way Alexander Pope did in his *Rape of the Lock* and *Essay on Man*. Richard Posner argues thus: "Satire tends, finally, to be topical. This makes it perilous to try to understand a satire without some knowledge of social conditions in the time and place in which it was written" (9). It is to be noted that "Babbitt goes astray from his home and family giving himself to the Bohemian life, staying in bohemian's houses, associating with people whose life is dominated by suburban bacchanalia alcohol" (292). The most important fact in the life of Babbitt is his commercialization of religion as depicted by Lewis in the novel. Babbitt advises Eathrone to "drum up customers or members" and to recruit "a real press agent for the Sunday School- some newspaper fellow" (188). Babbitt uses religion as a tool to win the confidence of others and to rise in the social

ladder of Zenith. He is a big hoax as he “turns the Biblical story of Jacob into an adventure. Jake Fools the Old Man, Makes Getaway with Girl and Bankroll” (189). The religious hypocrisy and corruption of Babbitt are very significant social evils engulfing the society of Zenith. Eathrone is the President of the First State Bank of Zenith who gives grants to the Sunday School but this grant “did not appear on the books of the bank” (206). Lewis is depicting one episode of bank fraud in the novel but in the modern society bank frauds and embezzlements are very common. Lewis’s episode of bank fraud is a part of cultural progression of the American society. Babbitt’s God and religion in the twenties is the “God and the God of Modern Appliances: the God of Modernism. Babbitt observes that all the mechanical devices are “the symbols of Truth” for him. (61). Karl Marx has discussed in detail the nature of business as an agency of inhuman oppression and exploitation. Lewis uses the phrase “boosterism” which is merciless and is based on the idea of profit and self aggrandizement. In cultural terms “boosterism” symbolizes selfishness and merciless exploitation. Marx (1986) observes thus: “The expropriation of the immediate producers is accomplished with merciless vandalism...capitalistic private property, which rests on exploitation of the nominality free labor of others” (209).

This chapter explores the satire on materialism and social snobbery in Sinclair *Babbitt* in which he revealed the shocking truth of the middle class American society. After successful depiction of the village life in his evocative novel *Main Street*, Sinclair Lewis turned to expose the indecent side of the city life of America where a great deal of people resided. Due to industrialization, a large population of rural people migrated from the villages to the cities for a better employment opportunity. Schools, colleges, hospitals and markets were developed for the fulfillment of the

need of the people. All amenities, facilities and opportunities led to the urbanization which constituted the middle class society. The life of urban people was characterized by the artificial manner, low moral values and much of showy appearance. Intense social pressure and materialistic outlook made them greedy and snobbish. They were in the pursuit of being wealthy, superior and special. They had impersonal attitude towards their fellow-beings and a little care for spiritual and moral concern. Everyone seemed to be attracted towards upper social hierarchy and overlooked the people who belonged to lower social hierarchy. Babbitt involves himself with Tanis and her Bohemian friends to enjoy drinking and dancing to escape the dullness of his life. The business elite of Zenith are jealous of the growing social status of Babbitt and they start ignoring him putting pressure on him to join Good Citizens League. Lewis has characterized this Club representative of the fascist ideology; anti-democratic and anti-human. Babbitt feels that his nonconformity will bring him great setback in his business because his business rivals threaten to destroy him and hurt his business. They are ready to hunt Babbitt like stronger wolves of the pack. Meanwhile, his wife Myra is afflicted with appendicitis; Ted is growing rebellious, all his friends are turning his enemies. In this hour of crisis when public opinion is turning against him Babbitt finally finds “greater than his desire for escape”. Babbitt is forced to give up his liberalism and becomes a member of Good Citizens Club, the organization that inspires its members to approve the ideal of equality except the lower class people. Lewis has faithfully depicted the commercial culture of contemporary civilization and its ongoing conflicts. In American society, Babbitt means a worshipper of material success and despiser of intellectual values and soon “Babbitry” became a cultural phrase after the publication of the novel by Lewis. The contemptuous portrayal of

Babbitt in the novel became a subject of heated debates in America and many critics attacked Lewis for downgrading the pioneer image of an American businessman. Robert Morss commented thus”

“A leading trait of the American people is a youthful self-consciousness amounting to an inferiority complex, which makes us impatient to all criticism. Everything which we have done is right because we did it. All our wars were just, all our statesmen are pure, all our business is honest. Ours is the land of liberty, of tolerance, of opportunity, of righteousness” (Schorer 32).

Lewis has dramatized a situation where people are bereft of spiritual growth and cultural consciousness. Their intellectual growth is hampered as they can imitate only progress. They are completely under the sway of imitation and can merely follow others without exercising judgement. The American society is riding on the wave of materialism which is the cause of their abysmal condition. Each individual is crazy to rise in higher status and they despise the people belonging to the lower classes. This attitude was undemocratic. The rich people were turning snobs as they developed disparaging attitude towards common people and down-trodden. Zenith is just an example of a city representing all the small towns of America. Zenith is an example of the conform society of America and Babbitt, represents a large section of business people living in false illusions and following involving immoral principles. Babbitt is crazy about modernity and urbanity and he has immense respect and love for his material possessions more than anything or anybody else he has because they are symbol of his social status and success. Babbitt’s conformity is the main target of

attack of Lewis. Babbitt comes to know that his office is three story less than his another business rival, he feels disturbed but he expresses his satisfaction that his office is well decorated and more spacious than others. Interestingly, every word Babbitt utters, every action he does is rooted in his ideology of conformity. He is the product of smug culture promoted by his society. He is always hungry for power, property and status: “Zenith’s city with gigantic power; gigantic buildings, gigantic machines, and gigantic transportations” (110). Everything that signifies economic prosperity attracts Babbitt as Lewis says: “He yearned for a Dictaphone, for a typewriter which would add and multiply, as a poet yearns for quartos or a physician for a radium” (57). Babbitt is a typical businessman of the 1920s who is passionate to maintain ethical dignity to get applause from his rivals for his high caliber, integrity. In his business deals he violates its righteousness and flouts all moral principles. His morality is based on his material convenience and high profitability. In all his speeches, Babbitt reveals his grand vision and proficiency in business ethics as he says: “It is at once the duty and the privilege of the realtor to know everything about his own city and its environment” (47) and “rather must know his city, inch by inch, and all its faults and virtues” (48). He has accumulated huge wealth by fair and foul means but he finds himself in a state of dilemma as he leading a hollow life. Mencken states thus:

“His every act is related to the phenomena of that society. It is not what he feels and aspires to that moves him primarily, it is what the folks about him will think of him. His politics is communal politics, mob politics, herd politics, his religion is a public rite wholly without subjective significance, his relations to his wife and children are

formalized even his debaucheries are orthodox debaucheries of sound businessman” (Schorer 22).

The Zenith Athletic Club is neither athletic nor a club but a representative of modern culture with members who are snobs. The members of the club boast of their sound monetary background and high social status. The members of this club are least bothered about the athletics and sports and are not interested in creative activity. They gather in the club meetings not to discuss any strategy for sports or to promote sports activity in the city but they meet to build relationships, to enjoy lunch and drinks. This club disregards Union Club for its being snobbish, extravagant and arrogant, “ its chief hatred is the conservative Union Club which all sound members of the athletic call a rotten snobbish, dull, expensive old hole” (60). The members of the club suffer from superior complex and do not mix up with the lower class people articulating their snobbery. They take pride in ignoring their friends, neighbors and acquaintances. They hold the opinion that money and wealth give social status and these are more important than any other thing. They have little concern for the sufferings of humanity as they are engaged in the petty goals of life. Babbitt only delivers long speeches but does nothing for the growth and promotion of his employees. He expresses his great affection for them but cannot bear spending much money on them:

“He liked to like the people about him; he was dismayed when they did not like him. It was only when they attacked the sacred purse that he was frightened into fury, but then, being a man given to oratory and high principles he enjoyed the sound of his vocabulary and the warmth of his own virtue” (78).

The novel *Babbitt* of Lewis has cultural significance as it is a strong and forceful effort to evince the miserable condition of the middle class Americans trapped in abysmal situation of moral decadence and spiritual bankruptcy. Lewis observes that it is the real time for their introspection as his novel inspires the people to refrain from social evils to lead a life of simplicity, truth and spontaneity. Babbitt's life is infected by the virus of pettiness, provincialism and snobbery. He struggles to get peace of mind and goes on a journey with his friend Paul Riesling but he fails to escape from morbidity, dullness and emptiness of life. He lives in a world of chaos and confusion and lives with a void. Lewis mirrored the real American society exposing the dominance of materialism; the degradation of people and their social vices. The novel of Lewis expressed the urgent need for reform as the society is at the lowest ebb. Babbitt is always worried about his high social status and this status consciousness is cancerous in his personality: "It was an aspiration for knightly ranks. In the city of Zenith, in the barbarous twentieth century, a family motor indicated its social rank as precisely as the grades of the peerage determined the rank of an English family" (81). The daily life of Babbitt is suffused with hectic business activities; he believes that the real wisdom lies in the accumulation of money and wealth and money alone conditions all human relations. He promotes the culture of conformity contrary to the ideals of Ionesco who regarded conformity ugly; dangerous and anti-humanity like the ferocious nature of rhinoceros. Lewis observes thus:

"Babbitt takes over as an official delegate of the State Association of real estate board. He is asked to write a paper for the convention expressing his views about the real estate. At the beginning he is

confused on his interpretation of facts about style, order and many other aspects of writings but much labour, he produces a concise paper which solely aims at the progress of real estate business leaving behind many other matters of great importance like welfare of workers etc. He reads the paper eloquently before the convention and receives great applause. When a few newspapers publish his speech focusing his vision about real estate with admiration then he comes to know about his quality of being an orator. Seneca Doane, who was a lawyer, is candidate for Mayor on labour ticket, he fights for the welfare of working class to raise their wages and provide with them better working facilities. His candidature and campaign threatens the people of middle and upper classes who are hell bent to hold on wealth, power and position” (194).

Babbitt is proud of his business culture but from Marxian sense he is the most dangerous person in the Zenith society promoting class antagonism and capitalism. Babbitt brags in his eloquent speeches that he has fostered a new type of business culture inspiring others to follow him for prosperity and social status. In reality, the business of Babbitt is exposed and ridiculed by Lewis in satirical language. Babbitt expresses his enthusiasm thus:

“Zenith and her sister cities are producing a new type of civilization. There are many resemblances between Zenith and these other burgs. I’m darn glad of it. The extraordinary growing and sane standardization of stores, offices, streets, clothes and newspapers

throughout the United States shows how strong and enduring a type is ours” (203).

Finally, Sinclair Lewis’s novel *Babbitt* is a cultural icon and is highly praised by the critics and reviewers for its cultural value. The critics of Cultural Materialism such as Greenblatt and Sinfield are of the opinion that Lewis’s novel *Babbitt* has modern relevance because in the modern times the social evils such as snobbery, moral degeneration and hypocrisy are rampant. His novel helps to understand the social evils polluting the society as the publication of the novel urged many political thinkers to bring reforms in society. The novel is a fruitful study of Cultural Materialism as it depicts the antagonistic relationships between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie; between the rich and labor class and between the poor masses and the rich businessmen like Babbitt and Paul. H. L. Mencken states that:

“*Babbitt* gives me great delight. It is shrewdly devised; It is adeptly managed; it is well written. The details, as in *Main Street*, are extraordinary vivid... I know of no American novel that more accurately presents the real America. It is a social document of high order” (Hall 247).

To conclude, Sinclair Lewis was profoundly stirred by the prevalent moral crisis in the life of American Culture which was going to succumb to the lure of materialism. It has led to numerous kinds of corruption, physical and mental disorder and consequently it gives the shocking blow on the culture. Their unceasing desire to become powerful, superior and affluent has turned Americans into insensitive and immoral people. Blatant corruption and competition for the sake of accumulation and

grabbing of wealth and undeterred desire to rise socially is the root cause of American people's bizarre whims and blind race. Sinclair Lewis highlights the urgent need to cure them in favor of humanity. He appeals to the people to brood over its outcome and make an effort to come out of their trapped and pitiable situation to establish the inherent value of humanity. Society cannot be transformed overnight but proper action ought to be taken to trigger a great change. Stuart Hall (1992) observes that "the seriousness of Cultural Studies is inscribed in a way that is not exactly true of many other intellectual practices" (Hall 278) Tony Bennett (1998) observes that "Cultural Studies is fundamentally concerned with the relations of power and culture" (53). Raymond Williams called it "social –scientific" study of all culture. The novel *Babbitt* of Lewis has cultural significance as it deals with the issues that are relevant and applicable in the modern society also.

Chapter : Four

Themes of Greed and Human Degradation in Sinclair Lewis's

Arrowsmith

With the publication of his novel *Babbitt* Sinclair Lewis had already established his name in America as a prominent novelist dealing with the problems of the middle class. His *Arrowsmith* was published in 1920s. Lewis was ambitious to become the champion of the middle class as he depicted the greed, degradation and the growing lust for money in the people living in small villages and the towns. He had planned on writing a work about labor giant and he had gone to visit the US union leader, Eugene Debs. Sinclair Lewis is known for his ambiguity and contradictory attitude toward the middle class Americans. He is inconsistent, changeable and irregular. He is a man of multiple personality who “shifts his point of view so often that finally we come to wonder whether he has any” (Mark Shorer, *An American Life* 483), He dislikes churches, dogma, pastors and flocks. His *Arrowsmith* got him a Pulitzer Prize, which he declined. In this novel, Lewis depicted the life of a greedy doctor who is caught between his idealism and commercialism. Like Scott Fitzgerald's *Gatsby*, Martin Arrowsmith transcends all barriers of religion and morality to make money representing the profit hunting spirit of the capitalists. Lewis virulently attacks the Middle West, the Middle class and all his middle class characters. He became an ingenious social satirist like Jonathan Swift and Bernard Shaw. His criticism of the middle classes and the American culture is summed up in his historical Nobel Speech. He contended that “America, with all her wealth and power, has not yet produced a civilization good enough to satisfy the deepest wants of human creatures” (Sinclair

Lewis, *Arrowsmith* 6). But the critics called him the victim of his own divided self. He is radical and socialist like Bernard Shaw Lewis mimics the speech and action of the American Middle –class. He has created good-humored caricatures like Charles Dickens. He had read Bernard Shaw and soon became a freelance writer and he joined the Socialist Party of New York. He exposed the false illusion of the capitalism. He exposed and ridiculed the commercial values of corporatized society. Lewis is perhaps the first American writer who took keen interest in the vices of the middle class Americans. He wrote about the emerging professionals, intellectuals, scientists, engineers and business managers. Lewis observed that after the World War-1 there was a trend towards cultural transformation. People had become crazy about earning money by easy means scrapping all the old values enshrined in the American constitution. Lewis exposed shams, mediocrity, greed, complacency and hypocrisy of the middle class people in small towns, business, medicine, religion and marriage. His cynicism and scathing attacks were a conscious effort to bring social and political awareness to quicken the nation to a richer way of life. He lashed at corruption, brutality, obscenity and upheld freedom, individuality and science. Lewis saw America foul and banal so he could not write a glorifying literature. Van Doren observes that by nature and instinct Lewis was a pessimist as he could not find beauty and grandeur. He had seen greed, vulgarity, inhumanity and corruption everywhere. His treatment and tone is acrid in *Arrowsmith* as he attacked the stupidity and abuse of liberty. In his novel *Arrowsmith*, Lewis begins his novel with a journey through the medical profession. Lewis once again set his novel in the small town and focuses on the ignorance, stupidity, backwardness and of the orthodox villagers of Midwest. The novel depicts the stifling American environment on the creative spirit. D.J. Dooley in his book *The Art of Sinclair Lewis* (1967) sums up the socialistic vision of Lewis thus:

“Looking outward rather than inward, he attempted to analyze the forces which affected the behavior of his fellow citizens in a confusing transitional period; he tried to discover the sources of hope and frustration in the lives of typical women, white collar workers, engineers, and garbage mechanics of time” (Dooley 53).

Dooley argues that Lewis’s approach is cultural and socialistic and he was influenced by H.G. Wells and G.B. Shaw, and Thorstein Veblen. Lewis evolved his own vision of life and followed a consistent theory of cultural materialism to solve the problems of society of Midwest. Raymond Williams (1958) aptly argues that “it will be the test of our cultural seriousness whether we can in the coming generations redesign our syllabuses to a point of full human relevance and control” (Williams 14). The major themes of Lewis are; the barriers of provincialism; the rigidity of the middle class; the possibility of socialism; the promise of science and technology; and the cultural transformation. Carl Von Doren and E. M. Forster praised Lewis for his seismographic and photographic approach to depict the vices and social ills of the society. Everett Carter in his book *Theories of American Realism* (1972) observes that for Lewis the society is a laboratory in which men are observed, analyzed and classified” (Carter 385). Mark Schorer in his monumental biography records that Lewis had passionate ambition to give a photographic picture of society because he believed that people can enjoy happiness only in a socialistic society. Lewis’s approach in his novels is cultural and societal. Sinclair Lewis constructed his narrative *Arrowsmith* exploring ideas of “small-town life” and growing cultural obsession of America with materialistic metropolis. Culture deals with social consciousness and culture has two important aspects. The first aspect refers to “the known meanings and

directions which its members are trained to” (Williams 4). The second aspect of culture is “the new observations and meanings which are offered and tested” (Williams 4). Mervin Harris,(1979) the father of the theory of Cultural Materialism observes in his chapter: “The Epistemology of Cultural Materialism”

“To describe the universe of human mental experiences one must employ operations capable of discovering what people are thinking about. But to describe body motions and the external effects produced by body motions one doesn’t have to find out what is going on inside people’s head at least this is not necessary if one adopts this epistemological stance of cultural materialism” (Harris 21).

