

Existence And Suffering As Portrayed In Jack Kerouac's *On The Road*

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American Literature was a great compilation of prose, nonfiction and poetry written by many colonial writers from about 1600 to till date. The 1950's had given a thirst for the writers to produce more new literatures with a view that were focussed mainly on the freedom and social constraints by adopting unique methods to enlighten the future readers. It was a time of new inventions in transport and communication where the American Literature had seen new challenges. Their writings were challenged and new forms of books evolved. Advancement in communication made the whole world know about American literature which made it more familiar with more countries where their voices could be heard from remote corners of the world and reached the American audience. The twentieth century, had an exertion to seize the uncertainty and confusion of life in the contemporary world where most of the writers had turned away from the traditional way and concluded the stories without any tenacity. America had been acclaimed as the most powerful nation in the world and every American were skilled workers and had a dream where every part of the city in the country was flourishing with life, liberty, and pursuit of happiness.

It was Jack Kerouac who founded the term Beat Generation in 1948 to characterize a perceived underground, anti-conformist youth movement in New York (Wikipedia). Having Thomas Wolfe as his literary model Kerouac's fiction was autobiographical where he had pursued to create his life into art, and had made language as the medium of metamorphosis. His life experiences were transferred into details of art through the intensified language. He was born to

working class French-Canadian parents as Jean-Louis de Kerouac on March 12, 1922 in Massachusetts where the small mill town had been in an economic boom even before the Great Depression could hit America. He had been discharged from the navy by coining him as an indifferent character had a great impact on his life which was reflected highly in his works. It was when he met his friends John Clellon Holmes, Neal Cassady, Allen Ginsberg, William Burroughs and John Clellon Holmes, he coined the term Beat Generation. It was after 1950s where he travelled extensively across the country that became the source of his American Classical novel *On the Road*. His experiences with the economic boom, working class roots and his extensive travels became his chief influences and had brought up a strong urge to be a remarkable writer of the age.

Jack Kerouac stands as a prominent figure of the 1950's not only as a writer but also as the father of the beat generation and beat culture. He tried to custom his life around his beliefs where his writing was largely associated with his personal life and experiences where the values he experienced were almost real. Like any other writer he faced many problems which were new and unique and he suffered from a conflict between old and new cultures within his own life. He had also failed in coping up with it. His long journey was travelling into a world of the unknown and he was not capable of solving his own suffering for he had to assure himself that he was innocent in a world which was filled with sick and evil. Kerouac wished to live outside a world where man was constantly forced to face his own flawed nature of his body. He wished all the men of the world to be good and spontaneous in nature and he was yearning to experience innocence which he felt that was very essential to live a pure and free life. But it was natural that he felt fear and guilt out of his shortcomings and also perceived intellectually the defects of the society which made man an ugly and evil man.

His quest for innocence continued throughout his life and he turned to religion, friendship and nature where he had related his innocence to a world of suffering. As Neil Roberts quote Kerouac's words from *Beatific: On the Origins of a Generation* where Kerouac had described the awareness of the beatific quality as "... beat originally meant poor, down and out, sad, sleeping in subways..." (186). The members of the beat generation were described as the special people who had transcended the sufferings peacefully which was really difficult to him. Hence they became the heroes of his novel particularly Dean Moriarty (Neal Cassady) in *On the Road* who was considered to be his alter – ego a man who could establish himself as an innocent man as he could not sense his own failure. He gave his hero the heroic stature of the sufferer and the victim. It was Kerouac's *On the Road* that marked his popularity in his writing career. It was Neal Cassady who was his friend and inspiration for the novel *On the Road* and he had also said that "story deals with you and me and road" (Campbell 106).

Jack Kerouac's *On the Road* was overflowing with many people, people in achievement of various races and ethnicities, speaking many languages, migrating from one place to another with a lasting encounter. Each journey was like more than that of an adventure, more hysterical and more beatific. In their passion for life they tend to rise above the oppressive order of society surpassing the moral philosophy and trying to justify it. They were on the road travelling in search of new experiences and adventures. The travel witnessed small crimes in the life of Dean Moriarty and he had been seen as an innocent in the view of Kerouac for he out passed the corruption that was predominant in the society. Sal Paradise was the reverse character of the Dean for he epitomized the "Beatific Soul" and he had been seen as the Kerouacian figure throughout the novel. It was clear that Dean value everything in his life to the point of lunacy and the crimes which Dean had committed was making him into an: "now the bug was on me

again and the bug's name was Dean Moriarty and I was off on another spurt around the road ...Dean was becoming the real Idiot, the Imbecile, the saint of the lot and he addresses him as the HOLY GHOOFF"(176)for morality was ignored through his actions and through which all the other men with him were chained.One of the mostimportant things that Kerouac admired about Dean Moriarty was that he had supported his friend in his search for his father. This became an interesting factor that developed a profound interest in the character andthat he had been searching his father the whole life after losing his mother.

