



Depiction of the Theme of American Dream in Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*

Nitin Kumar

Dept. of English PGDAV College Delhi University, Delhi, India

Abstract

The paper is about the theme of American Dream in *The Great Gatsby*, by F. Scott Fitzgerald. The novel is an intriguing account about love, money and life during the 1920s in America. It demonstrates the society and the associated beliefs, values and dreams of the American people in 1920s. These beliefs, values and dreams can be summed up to what is termed the 'American Dream'; a dream of money, wealth, prosperity, and the happiness that supposedly came with the booming economy and the get-rich-quick schemes that formed the essential underworld of the American upper-class society. This withering theme presents itself in the novel through many of its characters.

Keywords: American dream, Gatsby, money, The Great Gatsby, success, happiness, American society

Introduction

American Dream

The American Dream encompasses the myth of America: a myth defined by another familiar phrase – the New World and the contrast of course was with Europe – the Old World. The American Constitution guaranteed all Americans life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. But the American Dream has come to mean at a popular level. It is to go to the West and become millionaire. The American dream is conceived of in terms of success and of material success in particular: getting rich quick is what it is all about.

The true origin of the phrase was first mentioned in 1931, by a middlebrow historian James Truslow Adams in his book *The Epic of America*. In this book, the phrase appears for the first time in the Preface, when Adams refers to the “American Dream of a better, richer, and happier life,”

Coining this phrase took place in 1931, at a time in American history when the United States was already knee-deep in the Great Depression and in a calamitous economic and social condition. What was lost in the Depression was the old idea and faith that America was a land of infinite possibilities and honesty.

Francis Scott Fitzgerald: *The Great Gatsby*

The Great Gatsby is an exploration of the American dream as it exists in a corrupt period, and it is an attempt to determine that concealed boundary that divides the reality from illusions.

One reason for the book's popularity is that it mirrors the world order in which man finds himself today. The theme does not relate just to the hero, one individual but rather entire America, Even the whole world like T.S. Eliot's *Wasteland* and Dreiser's *American Tragedy*, Fitzgerald creates his own wasteland, a death bed of American dream. He had discovered for himself that his own country was nothing but a graveyard of dry bones. It was written against the background of first Great War. At this time bombs and poison had done their devastating work.

Affluent American wallowing in her wealth and plenitude poured themselves thousands of litres of milk down her town drains while millions in other regions lived on verge of starvation. No question why the rich class may help the poor ones. They needed their swimming pools, their drinking bars and night clubs. This was the social history of twenties.

In this novel the protagonist Gatsby is a 'mid-western farm boy' with heightened sensibility to the promises of life and with 'romantic readiness' for hope. He sees in the figure of Daisy immense possibility of life a life he imagines for himself and for which he aspires. But he loses Daisy to the fabulous wealthy Tom Buchanan. Who marries her when Gatsby was away trying to get rich so that he could be worthy of her. Wealth in itself meant nothing to him. He throws away his wealth in elaborate parties to the people in whom he was least interested and whose names even he does not know. He was however careful about making money, for money alone could open to him all his imagined possibilities of life, but what he earned did not meet much to him. We know nothing about him for full five years but when he returns he is already rich beyond expectation. And he expects same warm welcome from Daisy. But when he feels his romantic dream of her get shattered.

Though for a moment he was bewildered and disillusioned by the truth about reality, he prefers to retreat into his illusions rather than to term with reality. Even after his disappointment with Daisy Gatsby persists in hoping that his disappointment was after all not real and Daisy would come back to him to repeat the past. He refused to understand that he simply cannot repeat the past. Nick knows that Daisy can never come up to Gatsby's imaginative expectations. “Daisy tumbled short of his dreams”, says Nick, “not through her own fault, but because of the colossal vitality of his illusion. It had gone beyond her, beyond everything”. Nick also knows that one cannot obliterate time, that in those five years Daisy and Tom have known love, and that at thirty two the illusion of twenty seven have lost their promise

“I wouldn’t ask too much of her, “(Nick) ventured
“You can’t repeat the past.”
“Can’t repeat the past?” (Gatsby) cried incredulously.” Why of course you can!

The kind of good life Gatsby imagined for himself has haunted him for five years. And the distance of time only helped to make memory of Daisy deep intense and obsessive.

The American dream and the American disillusion come together in *The Great Gatsby*. Gatsby’s blind adherence to the desire to realize all the possibilities of existence is not the weakness of a single individual. It embodies a criticism of American experience, the theme of which is the “withering of American Dream” a life where the spiritual and material have become inextricably, yet Gatsby in his innocence fails to recognise that it is beyond man’s reach and he ends up paying the ultimate price for it.

Upto the moment of death Gatsby cannot accept that this dream is over. He continues to insist that Daisy may still come to him, though it is clear to everyone including the readers that she is bound indissolubly to Tom. Gatsby’s death thus seems almost inevitable, given that a dreamer cannot exist without his dream; through Daisy’s betrayal, he effectively loses his reason for living. Both men “Gatsby and Wilson” are destroyed by their love for women who love the brutal Tom Buchanan; both are consumed with longing for something greater than themselves. While Gatsby is successful “American dreamer, Wilson exemplifies the fate of the failed dreamer, whose poverty has deprived him of even his ability to hope.

References

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