Sinclair Lewis’s fiction like the novels of Dos Passos is a witty and satirical cultural study of the “Roaring Twenties.” The hero of his novel *Arrowsmith*, Martin is driven by his selfish impulses and is desperate to acquire name, fame and wealth and social status. The journey of Martin Arrowsmith begins from a small town and ends in a big city. Martin plays multiple roles in the novel; he is a country-doctor in a small town of Gopher Prairie, an Assistant Commissioner of Public Health in the city of Zenith, a pathologist at the McGurk Institute of New York, he is fighting plague on the island of St Hubert and a scientist working in the laboratory of wilderness of Vermont. Lewis has given his full liberty to grow and prosper in life. He is aspiring, ambitious, a keen observer of human nature as he notices the changing face of his town and the ugly side of the society. He has to confront the social forces everywhere he goes and society is the main enemy in his life. Like the hypocrisy of the Booster’s Club of Main Street, the hypocrisy of the scientists and the doctors is a threat to the survival of society.

Martin Arrowsmith joined the University of Winnemac and found that the doctors and professors are crazy to make money. They want money, fame and success in medicine, but their main profession is to heal people and not to mint money. Lewis compares the University of Winnemac with “a Ford Motor Factory turning out beautifully standardized products that is students” (Sinclair Lewis, *Arrowsmith* 6). Martin realizes in the university that:

“America is a mill to turn out men and women who will lead moral values, play bridge, drive good cars, be enterprising in business and occasionally mention books, though they are not expected to have time to read” (Lewis 7).

The students are trained to become professional salesmen who treat patients as their customers. The senior university professor Dr. Roscoe Geake gives the following speech summing up the culture of the university:

“Knowledge is the greatest thing in the medical world but it’s no good whatever unless you can sell it, and to do this you must first impress your personality on the people who have the dollars. Whether a patient is a new or an old friend, you must always use salesmanship on him. Explain to him, also to his stricken and anxious family, the hard work and thought you are giving to the case, and to make him feel that the good you have done him, or intend to do him, is even greater than the fee you plan to charge. Then, when he gets your bill, he will not misunderstand or kick” (Lewis 83).

The checkered career of Martin reveals the tragedy of rural quackery, the politics of fraud connected with public administration in the small urban centre, the refined commercialism of hospitals for the wealthy and the financial temptations blocking the growth of a researcher. Martin believes that his science is a religion and he confronts the material forces that threaten to corrupt his vision and work. But the worst enemy of Martin is his soul's yearning for wealth and security for himself and his wife Leora. Lewis has dramatized the stirring inner conflict between worldly aspiration and scientific idealism in the character of Martin. A. H. Quinn (1932) calls him "a character of spiritual significance" (Quinn 875). Carl Van Doren calls Martin "a highly distinctive individual" (Doren 44).

In the beginning of his career, Martin is an idealist who dislikes the attitude of his students and their selfish attitude toward medicine. They are "mastering a trade" and the trade of the doctor's will "enable him to cash in" (Lewis 24). Martin is very critical of their money-mindedness and selfish mentality; he believes that most of his class fellows are plain "commercialists" (Lewis 29). However, Martin came in contact with Professor Max Gottlieb who teaches him to be selfish and greedy. In his final address to the entire medical school, Dr. Geake tells them "what sadly seems to be the truth that the world judges a man by the amount of good hard cash he can lay away" (Lewis 84). Dooley observes thus:

In *Arrowsmith*, Lewis describes the obstacles in the scientist's way. In the Midwest, the doctor is a medicine man and conformity to the tribal code is much more important than medical skill while in Nautilus Martin faces the boosterism of Pickerbaugh. Another obstacle is the

profit motive, and finally, most painfully experienced by Martin in St. Hubert, humanity stands in the way of his research. The novel deals with a dramatic tension between two kinds of value” (Dooley 110).

Martin has to fight his friends and colleagues for their selfish and money-minded attitudes in medical profession. Often he gets confused and bewildered. He wants to cure his patients as a practicing doctor and alleviate their pain. He is ambitious to annihilate all sickness for future generations. He knows that it is very hard to take decisions but he can bring many changes in the medicine culture. Lewis father was also a doctor and he had great regard for medical profession. Martin shares some of Lewis’ notions. Martin feels enthusiastic “about the freedom of the West, about the kind hearts and friendly hands of the pioneers, about the heroism and usefulness of country doctors” (Lewis 114). Martin believes that “a country doctor has great impact on the lives of people and he enjoys great respect and admiration in the society. He feels “homesick for the laboratory, for the thrill of uncharted discoveries” (Lewis 118). Martin has to “choose between his search for fundamental laws and temporary healing” (Lewis 118). Soon in his medical profession, he comes in contact with Max Gottlieb, an eminent German researcher and famous for the discovery of artificial parthenogenesis. He becomes his mentor, teacher and a role model in medical research. He is passionately devoted to the service of the society; his name means love of God and he is committed to science and religion. He says:

“Give me unclouded eyes and freedom from haste. God give me a quiet and relentless anger against all pretense and all pretentious work and all work left slack and unfinished. God give me restlessness

whereby I may neither sleep nor accept praise till my observed results equal my calculated or in pious glee. I discover and assault my error. God give me strength not to trust God” (Lewis 139).

Charles E. Rosenberg argues that “Lewis’s hero Martin could not be a physician; he had to be a scientist as he explored the challenges and uncertainties in the life a researcher. Martin is heroic to whatever degree he manages to disengage himself from the confining pressures of American society” (Rosenberg 54). He believes that the function of a doctor is to heal and console. A doctor has an obligation toward his patients. In his laboratory he is totally detached from the ugliness of the outside world. The realities of life cannot penetrate the walls that confine the scientist. Martin is cold as he has distanced himself from his friends and relatives; he has no time to care about individual destinies. There are two phases of Martin; one as a scientist stuck in his laboratory and the other aspect is his role of a doctor. Through the career of Arrowsmith, Lewis presents an essential conflict between clinical and scientific research and clinical medicine. This struggle cannot be resolved because one is either a doctor or a scientist. In the modern society the same struggle is going on and Lewis’ theme is relevant even today. Sinclair Lewis provides many facets of Midwest society and the novel may be described microcosm of American material culture. Sheldian N. Grebstein in *Twentieth Century Interpretations* observes that August Duer represents the profit motive, Pickerbaugh is a booster in the society and Holabird is “the international fraud” Madam Fox and Joyce Lanyon “symbolize the demands of Society and Success” whereas Leora “represents personal integrity” (Grebstein 70). Duer, Pickerbaugh and Holland are morally corrupt and enemies of the idealism of Martin in the novel. His friends put

pressure on Martin to abandon his ideals and join the medical profession to make money. It is all a risky game and the best option for him is to turn the practice into a commercialized enterprise. They argue that unnecessary surgery and treatment is a wastage of time and money. In the words of Sheldon N. Grebstein, it is “the exploitation of the many for the profit of the few” (Grebstein 71). Gottlieb is employed by the pharmaceutical company Dawson T. Hunziker only to make profit and does not care for research and the patients. Lewis exposes the ethics of the large pharmaceutical companies. Dr. Tubbs urges “Martin to publish his results prematurely and it will bring him the greatest good for the greatest number” (Lewis 324). Dr. Tubb’s main concern is the competition in the capitalist market because he does not want Martin to withhold the important discovery which might save many lives. He does not want anyone to publish the discovery. Medicine is a business and the competition is just as fierce as in any other line of business. Dr. Tubb understands the pulse of the market and wants the drugs to be well advertised to boost sales because “all publicity is good publicity” and this is vital to the success of the company. In this competitive world, money is everything and the ideals of Martin are threatened. But their idea of success is utilitarian and the product of capitalist society. Madeline Fox and Joyce Lanyon symbolize selfish impulses in the Midwest society. Martin is closely associated with Madeline Fox, the first woman who enters into the life of Martin. Her apartment is full “literature and decoration; a bronze Buddha from Chicago, a rubbing of Shakespeare’s epitaph, a set of Anatole France in translation, a photograph of Cologne cathedral, a wicker tea table with samovar” (Lewis 17). She is presented as an approver in the novel and when Martin says “damn” she rebukes him. All women who enter into the life of Martin desperately try to change his mind and

attitude toward life and success. They want to domesticate Martin but fail completely because Martin is of very hard metal. Lewis comments thus:

“Few women can for long periods keep from trying to improve their men, and to improve means to change a person from what he is, whatever that might be into something else...The moment the urgent Martin showed that he was stirred by her graces, she went at his clothes and at his vocabulary and his taste for fashion, with new and patronizing vigor” (Lewis 46).

Madeline holds a different opinion about Professor Max Gottlieb who is the mentor and guide of Martin. She finds that he is a heartless science machine. Madeline is also rooted in money culture, like Daisy of Scott Fitzgerald, as she measures everything in terms of money. For her success and money are the main motives of life to survive in the society after World War-1. Martin feels dissatisfied with the utilitarian ideas of Madeline; he rejects her and their engagement is broken off. He thinks that he will not be happy with Madeline. He meets another woman Leora Tozer and finds her comfortable and a better person than Madeline. He marries her as he compares her to Madeline:

“Perhaps you like me better because you can bully me-because I tag after you and She never would. And I know your work is more important to you than I am....But I am stupid and ordinary and She isn't. I simply admire you frightfully...while She has sense enough to make you admire Her and tag after Her” (Lewis 70).

Madeline could not understand that the ideology of life of Martin and her egotism led to their separation. She lives in her own egocentric world and is unable to sacrifice for Martin and his science. Martin is a scientist and a researcher and for him success involves in the laboratory. The outside world of Midwest society does not appeal him as he finds himself misfit in the growing mercantile society. In the development of the plot of the novel, Lewis carries Martin who is a young bourgeoisie physician through the ordinary handicaps and temptations which the society of 1920s sets before the scientist medical researcher. Martin fluctuates between his conceptions of right and wrong in his life and like Lewis his approach of life is ambiguous and ambivalent. One of the most dramatic event in the novel occurs in the West Indies where Martin struggles with the temptation to test the effectiveness of his compounded antitoxin which he had discovered. He takes the risk and inoculates half of the plague-stricken native people and leave the other half without treatment. Martin has to submit to the pressure of the government and finally he has to give up his ideals giving injections to others also. Martin suffers the first tragedy when his wife Leora dies during the plague. But after Leora's death, Martin begins admiring the rich as Joyce "the soft -voiced mistress of many servants easily lures Martin into her world (Lewis 402). Lewis has described the charming and beautiful personality of Joyce. She is also egocentric and possessive as she wants Martin to be with her all the time. Martin has not learned anything about women. It takes a friend from his youth to tell him: " But what I can't understand is how after living with Leora, who was the real thing, you can stand a hoity-toity skirt like Joyce" (Lewis 431). Bur Joyce muses that "her man was prettier than any of them, and if she would but be patient with him, she could make him master polo and clothes and

conversation...but of course, go on with his science” (413). Her view of Martin’s work is that it is an ornament:

“She expected him to remember her birthday, her taste in wine, her liking for flowers, and her objection to viewing the process of shaving. She wanted a room to herself; she insisted that he knock before entering; and she demanded that he admire her hats” (Lewis 414).

Joyce belongs to a bourgeoisie society. She is devoted to give love and affection to Martin and her son. But, she soon realizes that she cannot buy love, loyalty and affection with money. Leora is a different person; she understands the ideas and sentiments of Martin and tries her best to make him comfortable. She does not put any pressure on Martin but she is always worried about the happiness of Martin. She says:

“You belong in a laboratory, finding out things not advertising them. Are you going on for the rest of your life, stumbling into respectability and having to be dug out again?” (Lewis 217).

She feels she will not feel alienated and will enjoy working with her scientist husband but she fails to understand that money cannot buy love, ambition and idealism of a man. Joyce Lanyon is not wholly unsympathetic: “Behind all her reasons for valuing Martin was the fact that the only time in her life when she had felt useful and independent was when she had been an almshouse cook” (Lewis 411). He observes “socializing with the Smart set of Nautilus, he did admire the Group’s motor cars, shower baths, Fifth Avenue frocks, tweed plus-fours and houses” (Lewis 244). He does not want to be a “just a climber but at the same time he does not see why we

should be inferior to the bunch” (Lewis 247). Lewis writes that “Dr. Tubbs led him to a mountain top and showed him all the kingdom of the world” (Lewis 321). Lewis has dramatized the inner struggle between the temptations of a capitalistic society and integrity of an honest and idealistic scientist. Blankenship comments thus: “Arrowsmith of Lewis is a study of the conflict between commercialism and the scientific spirit” It is difficult to start a quest for truth in a social order dominated by money culture and orthodox stupidity and rigidity of the people. Lewis has given a detailed analysis of the evils of the medical institute which had become the center of corruption, hypocrisy and inhumanity. Lewis has exposed and ridiculed the characters who are corrupt, selfish, money-minded and greedy. Hartwick calls Pickerbaugh a “bubbling Billy Sunday crusader against drinking and germs, whose chief delight is to spread his views by means of jingles and rousing address before clubs” (Hartwick 264). Martin is in no sense the Messiah of the people or Savior of humanity, but he too is utilitarian and materialistic. His passion for medical research to serve the humanity is a sham and his idealism is false and misleading. He is crazy to accumulate wealth for his family:

“Martin wavered back to his room, dazzled by the view of a department of his own, assistants, a cheering world and ten thousand a year. But his work seemed to have taken from him; he was no longer to be Martin, and Gottlieb’s disciple, but a Man of Measured Merriment” (Lewis 322).

Like Dr. Faustus of Christopher Marlow, Dr. Martin knows that he is following a wrong track in pursuing wealth and power. He realizes that he would

suffer endless perdition like Dr. Faustus. He is in conflict as he expresses his fears: “But his work seemed to have taken his self.” Martin perceives “the horror of the shrieking bawdy thing called Success with its demand that he give up quiet work and parade forth” (Lewis 323). In his life Martin seeks to explore “the frontiers of knowledge” (Schorer 69). The first phase of Martin’s life reveals that he belongs to the pioneers of the American tradition and places him within a larger context. He wishes to push himself to extreme limit aspiring to touch the heights of Medical research. Martin wants to open up a new word of knowledge. Lucy L. Hazard observes that Martin is a “Refugee from Civilization a frontier character of Sinclair Lewis” (Hazard 113). He seeks freedom of the pioneers to choose how to live and work to scale new heights. Since the very beginning, America has been a land of opportunities. The society of Midwest is regulated by two ideals: Standardization and Conformity” and Martin’s growth is blocked by the rigidity and orthodox nature of the society. Dooley expresses weakness of Lewis thus:

“In spite of the excellence of much of the satire and the author’s success in fusing satire and novel, the book shows that Lewis could not do what Sherman asked him to do; give a satisfactory exposition of values” (Dooley76).

Martin pursues his goal independently and honestly like a true pioneer. Martin in his quest failed to achieve his destination as he is trapped in the bog of money culture throwing into the winds all the values of the pioneers. Grebstein observes that the novel *Arrowsmith* is different from *Main Street* and *Babbitt* because of two factors. First, Martin is an idealist who struggles to bring cultural transformation in

society unlike Babbitt and secondly, the plot of *Arrowsmith* exposes the decline of the spirit of “the pioneer in the character of Martin” (Grebstein 76). Martin is a seasoned and educated person. His cause seems to raise him above the average dissenter. Dooley argues that Lewis doesn’t defend Martin’s position intellectually. Martin has been ridiculed for his indecisiveness, uncertain behavior and ambivalence. Mark Shorer observes that “Martin is the real hero in the novel” (Shorer 45). He represents the psyche of a researcher and in his life the conflict between society and idealism is depicted by Lewis. However, Martin has a noble cause but he is unable to achieve his cause and emerges as a stumbling block to her at the end of the novel. Martin wavers, fails and tries again. Lewis comments thus:

“Arrowsmith is the biography of a young man who was in no degree a hero, who regarded himself a seeker after truth yet who stumbled and slid back all his life and bogged himself in every obvious morass” (Lewis 43).