Sal realised that Dean hold an interior quality that had attracted and repulsed people. For according to Sal Dean was an important figure in his life as he relate the relationship between him and Dean as "With the coming of Dean began the part of my life you could call my life on the road"(*On The Road* will be quoted as OTR 1).To Sal, Dean was the symbolic representation of his journey on search of adventure and identity. It was Dean who generally dictated how Sal should be during their travel on the road, forcing and pressurizing Sal to adventure around with him where ever he go. It was evident that throughout the journey that the personal space of Dean represent the existential space of his quest.Sal notice that his vibrant personality when Dean was beside him all the way on the road, was seen as lackluster and boring as he believed "...I was a lout compared, I couldn't keep up with them" (7). He craved for Dean energy and was overwhelmed by Dean's unique personality (7). To Sal, Dean was a divine and he was an embodiment of energy and he yearn to possess the quality of Dean and SaumyaBera quotes Carl Malmgrenfrom the article "*On the Road* Reconsidered: Kerouac and the Modernist Tradition" and he had said that "Dean epitomizes life on the road for Sal, as numerous passages make clear, and his narrative about road life necessarily evolves into the story of his relation with Dean" (73). Sal's view on Dean shows his inner conflict and struggle for he liked to live a life like him

but he was unable to follow it as Dean looks like an angel to him towards the end of the novel as Kerouac point out as “He was finally an Angel, as I always knew he would become; but like any Angel he still had rages and furies...(OTR 263)” .He had also incited bitterness, sadness and morality in equal measure and hence he was able to leave all the pleasures behind him to enjoy the true ecstatic joy of pure self. When Galatea opines that the sooner he's dead the better, Sal interjects: “Very well, then,' I said, 'but now he's alive and I'll bet you want to know what he does next and that's because he's got the secret that we're all busting to find and it's splitting his head wide open and if he goes mad don't worry, it won't be your fault but the fault of God.' (OTR 195)An ecstatic lust for world was evident then they together were travelling to the east and Dean delivers a monologue where he recommends the undertones of the worriless and all-embracing state being:

And it's not even the beginning of it—and now here we are at last going east together, we've never gone east together, Sal, think of it, we'll dig Denver together and see what everybody's doing although that matters little to us, the point being that we know what IT is and we know TIME and we know that everything is really FINE. Then he whispered, clutching my sleeve, sweating, “Now you just dig them in front. They have worries, they're counting the miles, they're thinking about where to sleep tonight, how much money for gas, the weather, how they'll get there—and all the time they'll get there anyway, you see. But they need to worry and betray time with urgencies false and otherwise, purely anxious and whiny, their souls really won't be at peace unless they can latch onto an established and proven worry and having once found it they assume facial expressions

to fit and go with it, which is, you see, unhappiness, and all the time it all flies by them and they know it and that too worries them no end.(OTR 209)

Here Dean's argument showed to be actualization of worry. He questioned the act of people that why they do not live a happy life and instead they were waiting for the appropriate in to time in future to celebrate their happiness. This visualized the confusions in the minds of people where they did not live their life naturally. He also had discovered the real meaning of happiness where he emphasized that people should had given some time for everything they do to achieve happiness. People were able control their futures and the consequences of their choices they take in their life. When a person was able to control his life and such perspective will be deliberately open and undefined.

A contradictory world was witnessed by Sal and Dean when Sal sit on pier overlooking New Jersey and thinking of Dean that how nobody in this world know anything apart from the forlorn rags of growing old. It was difficult for Sal to accept the view of the world by Dean and hence his society was a sort of elevated and spiritual which only Dean can experience. Sal's transition to acceptance was gradual and his last few journey on the road began to transform him. His change was witnessed when he met Henry Glass, an ex-convict who try to talk to him on a bus to Denver. "Here was a young kid like Dean had been; his blood boiled too much for him to bear; his nose opened up; but no native strange saintliness to save him from the iron fate" (OTR 234). Sal met a girl from New York and he decide to be with her knowing who she was and like to life unwavering life unlike the chaos he had experienced on the road and he claim that "...I went up and there she was, the girl with the pure and innocent dear eyes that I had always searched for and for so long. We agreed to love each other madly" (OTR 277-278). Sal had

found a girl whom he truly loved for whom and was determined to settle down for his own life. He was slowly changing his behavior according to the environment.

Sal's self-acceptance was his parting with Dean. Though it was being difficult for him, Sal had given him no direction rather it had diverted him from its centre. He was saddened by the departure of Dean from his life, and he was able to journey into a more authentic existential world from an unending journey and he knew how to travel without Dean's guidance. His journey on the road had idealized his existential space and had allowed Sal to gain a more clear perspective of life and in turn had made him to live a fulfilled life : "Sal is free of the illusion that the trip will resolve anything..Sal is able and willing to see clearly what he encounters. Things were no longer the greatest or most fantastic" (Hunt. 61). According to Larson, Sal's quest was resolved as, "For him, this relativity confirms the desires he has had all along: that American norms were not at the center of humanity. It seemed to justify his past differences with his nation's set of proprieties and responsibilities and permit him to explore them in the future" (Larson, 47). Hence Sal had reached a satisfied life for it was visible that that he had achieved satisfaction and contentment with life.

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