Martin Light is of the opinion that Martin like Carol and Babbitt is a quixotic. It is an attempt to “give the story broad topic, perhaps mythic, scope” (Light 88). Martin is a young scientist who uses “golly” language and in the words of Light his language is “slick magazine language” When he comes in contact with Gottlieb after nightfall: “He had worn the threadbare top-coat of a poor professor, yet Martin remembered him as wrapped in a black velvet cape with a silver star arrogant on his breast” (10). He confronts the reality for the first time: “If in the misty April night Gottlieb had been romantic as a cloaked horseman, he was now testy and middle-aged” (11). In Wheatsylvania, when he is practicing medicine he is confronted with a

real problem of life in his medical profession. He wanted to save the Novak kid. He took the car and in the dead of night he drove to secure medicine for the kid. He imagined for the first time that he was “in race with Death” (Lewis 158). He uses this opportunity to become a hero but his action is an expression of “quixotic gesture” as pointed by Martin Light. After the death of his wife, Martin tries to control himself and tries to help everyone to escape from the depression of life. Martin “with his head full of idealism and illusion, the Quixote goes forth to set injustices aright, to honor his lady and to seeks fame” (Light 44). Martin is portrayed by Lewis with a mission to expose the corruption in medical profession. In the McGurk Institute, he expresses a desire to succeed, in the sense that he wishes to break new ground in the field of medical science. But he is shocked to find the corruption, factionalism and degradation among the educated people. When Martin goes to join his old teacher at the McGurk Institute in New York, he finds that the Institute has become a den of evil forces. Lewis has given a detailed analysis of the evils of the Institute in satirical language. The Institute is nothing more than a social playground for Mrs. McGurk, the rich and exasperating wife of its founder.

“Tubbs, Eolabird, and perhaps Tubb’s secretary, Pearl Robbins, were the ruling caste. It was murmured that Eolbird hoped someday to be made Assistant Director, an office which was to be created by him. Gottlieb, Terry Wickett and Dr. Nicholas Yea, that long-mustached and rustic biologist whom Martin had taken for a carpenter, formed an independent faction of their own, and however, much he disliked the boisterous Wickett, Martin was dragged into” (Lewis 297).

Martin wishes to make a new discovery that will be of great significance to humanity. His teacher and mentor Gottlieb is surprised at this: "Succeed? I have heard that word. It is English? Oh, yes, it is a word that little schoolboys use at the University of Winnemac. It means passing examination. But there are no examinations to pass here" (Lewis 277). The critics have challenged Lewis who created Martin like a true Quixote; his hopes and dreams and expectations are challenged by the realities of life. Lewis has given a map of the growth of Martin in the novel. However, his progress is not linear and he slips just as often as he moves forward. Martin faces obstacles after obstacles, often loses his heart and has a mind to give in. He wishes to be liked and respected in the society and that is why he tries to be a good doctor who provides all facilities to his patients. But the harsh realities of life always impede his way for the laboratory.. Life in the laboratory is entirely different from the actual life in the society. He is his own boss in the laboratory but in the society he is answerable. At the end of the novel Martin comes to the conclusion that he must free himself from all the shackles if he wants to pursue his ideals. He aspires for total freedom which is not possible in the orthodox society of small towns. Carol suffered because of the main street mentality of Gopher Prairie and Babbitt had to confront the narrow-mindedness and rigidity of Zenith. He has responsibilities to his wife and child, so Martin feels burdened because he sees his idealism collapsing and the rug slipping under his feet. T.K. Whipple opines that: "Martin is a type" (Whipple 36). But, the critical analysis of the text reveals that Martin is not a type but a round character of Lewis. There is consistent growth in his personality; he suffers emotional crisis; his attitude changes after the death of his wife Leora. Lewis has depicted the interior landscape of Martin and as the plot develops the ideas and

perceptions of Martin change. Martin is clearly not meant to be “primarily a type.” Light further argues that “Lewis’s male characters seem to need one extra demonstration of truths they should know but somehow cannot accept” (Light 93). After the death of his wife Leora, Martin marries Joyce Lanyon and tastes the fruit of affluence and prosperity. It is not an important episode in the novel as it brings drastic transformation in the life of Martin. He starts thinking of the relevance of his idealism and from this section onwards he devotes himself to make money for the family and security of life. Leora and Madeline could not change Martin but the circumstances bring change in the attitude of Martin. Mark Schorer observes that after the death Leora, Martin got full freedom to withdraw from society. He could commit himself to his idealism and research work in the laboratory as there was no obligation for him. His marriage with another woman further put pressure on his psyche and he could never feel free. His second marriage entangles him again in the domestic life. Dooley argues that Lewis has given Martin a choice to escape from the trap but he is not a committed researcher. He makes a compromise in his own way and Lewis seems to suggest: “You cannot eat the cake and have it too” He chooses a life in the woods with his friend Terry and breaks of all relationships with the society and the family. He has no power now to change and reform the society. Gottlieb’s ambition to create a new medical school for the people seems a sounder solution. He wants to inspire the young students to pursue medical research for the betterment of humanity. Lewis is unable to imagine such a possibility. Martin’s victory is personal but the implication of that victory for his society is dire. Lewis clearly states that the American society does not encourage creativity, innovation and new ideas. Dooley observes that Lewis “has taken the tradition of dissent to its logical and ultimate conclusion” (Dooley

113). Like a true pioneer, Martin escapes from the confines of the society by scrapping the traditions and standards that already exist. Terry suggests him to involve other scientists also in his project expanding his enterprise. Martin's retreat from the society is an expression of his pioneer spirit. For him his vision is very important and in the wilderness he has an opportunity to realize his vision of life. Mark Schorer does not find the ending of the novel believable. He comments: "At the end of *Arrowsmith*, in a remote quarter of Vermont, Martin had achieved, most implausibility, ideal circumstances for medical research and natural freedom for himself" (Schorer 438). Hazard compares him to a Puritan pioneer thus:

"But while his resemblance to the Puritan is probably of which he himself was unconscious, he is proudly conscious of his resemblance to the pioneer...Like the transcendentalists, Arrowsmith must revert approximately to the conditions of regional pioneering. Martin Arrowsmith is the most recent incarnation of that familiar frontier character, the Refugee from Civilization" (Hazard 284).

Lewis wanted to enjoy freedom to complete his project" (Grebstein 438). Martin and Sinclair Lewis wanted to "uproot, change and reform" (Grebstein 70). James Hutchison in his book *The Rise of Sinclair Lewis* observes thus:

"Arrowsmith's struggle could be read as an allegory of Lewis's own. Just as Arrowsmith cannot decide whether to use his skills to heal people or to devote himself to pure research. Lewis had to divide his time between writing stories for magazines and writing novels" (Hutchisson 106).

Lewis's novel *Arrowsmith* is full of contradictions because in a society which has defined the material prosperity the creative spirit of Martin is bound to be defeated. The Midwest society was a material society as the capitalism was fast growing in America. Work has only one purpose to produce more material wealth. The project of Martin is bound to be doomed because it has no tangible results and everything that he plans is illusive. He feels that he has failed in life. There is dissatisfaction in his mind because he feels that he had not achieved what he set out to achieve. Thus, he is not happy with the hero status he gets. Martin feels like a fraud and there is discontentment in his face. Martin's quest to create an order in the chaotic universe has failed and he believes that he is living in a chaotic universe where nothing is certain:

“He wanted to look behind details and impressive sounding lists of technical terms for the causes of things, for general rules which might reduce the chaos of dissimilar and contradicting symptoms to the orderliness of chemistry” (Lewis 110).

He never loses hope that there is no meaning in the universe. He is sure that the universe has a plan and so many secrets are hidden and his job is to explore those secrets to the benefits of humanity. He is never discouraged while carrying over his project though often he feels depressed by the challenging demands of the family and society. Martin's comfort zone is his laboratory and his enterprise is not result-oriented but process-oriented. Gottlieb tells him that “the most important part of living is not the living but pondering upon it”(Lewis 34). The project of Martin provides him with meaning:

“Everybody says, Oh, you mustn’t temper with the truth, and everybody is furious if you hint that they themselves are tempering with it. Does anything matter, except making love and eating and being flattered?” (Lewis 225).

The circumstances compel Martin to think over his project and its future prospects because people around him do not value his scientific research at all. They measure success in terms of money. Even in the early part of the novel Martin sees “no one clear path to Truth but a thousand paths to a thousand truths far off and doubtful” (Lewis 18). Martin knows that all truth is relative being a scientist. Martin is aware that objective truth is subject to interpretation and analysis. Truth doesn’t belong to anyone and no one in this universe can grasp the whole truth.

“Martin insisted that there is no Truth, that Truth is not a colored bird to be chased among the rocks and captured by its tail, but a skeptical attitude toward life. He insisted that no one could expect more than by stubbornness or luck, to have the kind of work he enjoyed and an ability to become better acquainted with the facts of that work than the average job-holder” (Lewis 271).

Gorbstein observes that Martin is just like Carol and Babbitt, the frustrated individual revolting against standardization and conformity of the Midwest society. He wants to break free from society to realize his personal ambition. Lewis has followed the satirical style to expose and ridicule the adventurous spirit of Martin. He is superior to Carol and Babbitt because his ideals are superior and cosmic in nature; the struggle in the life of Martin is also multidimensional and on a higher scale.

Martin is too sentimental and too melodramatic. He is a romantic American and wants to enjoy fully; his relationships to Madeline, Leora and Joyce prove his romantic bent of mind. The important thing is the stifling environment which crushes the individuality of Martin and in desperation he goes to the wilderness of Vermont leaving his family and friends. Martin defies authority and makes more enemies than friends. With Martin it seems Lewis has come full circle as in all the three novels, *Main Street*, *Babbitt* and *Arrowsmith*, Lewis has depicted the mediocrity, hypocrisy, corruption and rigidity of the society of small towns and cities of America. Carol and Babbitt experience discontentment because of the material capitalism while Martin feels discontented and he rejects society. In *Arrowsmith*, the middle-class scientist is controlled by the power of politics and capitalism and feels restless and discontented. He is too weak to cope with the forces of greed and intrigue. Martin believes that it is better to have scholarly freedom even at the risk. Pickerbaugh expects him to be serious about enlightening the public and at the Rouncefield Clinic, “that most competent, most clean and brisk and visionless medical factory” (Lewis 270). Leora tells him: “You’re not a booster. You’re a lie-hunter.” Leora is very bold and blunt, she compared him to Professor Gottlieb and Voltaire:

“But maybe they were like you, always trying to get away from the tiresome truth, always hoping to settle down and be rich, always selling their souls to the devil and then going and double-crossing the poor devil” (Lewis 218).

Martin is not a wooden statue of Lewis; he is full blooded character with flesh and bones. He is a human being and he finds it hard to resist the temptations: “But

Watters and Pickerbaugh were not so great a compulsion to respectability as the charms of finding himself listened to in Nautilus as he never had been in Wheatsylvania, and finding himself admired by Orchid “ (Lewis 213). Martin suffers alienation, condemnation , hostility and opposition.

In *Arrowsmith*, Sinclair Lewis has presented his perspective of history. In the *Main Street*, he reviewed the American past. The pioneer rebellion is launched by Carol “emerging as a rebellious girl” worried about her “new coiffure.” The past is measured by capitalism and the triviality of the present is satirized. Carol is sincere soul but she cannot escape the confinement of a materialistic environment. In *Arrowsmith*, the pioneer tradition is revived by Martin who is aspirant to reform the future. His professional integrity and the rejection of social constrains for the core of the novel. Martin, an idealistic researcher struggles in the powerful capital system alone and his journey continues form Pickerbaugh’s Department of Health to McGurk Stephen Conroy uses David Reisman’s *The Lonely Crowd* to explain that Lewis’s dramatizes the conflict between the anxiety of the middle class and the personal ambition of the individuals. Robert Wiebe argues that Lewis is depicting the social reality that “a new middle class was rapidly gaining strength” (Wiwbw 111). In the 1960s, the new middle class was gaining unified identity and this is very clear in the plot of *Arrowsmith*. Lewis uses the tools of Veblen to depict the emergence of the leisure class and the class conflict growing in the small villages and towns of America. Veblen distinguishes between “industry” and exploit.” The first signified the “effort to create new thing in society” and the second is described by Gottlieb who urges the students to make maximum profit by their medical knowledge. Lewis borrowed the business concepts of Veblen and presented the professional managerial

class and with galleries full of “exploiters” contrasting them with “the producers of knowledge.” Raymond Williams talks of transformed social order and Lewis’s *Arrowsmith* deals with the problem of social order and cultural transformation. The struggle of Martin is to end the rigidity; narrow-mindedness and to change the society through research and knowledge. Raymond Williams describes it as a matter of Cultural Materialism: “Lewis exhibits an Understanding of, and commitment to, a radically transformed social order through his novel *Arrowsmith*. The ambition of Martin often overwhelms his ideals. In a dispute with his brother-in-law, Martin ignores his own skepticism of medical research methods. Lewis ruthlessly ridicules thus:

“Then behold the Dr. Arrowsmith who had once infuriated Angus Duer and having Watters by his sarcasm on medical standards upholding to a lewdly grinning. Bert Jozer the benevolence and scientific knowledge of all detractors; proclaiming that no medicine had ever...been prescribed in vain nor any operation needlessly performed” (Lewis 134).

To conclude, Lewis has depicted a clash of freedom of the individual and the power structure of the capitalism. Mark Schorer (1962) observes thus: “He has depicted “grossly materialistic, money mad, smugly hypocritical, provincial civilization” (44), in his novel *Arrowsmith*. The society of Midwest is of the profit, by the profit and for the profit” (Sinclair Lewis, *It Can’t Happen Here* 441). In *Arrowsmith*, Lewis deals with the theory of Cultural Materialism offering the scientific method to give security and stability to the age. He depicts Martin who is in

the grip of the temptations of life. Like Babbitt and Gantry, Martin is swept away the powerful currents of materialism and gives up his false idealism. His pursuit of wealth, love for money and glamour, his romantic love adventures with three beautiful women sum up his individuality and sincerity. He is often swayed by the force of matter, for the milieu in which he lives, is hostile to his ideals. As a result, Martin stifles his idealism and plays the easy game to accumulate wealth and to gain publicity and profits. Robert Morss Lovett (1925) in her article: "An Interpreter in American Life" comments thus on Leora's death:

"From smoking in the laboratory a half finished cigarette on which a maid had spilt a test-tube of germs, at the time when Martin was caressing another woman, is necessary to Lewis's program of showing Arrowsmith's prostitution of purposes. This other woman, Joyce Lanyon, the symbol of the intrusion of the social world into the provinces of science is an important step in Lewis's campaign to debamboozle the American public and relieve its institutions of bunk" (Lovett 518).

Chapter : Five

Contextualization Cultural Stagnation of Middle Class Americans in Sinclair Lewis's *Dodsworth*

Raymond Williams (1958) observes that culture of a country reflects the consciousness of the society and people. Culture means the sum-total of the ideas and actions of a social group. Culture refers to “the known meanings and directions which its members are trained to “(Williams 4). Raymond Williams (1989) in his book *Culture is Ordinary* observes that “culture is ordinary. That is the first fact. Every human society has its own shape its own purposes, its own meanings. Every human society expresses these, in institutions, in arts and learning” (Williams 4). The term materialism refers to all the possessions valuable in the society. It refers to the way life is lived. It refers to the values we possess and to the things we aspire. It refers to the institutions, legal system, the art and religious ideas of people. The main fact is that social beings determine consciousness. This is the main tenet of cultural materialism theory describing materiality of culture. He condemns humanism of Lewis and argues that “values or artworks could not be studied without reference to a particular society within which they were expressed” (Lewis 16). Cultural materialism is not concerned with history or about the future of the society. The growth of money and power of money and the power of media or the growth of capitalism are the elements of cultural materialism. Materialism is a theory of culture and does not deal with abstract things. The novel *Dodsworth* investigates how lust for money influence the thought and actions of the people.

Sinclair Lewis was selected for the Nobel Prize because of his publication of *Dodsworth* (1929) and this novel marked the zenith of his literary career as a commentator of the American cultural scene. Although Lewis wrote prolifically, his novels written in the second phase got him immense fame and made him an international celebrity. His *Main Street*, *Babbitt*, *Arrowsmith* were widely read and appreciated as people like his cultural attitude and called him “a cultural critic of the 1920s of America. Martin R. Ausmus (1960) in his article “*Dodsworth*. and the Fallacy of Reputation” observes that *Dodsworth* was rated as the best of all the four novels because it is his most sympathetic, yet most savage, his most real, his truest picture of the middle class, his deepest penetration into character” (Ausmus 351). The novel *Dodsworth* was written in the 1930s at a time when Lewis was passing through a period of turmoil. Lewis had been twice divorced; his eldest son had been killed in the war. Lewis was sixty years old; he suffered from heart disease and cirrhosis of the liver. Lewis wrote *Dodsworth* to escape from the tensions and depression of life. He gained humor from Charles Dickens and drew his strength from satirizing a “robust, thriving, booming America” (Ausmus 352) giving a photographic picture of the new culture of money and business. Lewis has discussed almost all cultural issues in his novel, love, sex, feminism, work culture, business, finance and education. Sam has expressed his opinion about education thus:

“An education dominated by the beliefs that one goes to college to become acquainted with people who will later be useful in business, and that the greatness of a university is in the ratio of its students and the number of its athletic victories” (379).

The main focus of Lewis is to depict the social and domestic life of the Americans who were becoming victims of the new trends of change and cultural transformation. New values, new fashions, the affluence and the new industrial revolution brought tremendous changes in the life style of people. In his novel *Dodsworth*, Lewis unmasks the depravity from the painful spot which hurts and threatens the lives of many Americans. Maxwell Gemstar (1959) says that it “displays Lewis as a mature and reflective writer” He regarded it as Lewis’s best criticism of his country, really he proves, though it and other works, to be the writer of experience and liberation” (Gemstar 282).

The main conflict in the novel *Dodsworth* is between the characters of Sam and Fran and the central story is about the dissolution of their marriage. Fran is a shallow, selfish woman who is bored with her domestic life. Dodsworth plans a trip to Europe to bring real happiness in her wife who is in desperate need for a change. The hero of the novel *Dodsworth* is a retired president of a corporation. He has sold away his successful automobile company to his competitor and sets out for a leisurely trip to Europe. He has aspirations to visit some manufacturing plants in Europe to look for his next venture. Europe is regarded as a Paradise; a reservoir of magical drug for happiness; love; romance and passionate enjoyment. Sam and Fran believe that Europe is the living source of culture so both of them decide to escape the dullness of the half-baked city of Zenith. Fran thinks that she can “find youth again merely by changing skies” (Lewis 43) Fran is motivated by her own fear of lost youth.

“And life would be over for me if I simply went on forever with the idiotic little activities in this half-baked town! I won’t, that’s all! You

can stay here if you insist, but I'm going to take the lovely things that I have a right to take them, because I understand them! What do I care whether some club of human, or half-human, baby-cats in eye-glasses study dietetics or Lithuanian art text next year? What do I care whether pretentious bunch of young millionaire manufacturers have an imitation English polo team? when I could have the real thing in England! And yet if we stay here, we'll settle down to doing the same things over and over again" (Sinclair Lewis, *Dodsworth* 39).

This passage of Lewis is historically and culturally very important as it reflects the mood and choices of the rich American women living in the small towns like Zenith of America. Raymond Williams has given a detailed analysis of cultural consciousness. Fran is sick of backwardness and dull and boring life of Zenith and aspires for a change. Susan Ostrander in *Women of the Upper Class* observes that the rich women are a significant part of culture. She gives the definition of the upper class: "there is large portion of corporate sector rolling in wealth and there are many organizations and social networks open only to the rich people" (Ostrander 5). "Fran belongs to this category of women. Her husband is rich and wealthy and she has every right to move out of Zenith to escape from the boring and dull life. Fran is fed up with the "idiotic little activities of the "half-baked town." The plot begins in a natural manner setting the cultural background of Zenith. Raymond Williams (1958) says:

"Culture deals with social consciousness, the learned repertory of thoughts and actions exhibited by members of a social group. A culture has to aspects. The first aspect refers to the known meanings and directions which its members are trained to. Williams" (4).

Fran is introduced to be a symbol of cold American woman. She is the childish adult, has an interest in running after the newest model, caring for her faded beauty and attending parties. At the age of forty, she frees herself from any responsibility toward her daughter and son, thinking that the former marriage and the latter friends can compensate her absence. Her idiotic feather-brained” (Lewis 131) mind and her self-centered habit lead her to think about travel as the sole path to gain culture and enjoyment. Even her interest, attending clubs and leagues fail to keep her busy. She admits that her care for these associations is part of her social appearance, since her interest in these leagues “in every aspect of these except perhaps the purposes for which they had been formed” (Lewis 16). Fran feels dissipated with her dull and boring life with her impotent husband and small town Zenith and want to settle in Europe as an expatriate. Sam also realizes the void in the life of his wife and leaves his work, friends and Zenith to achieve his dream. He takes his pretty wife Fran to Europe for an extended trip. His wife is determined to join European society for real understanding and excitement of the culture and values of the European people. Before going to Europe, Fran expresses her inner anguish because life in Zenith is boring, dull and tasteless.

Lewis gives a real picture of an American couple confronting the existential realities of life. Dodsworth is a 50 year old retired businessman whose main ability was designing cars. His interests centered on his work which he saw as adventurous. He made huge money but feels a void in his life. Sam Dodsworth is inwardly empty as steel has entered into his soul. He has lived with the cars and the cars have entered into his soul. He is a hugely successful automobile manufacturer leading an insipid life in Zenith. His wife protests against this dull living and exhorts him to go to

Europe. Both go on an extended tour to find passion and fulfillment. Their first plan of travel to Europe when:

“They had first planned to go Europe, her belief, that they could make more passionate lives merely by running away to more complex and graceful civilization, had been seen as naïve as the belief of a village girl that he could but go off to New York, she could magically become beautiful and clever and happy” (Lewis 53).

The Americans feel deceived because the wars and their aftermaths make Europe lose most of its brightness. Sam finds himself in Europe, that he praised previously as “a lost dog” (Lewis 51). He insists on going back to his country because he feels that he is just like “the prisoner who sinks into accepting jail” (Lewis 108). He can not endure the continual accusation of the Europeans to his country. Even Fran, who drags Sam to Europe, bursts to tell Sam that “I can’t stand staying in this country...” (94). Really she cannot stay anywhere. She contrasts herself sharply when she gives double views towards the same topic. In the alien land Sam does nothing, only bewilder and lose his self confidence. The Americans confuse the meaning of travel with aimless journey. He seems “meekly trots to Europe to buy sum-dials...To try to buy aristocracy by buying the aristocrat’s worn out coats” (Lewis 308). Sam is a typical character of the new Machine Age of the 1930s; he has built a big empire and made huge money in his automobile business. He worked like a machine in Zenith ignoring his wife who never enjoyed love, good company and passionate relationship with Sam since he had no time for such immaterial things:

“Sam Dodsworth had helped to build a machine which was running away from him. Sam had lost the dignity of a true craftsman. In life he made nothing, he meant nothing and whatever he created was the outcome of his mechanical spirit. He had lost his identity and he was no longer Samuel Dodsworth but merely part of a world vigorously pushing one another towards nowhere” (Lewis 19).

Sam has become a cog of the machine and had no time for recreation and leisure. He was a successful business man and he buried his passions and enthusiasm in the rat race of making money. He resolves the problem developing intimacies with the beautiful women of Europe to satisfy the desires of the Id. In Zenith most of his time, he was busy with whisky and poker” (13). Sam was growing dull and weary every day as he took no part in civic activities. He was feeling alienated and loved to live alone and to meditate. He was a tall well built man with impressive appearance. He took his own decisions and never consulted anyone in his business transactions. Dodsworth sees himself as part of “a crowd vigorously pushing one another toward nowhere” (21). His trip to Europe pointed out a need of which he himself had not been conscious. This was a need for affiliation as exemplified of an English home:

“If in his quest for romance, the exterior of the house was a jar to Sam, the drawing room was precisely what he had desired, without knowing that he had desired it. Here was definitely home with a homeliness which existed no longer in most of the well-to-do houses of Zenith” (Lewis 78)

Other circumstances introduced in the novel point up Dodsworth's needs in other ways. For example, the unsatisfactory relationship with his wife who is calling him an "impotent person, with no fire of love and a working machine" Sam is shocked to know that his wife Fran has started flirting with other men in Europe. He was upset by her sexual adventures but he was helpless because Fran believed in the values of flapper culture. However, he tried to persuade her to go back home and he rejoins her but Fran is not serious about the marriage and it seems the dissolution of marriage is inevitable. Sam gets involved in his own sex adventures and develops relationship with European women. His love affair with Edith is very interesting in this part of the novel. Lewis comments thus:

"Good God, had he really become confirmed, since the case of Arnold Israel, on this habit of seeing Fran not as his loyal companion but as a dreaded and admired enemy, to placate whom was his object in life? Was this the truth about his wanderings, all his future?" (Lewis 273).

Sam is confused when he notices the deviant behavior of his wife Fran in Europe; he seriously ponders over life and asks: "What's matter with our lives?" and expresses his needs for intimacy and identity. He is very "passionate to enjoy sexual pleasures and his need for intimacy with women grows powerful. Nande Azeredo is the first woman willing to become his bed partner. He returned to the hotel with a bag; he spent three nights in the flat of Nande Azeredo" (357). But this did not satisfy him and he soon left Nande. Sam had a need for approval that interfered with the satisfaction of his other needs: "But to face the decision that would be his if he wanted to divorce his wife" (145). Sam had a view of the world as menacing:

“The heat was churning up into a thunderstorm. Lightening revealed the cornices of the inhumanly lofty buildings. The whole air was menacing, yet he felt the menace indifferently, and heavily he said goodnight to Ross Ireland. The storm exploded as he stood at the window of his hotel room. Every lightening flash threw into manical high relief the vast yellow wall of the building opposite, and its innumerable glaring windows; and in the darknesses between flashes he could imagine the building crashing over on him. It was terrifying as a volcanic eruption even to Sam Dodsworth, who was not greatly given to fear” (Lewis 185).

Like Fran, Sam is also inconstant and womanish, a typical American who squanders away money recklessly on women. As the plot develops; it becomes clear that his relation with his wife Fran is growing frustrating:

“She could make him feel so unintelligently that he would be silent all evening. The easy self-confidence which weeks of industrial triumphs had built up in him she could flatten in five seconds. She was, in fact, a genius at planting in him an assurance of his inferiority” (29).

Tub is a major woman who enters into the life of Sam and has full control on him; “They had been together since boyhood. Each was a habit to the other...They analyzed each other, they considered each other as individuals no more than a man considers the virtues of his own several toes, unless they hurt” (10). Sam leaves Fran and who does much for him: “But that was to him a lesser hint of what Edith Cortright had done to him than his increase in self-confidence” (399). Sam also comes in contact with Ross Ireland who is a journalist. He has a satisfying relationship with her as Lewis states:

“He had not known that wandering could be so satisfying as it was with Ross Ireland, who never complained and became superior like Fran, or felt bound to be funny like Tub, or noisy like Nande; who was interested in everything from pig-pens to cloister; and who enjoyed erecting theories of life more than anything save tearing them down” (Lewis 362).

Three women came into the life of Sam, Nande, Edith Cortright and Ross but he couldn't feel the thrill of life; life remained dull and boring as sexual pleasures gave him just short term satisfaction and not long term domestic happiness and stability of life. All these women except Fran gave him self-confidence and he felt the force of his individuality in their company. He did not care about his daughter: “she was not his rollicking helpless girl. She was a competent Young Matron. She does not need me anymore” (205). In Berlin, Fran learns that Emily, her daughter has given birth to a baby and instead of becoming happy, she is shocked and appalled. She begs Sam not to tell Kurt about the child because she does not want to look like a grandmother:

“But Sam, don't you realize that Kurt-oh, I don't mean Kurt individually, of course; I mean all our friends in Europe-They think of me as young. Young! And I am, oh, I am. And if they know I'm a grandmother! God! A grandmother! Oh, Sam, can't you see? Its horrible! It's the end, for me!...Think I was so young When I married. It isn't fair for me to be a grandmother now, at under forty” (Lewis 123).

In Europe, he enjoyed the sex adventures but at heart he remained empty and depressed. Fran adopts a typical attitude in Europe; she does not mix up with the friends of Sam and considers herself superior to the European women. In her whole tour of Europe, she refuses to associate with any of the business men from Zenith. Fran is a social climber; an opportunist and a faded beauty struggling look young and attractive. Fran knows that she is behaving like a snob but she pretends that she is a normal woman: “Am I a snob? Splendid! I shall get on, if I can only be clear and resolute about it.” (Lewis 170). Sam appears a self-centered and shallow in Europe, but Fran’s quest for youth is based on her illusions. Sam tries to expose her: “Do you actually mean to tell me, Fran that you think that just moving from Zenith to Paris is going to change everything in your life and make you a kid again? “ (Lewis187). Sam is aware that her claim to social distinction is based on illusion and false promises:

“Fran had read enough about art; she glanced over the studio magazines monthly, and she knew every gallery on Fifth Avenue. But, to her, painting, like all culture, was interesting only as it adorned her socially....He reflected that Fran had an unsurpassed show-window display but as much on the shelves inside” (Lewis 234).

Sam is a successful business man of Zenith; he has an eagle eye to read the inner feelings and ideas of people. He understands the nature of Fran very well and takes very little time to expose and ridicule her. Fran can cheat others and to Sam who has full understanding about the deceptive nature of Fran. Sam noted her pretentious nature in dealing with the people of Europe. She boasted that she was an expert in

tennis, boasted that she knew French very well for ever. In fact, she “was like a child boasting to show her father’s wealth” Her quest for youth and all dreams and illusions are crushed when Kurt’s mother refuses to let him marry her. Sam also feels restrained in spite the liberty that he enjoyed:

“He was chained by every friend who has made agreeable-bound not to shock or lose them. He was chained by every dollar he had made, every automobile he had manufactured-they meant a duty to his caste. He was chained by every hour he had worked-they left him stiff, spiritually rheumatic. He still wanted the world, but there was nothing specific in the world that he wanted so much as, thirty years ago, he had wanted to be a Richard Davis hero” (192).

Fran is extremely selfish and insensitive in her attitude toward Sam. When Sam tells her that he is going to marry Edith, she reacts expressing her selfishness:

“I don’t understand. What have I done now? Oh, my God, if you haven’t learned-you haven’t learned anything, not one single thing, out of all our sorrows! Still criticizing me, and such a kind way of springing something beastly cruel on me just when I’ve been happy, as I have tonight !...Will you kindly Mr. Dodsworth, be a little less mysterious and tell me just what I’ve done to hurt your tender little feelings this time?” (Lewis 233).

Sam’s conflict is between Fran and work and he suffers psychological depression because of this conflict. Being disgusted by her deceptive attitude, Sam for the first time in the novel gives vent to his feelings thus:

“I’m not going to be polite, Fran. You know how awfully I’ve loved you, a good many years. You tampered with it-What’s going to become of you? I don’t know. But I guess it’ll be the same thing that’s been becoming of you this couple of years. You haven’t needed me. You’ve found people to play with, and plenty of beaux. I suppose you’ll go on finding them” (Lewis 267).

In this speech, Sam exposes Fran’s cold and vicious nature as of a flapper who is moving in the society just to fulfill her hedonistic selfish means. She is never a serious wife, or a mother or a grandmother. She is cold and snobbish. Lewis has articulated in detail the conflict and perceptions of life of Sam thus:

“The vision of himself as Richard Harding Davis hero returned wistfully....Riding a mountain trail, two thousand sheer feet above a steaming valley; sun-helmet and whipcord breeches; tropical rain on a tin-roofed shack; a shot in the darkness as he sat over a square face of gin with a ragged tramp of Noble Ancestry. But his mind fled back to the excitement of Fran’s image; her spun-glass hair, her tingling hands, her lips that were forever pursuing in fantastic pouts, her chatter that felt suddenly into inexplicable silence, her cool sureness that made him feel foggy and lumbering” (10).

The problem with Sam is that he cannot feel independent from work without conflict because work gives him the real identity. Sam is sick of the behavior of Fran who makes every effort to dampen his confidence. But he continues ignoring her putting faith in her relationship because she is the only source for his intimacy. He has

high regard for her because she is the mother of two children and he never wants to lose her. Sam is afraid of “getting mixed up” (284). The anxieties of Sam follow his needs. He is miserable at the thought of loss of identity:

“But whatever discomfort he had at playing hobbledehoy, in the class reunion Sam found balm. They knew who he was! No one in Paris knew that. But his classmates realized that he was Sam Dodsworth, great tackle, Skull and Bones, creative engineer, president of a corporation, prince of good fellows” (Lewis 201).

Lewis has portrayed the multidimensional personality of Sam in the novel. He represents the affluence of elite class who built a big empire in business as America presented many opportunities to the young people who were hard working and had creative imagination. Sam is a successful car designer and his new models were very popular; he enjoyed monopoly in his car manufacturing business. But in spite of wealth, name and fame, Sam always looks confused and bewildered in his dealings with others:

“He also has dread of becoming dependent on others. In the taxicab, he had a confused timidity-no fear of violence; no sense of threatened death, but a feeling of incompetence in this strange land, of making a fool of himself, of being despised by Fran and by these self-assured foreigners; a fear of loneliness; a fear that he might never be restored to the certainties of Zenith” (Lewis 62).

The problem with Sam is that he does not use his defense mechanism in troubling situation. He desperately tries to forge his identity in Europe but his wife

Fran plays the negative role. Sam has conflicting needs but he does not rely on too much defense mechanism. He had attended Rotary Wheel only once and most of her time he is inactive in the civic affairs. There was “no reason for it apparent to him but suddenly these banners made him feel that in the chill ignobility of exile he was still Some One” (Lewis 103) He uses his rational mind to protect himself:

“Scholars. Men who knew. Suddenly he felt he might have been such a man. What had kept him from it? Oh, he had cursed by being popular in college, and by being having a pretty wife who had to be surrounded with colored lights...Besides a fellow did not become things-anyway not after five or six or seven years of age. He “simply was things.” If he had had the capacity to be a savant, nothing would have prevented. Or-Suddenly, he felt better about it. Was it possible that in some involved unelucidated way, he himself was a savant in fields not admitted by the academicians as scholarship?” (272).

Sam is also haunted by the nightmarish dreams as Lewis has depicted his weak mind and docile nature. He is only master of his trade but in his human relationships he is a total failure. Fran dominates and exploits him because she knows his weaknesses. Lewis has described deep conflict of Sam thus: “Sam is haunted by a nightmarish dream; “he dreamed that Fran had fallen from a cliff and is dead” (Lewis 293). Sam doesn’t want to lose his wife; he feels disturbed and feels for the first time a void in his life. He has plenty money but he needs intimacy and love also to survive in the harsh environment of Zenith where life is dull and boring. His restless mind indicates some trouble: “All thinking about matters less immediate than food, sex,

business, and the security of one's children is a disease, and Sam was catching it. It made everything more difficult" (212). Sam is able to plan but his trouble develops when he grows weak and alienated. He had been quite satisfied with his relationship with Fran though she ignored and insulted him on certain occasions. At that time Fran was working in his automobile factory. When he gives up his business the Id asserts itself and causes trouble because the familiar arsenal of his defense mechanism is not available. In his tour in Europe, for the first time his mind becomes very active and his holidays revive his energies; he is no longer impotent as he enjoys sexual adventures with three women. In Europe, there is no routine and no tension of the work culture; he has plenty of money to enjoy and to escape the dull and boring life of Zenith. His wholehearted attention is directed towards Cortright who is the American widow who looks after him and gives him what Fran denied him. He is attracted towards her because he feels that she understands him very much. Sam's experiences and understanding of women is very poor. Edith Cortright is comfortable with Sam, Minna is weak, Nande is vulgar and Matey is too plump. Edith has none of the faults and Sam gives her proper time and company. She is more than anything else respectable and rather sexless. Sam lacked at his early stages of his life authority, money and social position. For Sam, time is money and so he seriously thinks of the aims of travel and its benefits. He thinks that travel suits certain characters who are not one of them. Sam keeps on deliberating and has doubts:

“He continues in thinking about travel, to contrast previous thoughts about living abroad and travel, which are means to alleviate the personality to creative level and to remove the vulgarity. The paradox reaches its climax when Sam settles his doubt and reaches a

satisfactory point that we (the Americans) do all this hustling , all this jamming in subways, all this elbowing in elevators, to keep ourselves occupied and keep from getting anything done” (Lewis 137).

Lewis believes that the people from small towns such as Gopher Prairie and Zenith people are having clannish and conservative in their attitude and the rat race for money has become an established tradition in America. Such attitudes define Zenith as it appears in both *Babbitt* and *Dodsworth*. Lewis has lashed at the American boosterism through the character of Sam who is a typical American businessman. The rise of automobile industry; capitalism and feminism; sexual liberties and flappers are some of the important cultural themes discussed in *Dodsworth*. He feels contented with Edith Cortright at the end of the novel and discovering happiness and youth in her laughter. The last line of the novel expresses the ambiguity of Sam’s life stating: “He was, indeed, so confidently happy that he completely forgot Fran and did not again yearn over her, for almost two days” (Lewis 260). Lewis has poor opinion about the Americans and Sam feels stupid in Zenith and also in Europe. Lewis observes that Americanness is wholly bad and his portrayal of Americans is highly negative. Braut, a lecturer in Europe tells Sam and Fran this: “America wants to turn us into Good Fellows, all provided with the very best automobiles and no private place which we can go in them” (Lewis 240). Lewis has raised many cultural issues in the lecture of Braut who has punctured the false morality and cultural decline of America. Lewis has devoted many pages to the lecture of Braut highlighting the cultural decadence, the human degradation, greed for money of the American people. When Braut says that in contrast to America, and Soviet Russia: “Europe, she believes that a Voltaire, a

Beethoven, a Wagner, a Keats, a Leuwenhock, a Flaubert, give drama and meaning of life, and that they are worth preserving” (Leis 241). Lewis sees America as being a nation too disinterested in culture as depicted in the plot of the novel. Braut lashes at the money culture of America and the growth of capitalism. People are obsessed with buying and money and are least bothered about the arts and culture. Sam defends the money culture which has become the backbone of American life. He says: “We love to make money, but we love to spend it” (Lewis 242). Sam speaks of an American drive to discover and understand new things that most Americans come to Europe “as meekly as scholarships, to admire, to learn” (Lewis 242). The character of Sam reflects the cultural materialism of Sinclair Lewis as injects in Sam with all his opinions of America. Lewis lashes at the mediocrity, cultural stagnation, greed and capitalism through the character of Sam. Lewis satirizes the American business man who makes money and eventually becomes a machine man losing his spirit and cultural awareness. Lewis remarks: “Sam never loves passionately, loses tragically, nor sits in contented idleness upon tropic shore” (11). At the end of the novel Sam divorces his wife and marries the American widow and dreams of a life full of glamour and grandeur. Lewis has depicted the dreams of Sam thus:

“Sam had desire to lead a comfortable life with Edith in his farm house where they could enjoy the smelling of horses, cattle and chickens. The life would be extremely enjoyable with cornfields at noon. His ambition for the future happiness of a newly married life stirred his passions. It gave him the feelings that he had a bright future with Edith” (Lewis 305).

Fran plays a key role in the novel in castration of her husband and stultifying Sam's conscience. She wrecks what he builds in year only to enjoy her life. She exacts everything from him even his dignity. Fran proves to have no substance, when she makes many unhealthy liaisons in foreign society and neglects her husband. Even when Sam asks her hand, she sobs and tells him that she doesn't want to be a wife and a mother, but she "wants splendor! Great horizons"(Lewis 11). In spite of her coldness, frigidity and infidelity, Lewis grants her a great role of the spokesman and the reformer for the doctrine of freedom, man-women relationship and patriotism. She accuses the Americans of neglecting their wives and regard them part of furniture or machines. She advises then to use soft words and elegant presents. She addresses Sam and through him the American husband that:

"You are always thoughtful about me. American husbands never are. You are no worse than the rest, but you're just bad. You think of nothing beyond business and gold. It never occurs you that a woman, poor idiot is lost more pleased when you remember to send her flowers, or when you phone to her at odd hours just to say you love her, than she would be a new motor car" (Lewis 48).

In Europe, Fran has a series of love affairs. Sam divorces her because of her cuckolded and infidelity. Sam marries Edith Cortright and decides to begin a new life in America. The lovely Edith Cortright is a slim with "a taut frailness of body though she is far more natural looking than Fran. Edith loves the earth and the eternal elements" (Lewis 362). She is an "age of universal bobbing, Edith kept her hair long, parted simply and not too neatly" (Lewis 338). Edith is extremely lovely, with her

slender hands and silky hair. She is not fragile but full of passions. But Sam leaves Nande after three days because she lacks refinement. Lewis calls Fran the “villain of the piece” (xii), but Fran is honest about what she wants from life:

“Oh, Sam dear, but I’m so grasping! I want the whole world, not just Zenith! I don’t want to be a good wife and mother and play cribbage prettily! I want splendor! Great horizons! Can we look for them together?” (Lewis 6).

Fran is passionate to lead a life of sexuality and glamour as she represents the flappers of the 1920s. She is fashionable; wears erotic dresses and loves flirtations revolting against the traditional values of the Zenith town. Fran presents herself as a typical flapper of the Roaring Twenties as she has blond hair, voluptuous sexy body to entrap any man that she meets in Europe. Lewis depicts Fran cool and unfeelingly, as she shines: “glossy in her gray squirrel coat and her small cloche hat, smuggled too contentedly against Lockert’s shoulder” (Lewis 66). Lewis writes that “Fran’s shiningness in a combination of white glove silk” (Lewis 71); “a rather theatrical star in her white satin with a rope of pearls about her gesticulatory right arm” (Lewis 73) Lewis gives an insight to the liberty of women highlighting an important cultural phase of the 1930s. Thorstein Veblen in his book *Theory of the Leisure Class* (1899) has analyzed the upper class women and their cultural role in the society: “It is more or less a rule that in communities which are at the stage of economic development at which women are valued by the upper class for their service, the ideal of female beauty is a robust, large-limbed woman” (Veblen 106). Fran fulfills all the conditions of a rich woman. Veblen further remarks:

“Or a high class wife the ideal then includes the characteristics which are supposed to result or to go with a life of leisure consistently enforced....The resulting ...ideal of beauty takes cognizance chiefly of the face, and dwells on its delicacy, and on the delicacy in the hands and feet, the slender figure, and especially the slender waist” (Veblen105).

Fran’s role in the novel is to highlight the spirit of feminism and cultural transformation. She belongs to the rich class and all her features described by Veblen are true to her becoming a sex doll in the novel. Dissolution of family is the central metaphor of the novel and Lewis depicted his autobiographical elements in the novel through Sam and Fran relationship. Divorces were increasing in those days; Lewis himself was twice divorced because women like Fran were very demanding and were crazy about sexual liberty. Sam Dodsworth knows her psyche and with a view to save his married life simply responds: “We, will” (6), is a promise he doesn’t keep in life. Lewis has articulated Fran’s frustration in the early part of the novel and Fran is literally begging for life.

“Only to do all that, to grab the world, we must not be bound by the feeling that we’re tied to this slow-pokey Zenith till death do us part from the fun of adventuring! Oh, Sam, I’m absolutely not going to let my life be over at forty-well, at forty-one, but no one ever takes me for more than thirty-five or even thirty-three. And life would be over for me if I simply went on forever with the idiotic little activities in this half-baked town” (Lewis 30).

The impassioned monologue of Fran rings throughout the novel symbolizing the new wave of feminism and cultural transformation. Lewis has depicted the negative qualities of Fran in the novel. She is not an amiable person; she is greedy, money minded, cruel and selfish. She plots to wreck the identity and self confidence of Sam all the time: “Oh, Sam, if I could only make you see that it was your ignorance, your impotence, and not my fault” (Lewis 312). Fran is a genius at “planting in him an assurance of his inferiority” (Lewis 24). Fran is very clever and plays the child to cheat Sam: “I was cross, last evening....I felt kind of lonely, I was naughty, and you were so sweet. I’ll be good now” (Lewis 60). Fran is a dissatisfied person; she cannot understand the cause of her frustration. Her attitude to life and marriage is ambivalent. She is all the time obsessed with her fading age and is not concerned about her husband. She doesn’t know what she wants:

“We’ve drained everything that Zenith can give us-yes, and almost everything that New York and Long island can give us....In Europe, a woman at forty is just getting to the age where important men take a serious interest in her” (Lewis 30).

Fran’s ancestry is Swedish; her hair color is natural. Fran spends most of her time in repairing her beauty and her passion is always for puffs, powder and patches like Belinda of Pope’s *The Rape of the Lock*: “Sam had dutifully brought her heavy silver mirror, her brush and comb, her powder...When she had made herself a bit order by making herself youthful, she sat up in bed to read the Zenith Advocate Times” (Lewis 9). Most of her time is “spent sitting before the dressing table with bottles and jars of perfume and creams.” (Lewis 30). Lewis has described the routine,

tastes and hobbies of Fran in a photographic manner. She is fond of playing tennis, dancing and horse riding. In Europe “she is undaunted by mile of walking.” She took “riding lessons in Zenith” Lewis portrays her thus: “Being a flapper, she does not use corset; she loves shorter skirts expressing her freedom” (213). Veblen has described the special features of an ornamental wife and Fran is one of them. Veblen writes: “She is useless and expensive and she is consequently valuable as evidence of pecuniary strength” (Veblen 107). Veblen observes that her status does not allow it: “Propriety requires responsible women to abstain more consistently from useful effort and to make more of a show of leisure than the men of the same social classes” (Veblen 126). Beatrice Hinkle published her article “The Chaos of Modern Marriage” in *Harper’s Magazine* (1925) arguing that industrialization brought new tastes in fashion and glamour in the female world. They began “squandering money recklessly and their affluence resulted into idleness and mindless” (Hinkle 4). Fran is a significant example of such women. Fran is indolent; aimless, having too much spare time, she is growing sick of the dull and boring life in Zenith.

Fran sees herself as finished with the work of mothering. Her son Brent is as materialistic as his mother: “When I was a kid, a man with a limousine was a little tin so God, but now a fellow that hasn’t got a yacht simply isn’t in it” (Lewis 177). Fran is all the time busy in parties and friends and has no time for children. This type of life style is the product of new culture of industrialism in America. Women in the small cities like Zenith began imitating the women in big cities such as New York and Chicago. The main problem of Fran is that the presence of her children gives her the feeling of depression as she is haunted by the psychological fear of aging. Fran feel old:

“Madly though I adore them and long to see them, I’m almost afraid to, they’d make me feel so old, whereas now if you could see me in white blouse, shamelessly crimson skirt, white shoes and stockings, you would say I’m a flapper” (Lewis 200).

Fran’s main ambition in her life is to remain young, bold and beautiful like a true flapper. Lewis has depicted two important themes through the character of Fran; the theme of feminism and the emergence of flapper culture in America. This new culture started in big cities as young girls started going to the dancing clubs; they scraped all the traditional values and indulged in open sexual flirtations; drinking and smoking without any patriarchal fears. The flapper culture was a new wave that swept the country by storm and affected even in the small towns like Zenith. Fran has two children; Brent and Emily but she is extremely happy when one of her friends calls her the “daughter of Sam.” Fran is trying to escape motherhood; she doesn’t support her daughter Emily when she needs her during and after pregnancy. She is vain and is always worried about her age and beauty. In Europe, she spends all her energies to hook men and to enjoy sexual pleasures. She crosses all limits and is responsible for the dissolution of her marriage. The consternation fell on Fran when she gets the news that she has become grandmother. Her daughter Emily was pregnant and Fran never knew about this. Fran expresses her psychological anguish thus: “What could I do? A nurse in her case would be very helpful. I could not! She is grown enough to solve her own problems.” (Lewis 289). Rapp and Ross suggest thus:

“The Twenties, by focusing on consumerism, automobiles, movies, and a new adolescent peer culture, recognized the family unit, severing, especially, relationships between same-sexed kin” (Rapp 102).

When Sam questions her loyalty and love to Emily and the new baby, Fran reacts thus like a true flapper:

“Let me tell you...when there was something I could do for her, and for Brent, I did it. I’m not to stand any hints from you that I’m not a good mother and loyal ! For twenty years there wasn’t one thing those children wore that I didn’t buy. There wasn’t a thing they ate that I didn’t order. You-oh, yes, you came grandly home from the office and permitted Emily to ride on your shoulders and thought what a wonderful parent you were, but who’d taken her to the dentist that day? I had! Who’d planned her party and written invitations?” (Lewis 279).

The main purpose of Lewis in all his novels is to depict the new Cultural Revolution that gripped the psyche of the youth after World War1. He exposed greed, mendacity, boosterism, consumerism and the culture of the flappers through the character of Fran. Sam is a money making machine dead in spirits and Fran has lost everything; she is neither a wife, nor a mother and nor even a grandmother. Her only passion is to be young and voluptuous and propagate the virus of flapper culture. She openly flirts with men in Europe and doesn’t hesitate to divorce Sam. The divorces were very common in those days, Lewis himself became the victim of flapper culture and he was twice divorced.

Sam comes to realize that his wife is all the time remains idle at home as she has no activity and she needs some assignment to keep her busy. He plans her job of a house designer in the Sans Souci Company but Fran is not interested in a job. Being a

flapper, she loves to enjoy her freedom throwing parties and wasting time in cheap gossip. Fran has no creative talent. She is just an ornamental wife ambitious to dream, and waste her life in the petty things of life. She has no vision of life and is hedonistic, sexual and disinterested for she goes on changing as she has no fix goals. She is an icon of corruption, mendacity, falsehood, depravity and perversion. Sam considered her a precious jewel as he enjoys Fran:

“In her shaggy Burberry...and her orange tam o’ shanter, she suggested autumn days and brown uplands...He was cumbersomely proud of her, of the glances which the men passengers snatched at her as they swung round the deck” (Lewis 36).

Fran is sick at heart because of lack of any positive engagement and excitement. Her life is dull and boring and there is no fulfillment in her life. When Sam comes to make love she prevents advances of Sam. Fran thinks that Sam is impotent so she develops sexual relations with other men to satisfy her lust. In the hotel when Sam comes to her:

"Uh, Sam-do you mind-I thought you'd be tired after the journey so I got two single rooms, instead of a double. But they're right next to each other."

"No, maybe better rest," he said.

"I hope you will find the room all right. It has quite a nice bathroom."

He hesitated. "I'll unpack later " (23).

Sam in passionate mood gives a tap of a kiss but he does not expect passionate love from Fran who is growing indifferent and frigid. (Lewis 208-9). Sam expresses his relation with Fran in the most touching words for the first time in the novel this:

“She was far from me, and he knew that she didn’t allow me to touch her body; she is proud and for him she had become a bun, taboo, and any passion toward her was forbidden” (Lewis 280).

Besides being beautiful, Fran is also a rich lady. Her income was twenty thousand dollars. In a letter to Sam after he has returned to Zenith, she writes:

“Would you mind transferring five thousand dollars to my account at the Guaranty, Paris? Food here is very expensive that I had expected, and I’ve had to buy some more summer things... found a shop in Montreux with simply darling hats....” (Lewis 198).

Fran wrote four letters to Sam and demanded money (202). And when the two are in the process of dissolving their marriage, Sam says: “I’ll instruct my bank to send you ten thousand a year, on top of your money. That seems, ring” to end everything” (312). With women, Fran’s relationship is based on competition and not on friendship. Fran can never be sincere to anyone She continues the relationship for some time and when she feels bored she breaks off. She is never serious about any relationship. She meets Madame de Penable in Paris and inducts her in her social circle. But after sometime she forgets her. But when Sam returns to America to attend his Yale reunion Fran decides to stay in Europe with her new male friends. In these days, she has shifted her friendship for Renee De Penable. And she competes for the love of Arnold Israel: “she accused me of carrying on an affair with Mr. Israel and of stealing him from her which was idiotic as well as false because I must say she never

did have him so how could I have stolen him from her even supposing I had the slightest desire to” (200). Fran leaves Rene soon and is having an affair with Arnold Israel. She comes in contact with another woman, Matey Pearson. She pretends innocence before Sam but actually she is a hypocrite as she has won Arnold. She appears full of vanity and considers herself superior to Matey and other women: “You don’t expect me to look a fright, like Matey Pearson, do you! I’ll make her eyes start out of her head with the Marcel Rochas frock I got in Paris” (Lewis 376). Fran said “that she was vulgar. She said that Fran was lovely” (284), it is Matey who recommends to Sam that he “chuck Fran and let yourself be happy again” (291).

To conclude, the novel *Dodsworth* of Sinclair Lewis gives an insight to the cultural materialism of the 1930s through the conflict between Samuel Dodsworth and his flapper wife Fran. The plot is structured around the conflict between Sam who is a prominent business man of Zenith and his wife Fran who is a social climber. There are five sections in the novel; the first part is introductory. The real conflict begins in the second section, after the retirement of Sam from business activities. Sam has been reduced to a machine and the machine culture is depicted through the character of Sam. He dreams to relax in the shade of a palm tree on a tropic island. He has to endure the nagging behavior of Fran. On the Europe section all the important themes are discussed; Fran is exposed; her vicious and cold nature is put to ridicule and Sam’s sexual adventures are dramatized by Lewis. The stay in Paris, the flirtations of Fran ultimately lead to the dissolution of the marriage. Sam divorces the flapper wife and marries Edith, an American widow. In Sinclair Lewis’s novel *Dodsworth* the growth of cultural materialism has been investigated in this chapter as the text reveals the growth of money culture, machine age, greed, flapper culture and the dissolution of marriage.

Chapter : Six

Middle Class Consciousness in Sinclair Lewis's *Elmer Gantry*

Sinclair Lewis is a social and cultural critic as his chief interest is in the portrayal of the social and cultural life of the people living in small villages and towns. He was a restless man. Lewis went twice to Europe from 1924 to 1927 until the publication of *Elmer Gantry*. His famous biographer Mark Schorer points out that his behavior in America was erratic. His novel *Elmer Gantry* gives a realistic report of the religious activity in the United States. The novel was published on the most hotly charged religious atmosphere since the Salem witch burnings” During these years, people had lost faith in the Bible and considered it as a “collection of myths” With the growth of money culture and affluence people were lost in money earning and science promised them earthly paradise. All institutions were evaluated on the basis of scientific and rational ideas and beliefs and spiritualism were discarded. In the Twenties wealth increased and the fear of the devil decreased. The Church “was viewed as a purely social and political organization. Our present churches are as absurd as a belief in witchcraft” (Sinclair Lewis, *Elmer Gantry* 381). The *Oxford Companion to American Literature* describes Lewis as an “ingenious satirist of the American middle class, mimicking its speech and actions with what seems to be photographic realism but is actually more or less good-humored caricature” (Hart 425). In this chapter, the cultural vision is explored arguing that Lewis's *Elmer Gantry* is a cultural production and has social and historical relevance. Lewis hates false religiosity, smug deceptive believers and empty formalities of religion. (87) All these mouldy barns of churches

and people coughing illiterate hymns, and long winded preacher repeating perfectly meaningless doctrine (87). He makes Emery master and uses him in his war against the Rober Littrell (1927) Old Testament God, against Puritanism, hypocrisy, bigotry. Through the character of Elmer he attacks “cruelty and dollar evangelism” (Litrell 108) Lewis judges the whole church. He mocks established creed and makes a coarse, misplaced, cheap jest of everything that yet has value in American culture, that is to say religion” (Anderson 58) He misreads the meaning and faith of America but his bitterness is based on his concern for the corruption in religion. He is sure that something is certainly wrong.

“I have decided that no one in this room, including your pastor, believes in Christian religion Not one of use would turn the other cheek. Not one of use would sell all that he has and give to the poor. Not one of us would give his coat to some man who took his overcoat. Every one of us lays up all the treasure he can. We don’t practice Christian. We don’t intend to practice it. Therefore we don’t believe in it. Therefore I resign and I advise to quit lying and disband” (Lewis 385).

Lewis castigates people of America for not living up to the teachings of Jesus Christ and he scorns the Christian religion because he sees it as being false and irrelevant. His novel confronts a whole range of problems concerning the American middle class of his time subverting religion and its traditions. He created characters who are either members of the standardized society or rebellious characters fighting against standardization. M.H. Abrams defines the social novel thus: “it is a type of

novel that emphasizes the influence of the social and economic conditions of an era on shaping characters and determining events...it also embodies an implicit or explicit thesis recommending political and social reform” (Abrams 193). Figures of Lewis represent the middle class culture; people who are professionals representing the whole galaxy of the middle class. Gore Vidal wrote in *New York Review of Books* that Lewis “had a wide repertory of characters; types and he was constantly shifting in and out of characters” (Vidal14). Like Carlyle and Ruskin of the Victorian age, Lewis attacks philistinism and conformity prevailing in the American society. He exposes the vices of snobbery, greed, materialism and boosterism of the people. The novel *Elmer Gantry* is provocative and controversial. Maxwell Geismer considers it “one of the most ambitious, confuses and puzzling of Lewis’s works” William Allan White commented thus on the publication of the novel: “In *Elmer Gantry* at least God had struck the artist Sinclair Lewis dead. Even today, reviewers who praise the intentions of Lewis condemn him for the wrong theme handled in a wrong manner” (123). Mark Shorer describes the novel as a work of pure revulsion in the tradition of Swift. “This is the world of total death, of ministers without shadows” (Schorer 123). Lewis realized that while democracy in America flourished after World War- 1, their standard of taste declined. Material civilization brought about spiritual decadence. Schorer further observes that “People were given to efficiency, mass –production, commercialism, standardization, machinery and the worship of wealth and large number of people suffered from emotional and aesthetic starvation, lack of taste and sensibility. The Americans had degenerated into crudity, indignity and rigidity” (Schorer23). Religion, as everything else, has become automatic. “Mysticism has been replaced by respectability. The American churches failed to raise people to their

high level, and, in order to make themselves popular, they brought their ideals down to earth” (Lewis 151). Lewis was disgusted with the growing standardization in America. In his thinking, “the blind, unthinking acceptance of the standard...needed to be revealed” (Wickersham xiv). Lewis highlighted in his novel the lack of individuality and satirized the idea of standardization of culture and the people who were promoting this culture. His technique was to expose the decline of the cultural values as Raskin defines this idea of political humor as opposition...between the script for what the targeted national group or national entity is supposed to be and the negation of the script” (Raskin 230). It is this part of the cultural decline that Lewis is seriously exploring in each of his novel. He believes that the real happiness and success in life can be acquired through self realization and this realization can be achieved in a cultural society founded on the strong foundation of democratic principles. In his novel *Elmer Gantry*, the main focus of Lewis is on criticism of religion in America which has failed in its essential purpose. Lewis’s *Elmer Gantry* is a virulent attack upon the uncertainties and hypocrisies of religious fundamentalism expressed through preacher Elmer Gantry. Lewis dared to depict the evils of the religious institutions and expose the Biblical truth and morality; the novel is regarded as a manifesto of theological liberalism today. Dooley observes that Lewis “described America as a land of sterility and emptiness and narrow frustrated lives” (Dooley 44). Lewis made controversial statements and angered thousands; and some even tried to kill him. Lewis ventured to expose in *Elmer Gantry* the machinations and hypocrisy of religion and its institutions that enjoyed tremendous power and public following. Schorer observes that Lewis “was invited to a lynching party in Virginia; one cleric suggested that a prison sentence of five years was clearly in order” (Schorer 473)

The plot of *Elmer Gantry* is loose and episodic but what is important is the cultural scene. In each part the growth of Elmer Gantry and his relations with women is traced out by Lewis. The opening of the novel takes through the Baptist education; his pulpit and his escape from Lulu. The second section depicts his career as an evangelist and his association with the fantastic Sharon Falconer. The last part describes the experiences of the New Thought and the rise of Methodism. In this part Lewis describes his marriage issues and his escape from Hettie who threatened to ruin him. Elmer Gantry at the end of the novel "We shall make these United States a moral nation" Elmer Gantry continues the role of idol-breaker in the same vein as *Main Street* and *Babbitt*. The story of *Elmer Gantry* begins with an attack on the hypocrisy of religion, The story of a semi-illiterate country boob who becomes a preacher of a small town and then he rises to the rank of a powerful clergyman. The plot of *Elmer Gantry* incorporates aspects of famous preachers of the day including Aimee Semple McPherson; the model of Sharon Falconer. Lewis dramatizes his hatred of evangelical Christianity throughout in the novel. Every Christian character is either a charlatan, a hypocrite who does not believe in or practice what he preaches. Most of the religious characters are religious manipulators. He acquires the status of high priest of city and is regarded as one of the famous spiritual leaders. In this society, Elmer rises to the eminent position through the tools of treachery, hypocrisy and meanness. Lewis assembles in this novel the corrupt world of religion which made the critic Vernon L. Parrington charge him of "sketching in a morgue" (Parrington 69). Jim Lefferts is the main protagonist of *Elmer Gantry* who hails from a prairie village and has "fastidiousness, natural elegance, a careless and amused ease" Lewis is quite sympathetic to him as he says in the beginning of the story: "You felt that he would

belong to any set in the world that he sufficiently admired” (Lewis 2). It is sad to note that Lewis does not allow him to use his qualities and at the end of the novel he ends up a stooped, shabby and depressed person practicing the law in Topeka. He is described as a doomed intellectual and socially irrelevant in the novel. His importance is because of his friendship with Elmer during college days. Jim Lefferts is introduced thus:

“All the items of his wardrobe, the ordinary suit, distinctly glossy at the elbows, and the dark brown best suit were ready made, with faltering buttons, and seams that betrayed rough ends of thread, but on him they were graceful. You felt that he would belong to any set in the world which he sufficiently admired” (Lewis 13).

Elmer Gantry is the main hero of the novel; Lewis has depicted the vicious, fraudulent and deceptive nature of Elmer Gantry. He is depicted as a charlatan and a hypocrite; a sentimental villain. In the opening of the novel, he is introduced as a drunken libertine:

“Elmer Gantry was drunk. He was eloquently drunk, lovingly and pugnaciously drunk. He leaned against the bar of the Old Home ample Room, the most gilded and urbane saloon in Cato, Missouri, and requested the bartender to join him in The Good Old Summer Time, the waltz of the day” (1).

Elmer Gantry is a Christian in the beginning of the novel and a member of Baptist Church. He is unemployed and therefore he turned his mind to serve the Methodist Church. He is Christian but his morality is contradictory and his

adventurous sex relations with women reflect his base character. He is never serious about life and leads the life of a gypsy; always moving from one place to the other and developing relations with sweet girls and seducing them. He is passionate to visit bars and starting love affair with different women from place to place. The journey of this scoundrel is the main interest of the novel. Lewis comments thus:

“The barroom was deliciously calming. The sour invigorating stench of beer made him feel healthy. The bar was one long summer beauty; glowing mahogany, exquisite marble rail, dazzling glasses, curiously shaped bottles of unknown liqueur piled with a craftiness which made him very happy. The light was dim, completely soothing, coming through fantastic windows such are found only in churches, saloons, jewelry shops and other retreats from reality. On the brown plaster wall were sleek naked girls. He turned from them. He was happy now of desire for women” (7).

At the end, Elmer Gantry is presented as a minister held high in repute but he is still dissolute in character as may be seen thus:”Then he prays, Not less but more zealously shall we seek utter purity...and rejoice in freedom from all temptation” (434). Lewis describes the whole scene thus:

“He turned to include the choir, and for the first time he saw that there was a new singer, a girl with charming ankles and lovely eyes, with whom he would certainly have to become well acquainted But the thought was so soft that it did not interrupt the paeon of the prayer” (432).

Elmer is the president of the student union in the college but not quite loved in the office. He obtained the office through treacherous means despite protest from the students through Machiavellian tactics. He hated the Church from the beginning of the novel. He joined the ministry as one joins a racket, because he saw it as an easy way to make money. Jim Lefferts is the roommate of Elmer Gantry; they go out in a bar and got drunk after having visited two town girls with whom they enjoyed sexual pleasures. Elmer is the captain of the football team of the college in Kansas where he is the student and spends most of his time with the girls, making love to them and has no perception of life and love. He is simply a sex machine, and his id is uncontrollable in the first section of the novel. In the college he is very popular and he has only one dependable friend Jim who is self-centered and bully type. Jim enjoys terrorizing the students and the professors in the college and he picks up fights just for fun. They pick up a fight and attack upon Eddie Fislinger but the police arrive on the scene. Elmer is lost in the abyss of darkness; he is womanish, hungry for power and sexual conquests. He is dismissed from the college because he is caught by the police drinking in a saloon. Elmer is on the road and leads a wretched life of a salesman of a farm implement company. Elmer's mother was a religious lady and always took him to the Church since childhood. Mrs. Gantry was a respectable woman. She is a widow who is "owned by the church...She had always wanted Elmer to be a preacher. She was jolly enough, and no fool about pennies in making change, but for a preacher standing upon a platform in a long-tailed coat she had gasping awe" (Lewis 34). Elmer was baptized at the age of sixteen and her great desire was to make Elmer a preacher. Elmer is afraid of her goodness and he studies for ministry much against his will even though he knows that in doing so he is a hypocrite. But his mother manages to cajole and scheme to get Elmer to be saved at a revivalist meeting:

“Won’t you make your old mother happy? Let yourself know the joy of surrender to Jesus! She was weeping, old eyes puckered red, and in her weeping was his every recollection of winter dawns when she had let him stay in bed and brought porridge to him across the icy floor” (Lewis 51).

Salvation of Elmer Gantry is the real beginning of his spiritual death. The turning point came in his life when the president of the college informs him that he is to speak at the Y.M.C.A meeting that evening.

“Oh, gee President, I can’t” Elmer groaned.

“Oh, yes. Brother, you must. You must! It’ already announced. If you’ll go put within the next hour, you’ll be gratified to see posters announcing it all over the town! But I can’t make a speech!”

“The Lord will give the words if you give the good will! I myself shall call for you at a quarter to seven. God bless you!” (59).

Elmer is confused and baffled because he does not know what to speak before the audience. In the meantime, Jim throws a book on him and he finds the passage on love. His idea worked. His sermon is well received so much that the president thinks Elmer is a born preacher, But Elmer lacks confidence and he confesses that he could sell real estate instead of becoming a preacher. Jim enters into his room and Elmer tells him that the Gospel ministry is the career he ought to pursue. But Jim tells him that he cannot proceed without a clear Call from God. Elmer has no self control and is unable to practice the religious dogma with the routine activities of his life. Jim tries to expose his mendacity thus:

“You son of a sea-cook! You’ve gone and done it! You’ve been saved!
 You’ve let them horns woggle you into being a Baptist witch-doctor !
 I’m through! You can go; to heaven” (123).

In chapters 25 and 27, Lewis describes the activities of Elmer to promote himself. Sinclair Lewis refers to his metaphysical lecture: “Whoa up, Youth!) created sensation in the Christian world. He is ordained to the Baptist ministry after two years at Mizpah Theological Seminary. He proves very powerful at the pulpit with increasing fluency. Being the model of holiness he tells how he allowed God to “fill his heart with higher aspirations and begins to preach that “love is the one thing that can really sure-enough lighten of all of life’s dark cloud. Yes sir, just love! It’s the morning and the evening star” (Lewis 57). Elmer adopts a rational approach: “Chances are nobody there tonight has ever read Ingersoll”(57). His reference to Ingersoll calls into question the value of religious teaching and it challenges notions of religious truth. Lewis describes Ingersoll as a “rotten old atheist” (56). Elmer does not believe in either himself nor in the bible inspired by God. His mother is very proud of him as his dream is fulfilled. She is upset because he has not yet gave up smoking. Dean Trosper gives him a job promoting him as the head of a small church. The job pays ten dollars a week and Elmer looks forward to both income and promotion. The Dean warns him to give up the worldly habits in which he is still lost. Religious career makes Elmer the real cheater and the fucker of women. He learns to dissemble and to use people. Lulu Bains comes in his life in a country church. Lulu who was: “a gray and white kitten with a pink ribbon...with kitten eyes; small soft kitten who putted” (Lewis 100). He tells her:

“I’m really just a big bashful kid, and I need your help so. Do you need your help so. Do you know dear, you remind me of my mother?”
(Lewis 106).

Elmer seduces her and Lulu expects they will be married, but “he didn’t want to marry this brainless little fluffy chick, who would be of no help in impressing rich parishioners” (116). Lulu is the daughter of a farmer and she becomes the first victim of the sexual lust. He goes to the Dean Trooper and narrates the incident of Lulu who had developed illicit relations with other person. The Dean prays with him, comforts him and gives him a new assignment directing him to proceed to Monarch, a big city as a pastor for the Easter service. In the train, he meets a traveling salesman who invites him to enjoy a drink. He is lost with a prostitute and loses his serious assignment being drunk. The Dean dismisses him instantly. Elmer could not be happy as a salesman and he left the job and went to meet Sharon Falconer in Virginia who heads the evangelical organization. Elmer is deeply impressed with:

“Her brick house with tall white pillars and a white cupola; the deft peacock that parades across the lawn in the sun; and the two Negro servants: a butler with a green tall-coat and white moustache and a many in great calico, both bowing to him” (Lewis 182).

Sharon Falconer is a “half-crazy mountebank” and her supreme ambition is to fleece the innocent public. She is the model of Aimee McPhersons; a representative of an arch hypocrite. She has huge evangelical group of people with music directors, costumers, and advertising managers, press agents to advertise and entrap the customers from all over the world. She is a professional religious preacher who plans the shows and moves from one triumph to another. Sharon Falconer is another woman seduced by Elmer. Martin Light comments thus on Sharon’s image:

“She is a monstrous creation who seems to grow in size with each revelation of her craziness. She appears to Elmer as a saint, arms stretched, stately, slender and tall, passionate. Declining from this spirituality, she gives her gospel crew a pep talk: let’s hit people hard for money pledges. She is an insane perversion of the sanctity of the elect....She is the supreme fantasist. She has created an enchanted image of herself, and she has convinced her audience of that image, so, that they see her as she wants” (Light 103).

Sharon is an object of love and sex; she uses her body to entrap innocent people and she is not serving Christianity but is serving herself. Lewis has exposed and ridiculed the fake preachers who were very popular during the 1930’s and many people had become their victims. They had created big empires with music directors and would organize huge functions with good advertisement to attract people to listen to their religious preaching. Religion had become a profession in the age of Lewis. Sharon is the representative of those professional religious preachers. He really knows something, he isn’t a cast-iron statue of ignorance like you and me” (177). Elmer introduces himself to Sharon thus:

“I’m just a second-rate traveling man. I came from Paris, Kansas, and I’m not even up to that hick burg because they are hard working and descent there, and I’m not even that. And you’re not only a prophetess, which you are sure, the real big thing, but you’re a Falconer. Family! Old servants! This old house!! Oh, it it’s no use! You’re too big for me” (Lewis 182).

But Sharon tells him the truth of her life. She tells him that what he sees is a pretense, that the estate is not paid for a quarter and she is not at all the daughter of an aristocrat but her real identity is that she is Katie Jonas from Utica and her father worked in a brickyard: “Oh, I’m glad don’t come from anywhere in particular! Cecil Aylston; oh, I guess he does love me, but I always feel he’s laughing at me” (Lewis182). Sharon and Elmer understand each other in Virginia and make their confessions and found consolation one in the other and fall into other’s arms. Elmer is in love with Sharon and Lewis defines love in the word of Sharon:

“Love is the only bow on Life’s dark cloud. It is the Morning and Evening Star. It shines upon the cradle of the babe, it sheds its radiance upon the quiet tomb. It is the mother of Art, inspirer of poet, patriot and philosopher” (57).

Captivated by the setting and the gracious servants, he exclaims: “I’ve come home...and he feels free of all the wickedness which had daubed his soul-oratorical ambitious, emotional orgasm, dead say fogs of dull peers, dogma and piety” (179). He does a quick about-face: “Besides! There is a lot of this religious stuff. We do good. Maybe we jolly them into emotions too much, but don’t that wake folks up from their ruts? Curse it does!” (180). In order to make passion satisfy, Lewis dramatizes one of the most bizarre scene in the novel. Sharon takes Elmer to Hanning Hill in Virginia. Sharon comes to the bed of Elmer. Grasps his swart hair and cries: “Come ! it is the call!” She guides him through Oriental bedroom and seduces him. His coming to home indicates a place of corruption, posterity and deceptions. Elmer has cultivated a decent devotion to her. Sharon has become a commanding figure in the novel.

Boynton observes that “she is so commanding a figure that the author has to invoice a holocaust to get her out of the story” (Boynton 194). Elmer seduces Sharon and punctures all her morality and religious passion. Intoxicated with her sexual passions; she bids him to come with her because it is “the call” as she leads him to her suite of rooms:

“a red furnace of velvets, bizarre lamps, incense, a, carve ivory bed; in an adjoining room he sees statues of saints, animal Gods, Venus and a sadomasochistic crucifixion” (230).

Mark Schorer says that “ the travesty that it makes of both the sexual and the religious experience is of course to be associated with the temper of orgiastic evangelism with which the book is full” (Schorer 477). Sharon and Elmer exchange kisses back stage ”rake in the shekels, plan investments and do faith healing to make huge money and to cheat the innocent people. Sharon is depicted as a symbol in the novel of cultural decline and religious hypocrisy. Elmer joins the crew of Sharon and within a few months he becomes her best assistant. Elmer is a scoundrel and a vagabond but he teaches Sharon to sit still and read Jowett, Swinburne and Sir Thomas Browne. And on their wedding night, Elmer rapes Cleo Betham dooming their love and loveless marriage. Lewis dramatizes a parody of true love in the loveless and lustful life of Sharon and Elmer. Elmer Gantry appears as a monster, the incarnation of brutality. He has magnetic force and dashing personality to seduce women. All goes well until their Church building is destroyed by the fire and several people lost their lives along with Sharon. She dominates him with her moods: “sexually passionate, keen business acumen, dedicated worker, laughing child. Elmer

and Sharon plan a big business of religion to make huge money” (23). Sharon has a big idea to begin a Christian Socialist Colony, a newspaper and to launch a crusade to convert the entire world.

Elmer is delighted by her childish pranks and she likes his potency and vitality in the bed. As a mate of for Gantry she is sublime. But the end of Sharon is very tragic; she is punished for her sins. Sharon dies in a tabernacle fire, her saintly image intact: “Standing like an ivory column against the terror, truly believing she can lead her people through the flames” (220). Reverend Frank Shallard is another caricature created by Lewis in the novel. He is positive and liberal in faith and is more vicious than Elmer of Sharon. He is used as a symbol of the confusion in the Protestant ministry. He tries to create an organized religion in America. Squire argues that Lewis makes Shallard a mouthpiece for a few of his own convictions and the has the Ku Klux Klan lynch him. Squire further avers that “Lewis’s job is rather to start another Reformation than to write a book about them” (Squire 89).Lippmann contends that “Elmer Gantry is the study of a fundamentalist clergyman in the United States portrayed as utterly evil in order to injure the fundamentalists” (Lippmann 89).

Elmer is again on the road going from one pace to the other in search of a job until he meets a Methodist bishop who brings him into the church. Elmer is very successful in the hierarchy of the church and one day he decides to go to Europe in order to improve his image as an “up-and coming” preacher of the gospel. Lewis has directed his vigorous attack against the ministry. As Babbitt had been made representative of the American business man Gantry was made representative of the American clergyman. It has been pointed out that although Lewis viciously satirizes

Babbitt, there are times when he treats the latter rather kindly and seems to understand and sympathize with him. But Lewis's treatment of Elmer Gantry is devoid of this sympathy and understanding and the satire is vicious and intolerant from the first page to the end of this novel. Lewis has explored the psychological factors of his religious experience. He has investigated the mob psychology, peer pressure and the effects of a preacher on the mind of people. The important aspect in *Elmer Gantry* is man-woman relationship described in imitation of D. H. Lawrence. The sexual adventures of Elmer Gantry depicted in the novel raised a storm of controversy. Grace Hegger (1951) argues that

“Lewis had smirking attitude toward sex characteristic of his time, which reached its height, or rather depth, in *Elmer Gantry*. In the first draft of this book, considerably subdued later, the bigness of the theme, the vast research, the devastating satire, were blanketed by a lechery which caused one to read with nasty curiosity rather than with literary appreciation” (Hegger 325).

The plot of the novel unfolds a series of sex adventures of Elmer Gantry reminding of Henry Fielding's novel *Tom Jones* of the 18th century. Lewis has depicted the restlessness of Gantry; his casual approach to life and his addiction to wine, woman and wealth. An important episode is described in the early part of the novel which brings a turning point in the life of Elmer Gantry. He saves “Eddie Fislinger, president of Y.M.C.A. from an angry mob that the latter is attempting to convert. At this stage Elmer has no interest in his career but he becomes the miserable superficial lamb and the target of “holy plotting” (Lewis 23). He falls victim to the

charismatic Judson Roberts who is the secretary of Y. M.C.A. and a skilful revivalist. He can use the power of speech to siege a crowd and to accumulate money. The ministry gives him an opportunity for numerous sexual adventures. As a Baptist minister, Elmer for the first time prayed sincerely and passionately savoring righteousness: “Dear God I’ll down into it; not show off, but just think of thee-do good, God help me” (Lewis 54). In his journey of life, Elmer faced many vicissitudes but as a Methodist preacher, he expressed his genuine love for God:

“Never lie or cheat or boast. This town, it might be dull, but he would enliven it, make it his own creation, lift it to his own present glory. He could! Life opened before him, clean, joyous, full of superb chance of a Christian knighthood” (Lewis 258).

These moments of piety are transient in the life journey of Elmer Gantry because inwardly he has no faith in God. He is a successful charlatan and a libertine. Andrew Pengilly fully understands Elmer and he makes a long pompous speech to convert Elmer and asks him: with a question: Mr. Gantry, Why don’t believe in God?” (Lewis 353). Elmer Gantry believes that he has a better God to worship in himself. He was fed up with the pieties of his mother and the long boring speeches of his professors. He developed a hedonistic attitude and started enjoying sexual pleasures. Elmer Gantry does not believe in God because he has a better God to worship in himself. He rejected the traditional Christianity and developed in him the hedonistic attitude to enjoy the pleasures of life. Elmer is the self-seeker, the panderer of chicanery opposite of Martin Arrowsmith who was the scientist and the seeker of truth. Elmer Gantry comes in contact with many women in the course of his journey of life; the force he seduces many women and many of them are crushed by the forces

of society that promote the prominence of people like Elmer Gantry. After the tragic death of Sharon he goes to New York where he becomes a partner of Mrs. Evans Riddle. She is a rich lady, the sole proprietor of an empire but Elmer has to leave her because of his theft of money from the collection of plate. He faces acute financial crunch and has no money to feed himself; a friend lends him money to travel back to the West where he becomes a minister again in the Methodist Church. Elmer Grant is a false priest not a real person; a charlatan and a modern hypocrite who uses his resonant sweet voice to cheat people and to make money and to lead an indolent and hedonistic life. His body longs for depraved and perverted experiences. Therefore, it is the absence of soup, the absence of inner conflict between worldly aspiration and religious idealism that causes Hichaud to call him “ a hypocrite by excess, by hyperbole”. Van Doren calls him a “a bully, a sneak, a liar, a lecher, a drunkard and an ignoramus” (Doren 133). Elmer Gantry is an attack on religion as an ideal in America. Lewis has attacked the institution, at large, through the character of Elmer and has exposed the profligate ministers of America. Elmer is the study of a fundamentalist clergyman in the United States “portrays as utterly evil in order to injure the fundamentalists” (Lippmann 64). Boynton agrees with Lippmann (1928) and holds that Gantry is the product of a philistine and stupid social order, and exploits the church without ever in a real-sense belonging it” (Lippmann 88). At last he marries an honest woman in spite of his dishonesty and immorality and obtains a large church and has influence on the people. At the end of his journey of life, he has bright chances of becoming a bishop. Elmer has depicted the checkered career of Elmer Gantry, a wolf n sheep’s clothing. Whipple comments that he “is above all a collector of specimens” (Whipple 219). Sharon Falconer and Frank Shallard are other outstanding specimens in the novel. Frank Shallard and Cleo Bentham are some of

them. Sharon's death was a great setback to Elmer; he comes in contact with Cleo Bentham and marries her. Cleo is a virginal young woman whose likeness appeared in thousands of oval framed, tinted chromes in living rooms in America. Lewis introduces her thus:

“She is dressed in white muslin with ribbons bedecking her hair and waist, or sometimes she's wearing a wide brimmed hat, often she holds a rabbit or a flower or a parasol; she does not smile but her expression conveys a peaceful spirit. She is serene, young, yet mature, a personification of wife and a mother” (Lewis 259).

Elmer comes under the “spell of Cleo Bentham who had spent three years in Sparta Women's College, specializing in piano, organ, French, English Literature, strictly expurgated, and the study of the Bible” (259). When he goes with her father, Elmer “went fishing which gained him credit among the males. He procured a dog, also a sound, manly thing to do, and though he occasionally kicked the dog in the country, he was clamorously affectionate with it in town” (Lewis 278). After his marriage with Cleo, Elmer misbehaves with her. Cleo is passive but Elmer enjoys sadistic pleasures in torturing her: “On their wedding night he makes her cry, accusing her of clumsiness while she wept, her hair disordered round her meek face, which is halted” (284). For Cleo, marriage is sacred union but she cannot conceive in her long tortuous years with Elmer. She proves lucky to his life and after some years he restrained his cruelty towards her. Their cat and dog life continued for many years. He was obsequious and lustful towards other women; he even developed sexual relationship with Lulu Bains and he often remembered the lovely and sexy look of Lulu as he says: “Her eyes were ingratiatingly soft, vey inviting; she still smiled with

a desire to be friendly to everyone” (323). But Elmer was not comfortable with Lulu because of her passivity to lust and her lack of imagination. She is no match for Elmer who drops her from his life. During these days, another woman Hettie Dowler enters in his life:

“She crawled out after a time, a little figure in a shabby topcoat over her proud new dress. She stood waiting for a trolley car, alone under an arc light, fingering her new beaded purse, which she loved because in his generosity he had given it to her. From time to time she wiped her eyes and blew her nose, and all the time she was quite stupidly muttering, oh, my dear, my dear, to think I made trouble for you-oh, my dear, my very dear” (401).

Hettie Dowler was a pathetic little figure looking like a victim. She is like Lulu; she is very clever and skilful secretary who boldly confronts Elmer in his routine private life. At this time Elmer makes a fervent attack on the prostitution centers run by the unorganized vendors. Ironically he enjoys fornication with Hettie Dowler but at the same time is writing in the press. His views become very popular and he becomes the hero of the masses. Lewis describes Hettie thus:

“She was young...stately, slender and tall; and in her long slim face, her black eyes...was rupture or boiling passion. The sleeves of her straight white robe, with its ruby girdle, were slashed, and fell away from her arms as she drew very one to her” (157).

Her appearance in the life of Elmer inspires in him mystery, adventure and romance. The final irony of their relationship occurs when his mother admonishes

him for neglecting his wife Cleo. Elmer is upset fearing that Hettie Dowler may not expose him. He begins to show affection to Cleo in public pretending sincerity and loyalty to his wife. His mother does not know the real mystery of their relationship as she says:

“I knew you and Cleo would be happier if I just pointed out a few things to you. After all, your old mother may be stupid and Main Street, but there’s nobody like a mother to understand her own boy, and I knew that if I just spoke to you, even if you are a Doctor of Divinity, you’d see things different” (410).

Elmer is the rogue of the first order; he is an expert in manipulating and deceiving others. He believes in whitewashing and exploiting the sentiments of others. He immediately frames a good speech to sooth his mother. He does not hesitate in his reply: “Yes, and it was your training that made me a Christian and a preacher Oh, a man does owe so much to a pious mother” (410). The scene is ironical; his mother wants to instill in him the value of real love and piety but Elmer lives in the word of love, sex and romance. He has no regard for the genuine Christian values. The following passage illustrates the frenzy of Elmer who has become a dictator:

“Elmer stretched his big arms in joyous vigor. Oh, I can put it over the whole bunch. I’ll build a new church. I’ll take the crowds away all of them. I’ll be the one big preacher in Zenith. And then Chicago? New York? Bishopric? Whatever I want I will” (328).

Elmer Gantry was sensualist, and an usurper. His services were conducted with theatricality in religion, and hysteria in religion. Significant contributions to the happiness of men are not translated in neither loud boisterous demands that people worship God nor are they a series of meetings where the leader sings pep songs similar to college football yells. Gantry's offering to the happiness of a democratic people was a perceived form of the things needed. It was an unenlightened attempt to make people express emotions without ever experiencing anything deeper than a feeling of ecstasy. For example:

“In the autumn of his first year in Zenith Elmer startled his famous Lively Sunday Evenings, mornings, he announced, he would give them said religious meat to sustain them through the week, but Sunday evenings he should provide the best creamy puffs. Christianity was a Glad religion and he was going to make it a lot gladder. There was a safe, conservative, sanguinary hymn or two at his Lovely Sunday Evenings, and short sermon about sunsets, authors, or gambling, but most of the time they were just happy boys and girls together” (Lewis 344).

Elmer's led his congregation to look on religion with fear, to shoulder with him as he narrated stories relating to the sinners and how repentance comes too late to them. He also tells his followers that the Bible must not be disputed and hell fire burns. In short, his sermon lacked seriousness and there was nothing new and to know the best and to make it prevail. Moreover, he was not alone in the tramp but soon the violence broke out and Frank Hollard emerged as a proof of unjust society. Shallard expressed his liberal views of the function of religion and soon he became the victim

of mob attack. The fanatics allowed the fundamentalists to murder a man and it was done in the name of religion. Elmer honors no man or woman. His life is a series of taking from his neighbor whatever afforded him material and sexual pleasure. Boynton observes that his life was a series of intrigues and he violates sanctity of person and thing in his zest for power and pleasures he injures Lula Bains and does abuse to Frank Shallard. Elmer's life was a violation of the spirit of democracy; he used power and position to prey upon men and embezzle their rights, life, liberty and estate. As a spiritual leader his role "was to serve people and not to cheat and ruin their life." (Boynton 195)

His mother is eager to induct in Elmer the values upheld by the Church and the community. He must be initiated into the society if he wants to rise in life. But Elmer is selfish and greedy. When he met Cleo for the first time he knew that she was "the sort of wife who could help him to capture a bishopric" (260). He shows respect to Cleo for a few days but in his private life he treats her with contempt and cruelty. His relationship to women are ambiguous; either he dominates and manipulates them or he is dominated by him.

Elmer is a victim of internal and external forces which deflate his character and make him a hypocrite and a pervert. His mother notices his arrogance, his weak character and his ambitions to become rich and popular. Elmer pretends to be a good and religious person and boasts the he has got a Call from God to preach them but in his private life he keeps on smoking and following hedonistic ways of life. He becomes expert of strategies in manipulation and satisfies a biological litch and quickly a post-coital disgust. Elmer becomes a modern version of a lustful man a

debauch and a pervert. He is also the jingoist type; a victim of excessive nationalism as he says: "My Country right or wrong." As he strolls the deck of the ship bound for England, he begins condemning everything. In England, he disparages just about everything; he "doesn't like the railroad passenger compartment" (417). He thinks the passing towns are backward and not forward looking. He vehemently criticizes the hotel; the Bond Street and the clergymen. He views European people and their customs with a jaundiced eye.

To conclude, the novel *Elmer Gantry* is a virulent satire of Sinclair Lewis on the decline of culture of America. In this novel, he is concerned about the business of healing adopted by the religious teachers; they had opened shops to heal the poor and the innocent Americans and men like Elmer and women like Sharon used the modern electronic gadgets such as music and media to entrap the maximum number of people in the pretext of healing people and made huge money in America. The capitalism of culture and the selling of religion is the main focus of Lewis in this novel.

Conclusion

The thesis entitles: *Postulates of Cultural Materialism and New Historicism in the Select Novels of Sinclair Lewis* explores the contribution of Sinclair Lewis to the growth of cultural materialism. Lewis got Nobel Prize for his interest in the cultural development and his interest in the backward and downtrodden middle class Americans. Lewis found that America was progressing by leaps and bound but the people living in small towns like Gopher and Zenith were backward and rigid and there was no growth in these small cities. Lewis took the imitative and used his art to depict the plight of the middle class Americans to bring social, political and cultural awareness in them. His novels are interesting family comedies which have become cultural icons these days. In the “Introduction” of the thesis, the advent of the new age after World War-1 and the trends to new culture is the main focus. The main focus of this study is on the emergence of the middle class consciousness and the pervasive vogue of the virus of greed and hypocrisy that infected the middle class Americans living in the small villages and towns of America. The study explores the evolution of “New Historicism” and its dialectical relationship with the growing middle class consciousness in the “Jazz Age” of America.

The study has the following findings:

- 1) Literature plays positive role to the development and growth of culture and the growth of culture leads to the development and growth of civilization. Sinclair Lewis had philosophical vision about the American society as he evolved new ideas and themes to depict the middle class consciousness of the Americans. He

realized that there were two Americas; one living in New York; Chicago and Washington populated by the elite class and the business tycoons. The other America lived in the small towns; villages like Goopher Prarie and Zenith. Lewis found the middle class Americans infected with the virus of rigidity, conformity, meanness, greed and orthodox ideas.

- 2) He published *Main Street* and exposed the mean and backward main street mentality of the middle classes. The titles of all his novels became catch phrases and reached every home and office of America. This study is focused on the mind and sensibility of the middle class Americans. Lewis became a social reformer as his novels exposed and ridiculed the greed, meanness and main street mentality of the Americans. He took up the themes of wretchedness and dehumanization. He wrote about the middle class, *for* the middle class. It seems that he wanted to shake his audience into an awareness of their situation, to change their attitudes and awaken their moral consciousness.
- 3) The novels of Lewis have evoked great interest among the reviewers and the critics. In this study, the theories of Cultural Materialism and New Historicism are relied upon to investigate the cultural themes of Lewis. New Historicism is a literary theory based on the idea that literature should be studied and interpreted within the context of both the history of the author and the history of the critic. Stephen Greenblatt propounded the theory of New Historicism and contended that literature is dynamic in nature.

In this study it is concluded that Lewis had philosophical vision about the American society as he evolved new ideas and themes to depict the middle class

consciousness of the Americans. He realized that there were two Americas; one living in New York; Chicago and Washington populated by the elite class and the business tycoons. The other America lived in the small towns; villages like Gopher Prairie and Zenith. Lewis found the middle class Americans infected with the virus of rigidity, conformity, meanness, greed and orthodox ideas. He published *Main Street* and exposed the mean and backward main street mentality of the middle classes. The titles of all his novels became catch phrases and reached every home and office of America. This study is focused on the mind and sensibility of the middle class Americans exposed and ridiculed by him in his novels; their greed; meanness and their main street mentality; wretchedness and dehumanization. He wrote about the middle class and *for* the middle class. It seems that he wanted to shake his audience into an awareness of their situation, to change their attitudes and awaken their moral consciousness. The novels of Lewis have evoked great interest among the reviewers and the critics. In this study the theories of Cultural Materialism and New Historicism are relied to investigate the cultural themes of Lewis. New Historicism is a literary theory based on the idea that literature should be studied and interpreted within the context of both the history of the author and the history of the critic. Stephen Greenblatt propounded the theory of New Historicism and contended that literature is dynamic in nature

The study investigates the cultural vision of Sinclair Lewis. He abandoned his journalistic career and devoted himself to the portrayal of the social vices of the age. Lewis was not comfortable with his journalistic career and devoted himself to the writing of fiction and in 1920 he published his debut novel *Main Street* and soon became an international celebrity. Sinclair Lewis was a keen observer of nature and

he closely watched the mood of the people and the growing trends of cultural transformation. He was appalled to observe the rigidity, narrow-mindedness and conformity in the people of the small towns and villages. It was quite ironical to find that on the one hand America was emerging as a super power with massive changes in the big cities with the growth of colleges, universities, malls, transportation and communication but on the other hand the people living in small towns and villages were backward; rigid and narrow minded. Lewis's *Main Street* became the first American best sellers of the 20th century and got him the prestigious Pulitzer Prize in 1921. In the *Main Street* Lewis chronicled the plight of a newly married couple; Carol Milford and Will Kennicott who begin their life in a small town Gooper Prairie. The novel is a critique of the stagnant life of the "small-town people" greedy, rigid and conformist. Lewis depicts the growing cultural obsession of the people at a time when America is emerging as a Super Power in the world with her tremendous achievements in science and technology. Lewis had a critical attitude and directed his energies to expose and ridicule the encroaching materialism, moral degradation, vulgarity, bigotry and conformity of the people of small villages and cities. *Main Street* became a cultural phrase and was inserted in the cultural list of America. He debunked people who had main street mentality because growth is impossible if people resist changes of growth. *Main Street* became very popular in America and today is a cultural phrase.

Sinclair Lewis's *Babbitt* is investigated in this study through the Lens of Cultural Materialism. Interestingly, the main focus is to depict the popularity of *Babbitt* culture in America. Williams was influenced by the relationship between technology, social change and the role of literature in the transformation of culture.

He formed a link between idealism and materialism. In most of his writings, Lewis exhibits an “understanding of, and commitment to a radically transformed social order which was integral to his visions of life and society. His main focus is always on cultural change and he believed that literature plays a positive role in cultural transformation. The word culture refers to “not only a body of intellectual and imaginative work, it is also essentially a whole way of life” (311). Society is viewed not as a homogenous but as a composite group. Culture deals with social consciousness, the learned reservoir of thoughts and actions. The theory of cultural materialism refers to sense of materiality of culture. He is also critical of Marxist Communism and defines his theory as the study “of relationships between elements in a whole way of life, the analysis of culture is the attempt to discover the nature of the organization which is the complex of these relationships” (63). Milner (1993) observes that materialism is grown by many influences and is “stubbornly resistant to the lures of idealism” (Milner 5). It is not concerned with history or with the future. In the Western democracies materialism has strong association with capitalism. Briefly stated materialism relates to the ability to place value on products, objects and people. Literature plays a vital role to develop culture. Cultural Materialism recognizes that culture and society are in a state of constant change. In this chapter, the theoretical framework of cultural materialism is used to investigate the growth of Babbitt culture depicted in Lewis’s novel *Babbitt*. Williams observes that “we live in an expanding culture and all the elements in this culture are themselves expanding” (13).

It is observed that there was a pervasive vogue of greed and mendacity in the rural America. Sinclair Lewis’s *Arrowsmith* (1920) is investigated from the perspective of cultural theories of Raymond Williams. Lewis was ambitious to

become the champion of the middle class as he depicted the greed, degradation and the growing lust for money in the people living in small villages and the towns. Lewis was influenced by Charles Dickens and Bernard Shaw as he took up the theme of socialism lashing at the growing capitalism of America. Lewis attacked shams, mediocrity and the people of medical profession who were fleecing the poor people to make money. Arrowsmith has learnt in the medical school that a doctor should care to make money and should create opportunities to convince his patients telling about the seriousness of the ailments. For Arrowsmith, love dignity and humanity are meaningless things and it is money which can buy everything in the society. He lashed at corruption, brutality, obscenity and upheld freedom, individuality and science. Lewis saw America foul and banal so he couldn't write a glorifying literature. Written under the influence of Thorstein Veblen, Lewis evolved his own vision of life and followed a consistent theory of cultural materialism to solve the problems of society of Midwest. Raymond Williams (1958) aptly argued that "it will be the test of our cultural seriousness whether we can in the coming generations redesign our syllabuses to a point of full human relevance and control" (Williams 14). Lewis exposed shams, mediocrity, greed, complacency and hypocrisy of the middle class people in small towns, business, medicine, religion and marriage. He had planned on writing a work about labor giant and he had gone to visit the US union leader, Eugene Debs. In this novel, Lewis depicted the life of a greedy doctor who is caught between his idealism and commercialism. Like Scott Fitzgerald's *Gatsby*, Martin Arrowsmith transcends all barriers of religion and morality to make money representing the profit hunting spirit of the capitalists. Mark Schorer in his monumental biography records that Lewis had passionate ambition to give a

photographic picture of society because he believed that people can enjoy happiness only in a socialistic society. Lewis's approach in his novels is cultural and societal. Sinclair Lewis constructed his narrative *Arrowsmith* exploring ideas of "small-town life" and growing cultural obsession of America with materialistic metropolis. His critique of America's capitalistic ideals and critical observation of American society is a landmark in American literature.

Sinclair Lewis's *Dodsworth*, investigates the socialistic and cultural vision of Sinclair Lewis that got him Nobel Prize (1929). Sinclair Lewis was selected for the Nobel Prize because of his publication of *Dodsworth* (1929) and this novel marked the zenith of his literary career as a commentator of the American cultural scene. Although Lewis wrote prolifically, his novels written in the second phase got him immense fame and made him an international celebrity. His *Main Street*, *Babbitt*, *Arrowsmith* were widely read and appreciated as people like his cultural attitude and called him "a cultural critic of the 1920s of America. He gained humor of Charles Dickens and drew his strength from satirizing a "robust, thriving, booming America" (Ausmus 352) giving a photographic picture of new culture of money and business. The main focus of Lewis is to depict the social and domestic life of the American who were becoming victims of the new trends of change and cultural transformation. New values, new fashions, the affluence and the new industrial revolution brought tremendous changes in the life style of people. Maxwell Gemstar (1959) says that it "displays Lewis as a mature and reflective writer." He regarded it as Lewis's best criticism of his country, really he proves, through it and other works, to be the writer of experience and liberation" (Gemstar 282). Lewis gives a real picture of an American couple confronting the existential realities of life. Sam is a typical character

of the new Machine Age of the 1930s; he has built a big empire and made huge money in his automobile business. He worked like a machine in Zenith ignoring his wife who never enjoyed love, good company and passionate relationship with Sam. The novel is a realistic critique of capitalism and the decline of moral values in a society dominated by money and business.

Sinclair Lewis's *Elmer Gantry* "investigates the professional healing of the healing business in America. Lewis has attacked the corrupt religious teachers who misuse their religious powers for their personal aggrandizement. Two important characters, Elmer Gantry and Sharon represent the corrupt religious teachers who sell healing business arranging performances and inviting people to join their performances. His novel *Elmer Gantry* gives a realistic report of the religious activity in the United States. The novel was published on the most hotly charged religious atmosphere since the Salem witch burnings." During these years people had lost faith in the bible and considered it as a "collection of myths." With the growth of money culture and affluence people were lost in money earning and science promised them earthly paradise. Mark Schorer describes the novel as a work of pure revulsion in the tradition of Swift. "This is the world of total death, of ministers without shadows" (Schorer 123). Lewis realized that while democracy in America flourished after World War-1, their standard of taste declined. Material civilization brought about spiritual decadence. People were given to efficiency, mass -production, commercialism, standardization, machinery and the worship of wealth and large number of people suffered from emotional and aesthetic starvation, In his novel *Elmer Gantry*, Lewis launches a powerful attack on the working of religion which has become a source of making money and not to heal people. The main focus of Lewis is

on criticism of religion in America which has failed to in its essential purpose. Lewis's *Elmer Gantry* is a virulent attack upon the uncertainties and hypocrisies of religious fundamentalism expressed through preacher Elmer Gantry. Lewis dared to depict the evils of the religious institutions and expose the biblical truth and morality; the novel is regarded as a manifesto of theological liberalism today. Every Christian character is either a charlatan, a hypocrite who does not believe or practice what he preaches. Most of the religious characters are religious manipulators. He acquires the status of high priest of city and is regarded as one of the famous spiritual leaders. In this society, Elmer rises to the eminent position through the tools of treachery, hypocrisy and meanness. Lewis assembles in this novel the corrupt world of religion which made the critic Vernon L. Parrington charge him of "sketching in a morgue" (Parrington 69).

To conclude, Sinclair Lewis is a cultural icon of America who wrote *Main Street*(1920), *Babbitt* (1922), and *Dodsworth* (1929), *Arrowsmith*(1925), *Elmer Gantry*(1951) with a mission to depict the plight of the middle class Americans leading a backward life in the small villages and the towns. This study has reviewed all the major novels of Sinclair Lewis relying on the cultural theories of New Historicism and Cultural Materialism. Lewis never knew that he would get a Nobel Prize for his *Dodsworth* and that the titles of his novels would become famous phrases in American cultural history. He gained tremendous fame and was hailed as the champion of the middle classes. Like Alexander Pope of England, Lewis exposed and ridiculed the social vices of the age such as hypocrisy, cruelty of the capital class, boosterism, lust for money, greed, sexual perversion and human degradation. He did not spare the religious teachers of America who sold the healing powers of God and

made money through false performances. His Elmer Gantry was highly appreciated by his critics and reviewers.

When the novels of Lewis were published there was much hue and cry among the politicians. Seminars were organized to teach people the new values of democracy and education. Many reforms were undertaken to develop the small villages and the towns of America and a cultural revolution started; new schools and colleges were set up in these backward cities like Zenith. Lewis made commendable contribution through his novels to bring cultural and social awareness among the middle class Americans. Lewis is a great critic of society and this study has evaluated and analyzed all his famous novels from the socialistic and cultural perspective.

Social Relevance of the Thesis

This study has social relevance as the main focus is on the growth of cultural materialism. Literature is a mirror of society and has the potential to bring cultural transformation. The writings of Sinclair Lewis depicted the social vices of American society like greed, lust for money, meanness, rigidity, orthodox ideas and resistance to change of the middle class Americans in the early 20th century. There are so many evils and vices in Indian society and the demand of modern society is socialistic literature to highlight the social vices. Mathew Arnold stated that literature is a criticism of life. John Milton stated that the purpose of literature is to teach human beings how to live. The novels of Sinclair Lewis got good response from the readers; the leaders were motivated to look into the backwardness of the American villages and the towns. The reviews appeared in the leading newspapers such as *New York Times* and *New Year Book Review* and *National Herald* and *Washington Post*. The Senate of America provided special budget and there was a massive cultural transformation; infrastructure was built; new school and colleges were opened in 1930s; new companies entered into the American towns and new industries were set up; the cities were modernized and all efforts were made for the growth and modernization of the towns. The Nobel Committee recognized the cultural contribution of Sinclair Lewis and conferred on him the Nobel Prize for literature in 1930. This study highlights the cultural contribution of literature.

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