



## Shattered Identity of the Indigenous People Depicted in the Novel “The Grapes Of Wrath” by John Steinbeck.

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### Abstract

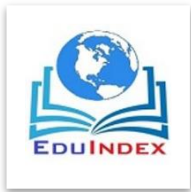
*Identity is the way of our living and when we lose our identity, we will be shattered. Both nature and poverty becomes the major aspects for losing the identity for the indigenous people. People started migrating to different places leaving their own indigenous places. This paper “SHATTERED IDENTITY OF THE INDIGENOUS PEOPLE DEPICTED IN THE NOVEL “THE GRAPES OF WRATH” BY JOHN STEINBECK” focuses on the indigenous people of Oklahoma especially the family of Tom Joad who were kicked off from their hometown and forced to travel towards California in search of jobs for their survival because of the financial crisis, starvation and natural calamities like Dust bowl etc., The identity of the aboriginal people of Oklahoma was shattered and they were emotionally defeated, which leads to many people’s death. They lose the indigenous identity and on the whole become a non-indigenous part of another region.*

**Keywords:** *Shattered, Indigenous, Identity, Poverty, Suffering, Financial Crisis, Natural Calamities.*

### 1. Introduction.

Identity is the one which reveals our own individuality, specification and recognition. It is the characteristics which defines who the person or the community is. At any point of time it can be shattered by the human beings itself. Sometimes nature also paves way for the shattering identity of the people. Humans destroy nature in which the nature repays in the form of a great disaster. It results in the shattering of people leaving their own indigenous places. Indigenous people have their own indigenous identity. However, they try not to lose their indigenous identity at any cost. It is the realistic situation that happens everywhere across the globe. Likewise, the researcher had chosen the novel “THE GRAPES OF WRATH” is set in the Depression-era Oklahoma Dust Bowl and follows the story of Tom Joad and his family as they embark on a journey to California to find work, a new home and a more promising future. The identity of the original people got shattered because of their migration towards California. This novel had received noble prize in the year 1962 and had also won the Pulitzer Prize. But some critics had a negative perspective towards the novel, whereas it had directly conveyed the political condition of the state and also the vigorous vocabulary made the women readers feel hesitate to go on reading the novel. Many writers had written about the migration, identity, natural calamities as the major theme, but John Steinbeck had encountered the same in the different way.

### 2. Objectives.



The objectives of the paper is to examine the study of shattered identity of the indigenous people, to investigate the background of the Great Depression happened in America, to focus on the eradication of culture of the native people due to their migration towards another indigenous place.

### 3. Background of the study.

*“To the red country and part of the gray country of Oklahoma, the last rains came gently, and they did not cut the scarred earth” – THE GRAPES OF WRATH.*

The opening lines of the novel clearly examine the financial and emotional trauma that was undergone by the people during the Great Depression. It had totally affected the lives of many indigenous people of Oklahoma. The Great depression combined with the Dust Bowl destroyed many farms and left hundreds of thousands of Oklahomans unemployed. Due to this condition in Oklahoma, more than 15% of Oklahomans moved to California. This became the central plot of the novel. The indigenous people lost their culture and they begin to accept another culture as their indigenous culture. The loss of their culture will be leading to the loss of their indigenous identity. Poverty was also hidden behind the Great Depression in which it leads to many people's death. Around the world, 767 million people live in extreme poverty whereas 19 million people suffer from poverty in South America. The Dust Bowl also suffered from severe dust storms during the dry period in the 1930s of America. It eradicates the agricultural farmlands of people in which they lost their crops and became the major reason for the people to move out of the native place. This leads to the economic depression of America. The dust storm that occurred on April 14, 1935 was particularly known as **BLACK SUNDAY**. The combination of drought, erosion, bare soil and winds caused the dust to fly freely and at high speeds. On the whole, the background deals with the setting of Oklahoma in which it suffers from Great Depression and Dust Bowl which leads to the shattering of identity, culture etc., the family of Tom Joad leaves Oklahoma and started their journey towards California leaving their own indigenous place. Though there were many struggles faced by the family members, Tom Joad becomes the identity for the whole people of Oklahoma.

### 4. Origin.

Oklahoma's name is derived from two Choctaw words, "OKLA" meaning people and "HUMMA" meaning red; literally meaning "red people." Oklahoma is the community consists of the residents called okies. They were also called as Oklahomans. It was beautiful place which was rich in natural resources. The native people of Oklahoma hold the people from different cultural region. Different cultures were followed in Oklahoma. Thousands of Native Americans were moved out from their ancestral places of North America and transported to the present area of Oklahoma. The territory now known as Oklahoma was first a part of the Arkansas territory from 1819 until 1828. But now, the city of Oklahoma totally developed and became one of the most populous states in the United States. Because of the different people from different places, there was more number of native languages. Oklahoma was the 21<sup>st</sup> largest recipient of medical funding from the federal government. In 2000, Oklahoma ranked 45<sup>th</sup> in physicians per capita. Though there were people from different regions, the different culture made people into a new indigenous culture. Likewise, in the novel The Grapes of Wrath, the people from Oklahoma shatter into different places and started to follow a new indigenous culture. Actually, the already shattered people from different places becomes a new indigenous group and unfortunately they become shattered again because of the natural calamities like Dust Bowl which ruined the crops of the native people but also the financial crisis, starvation, poverty. The nature is not only the cause for it but also the human beings.



## **5. Analysis and Interpretation.**

The family of Tom Joad and the Oklahoma people moving to California in the route 66 with the expectation of getting a new job, new future, new group of people to mingle. Unfortunately, it was totally messed up with the oversupply of labor, wages are low and the workers are exploited to starvation. Once when a group of people lose their indigenous identity, they could be scattered around the world. But they could not regain or match their native indigenous aspect with any other culture. They fail in their every attempt. Later, for the survival they have to start accept the job whatever they were being offered. It was actually written in the era of depression. They were both mentally and physically affected. They got dispirited. It is the human unity and love as well as the need for cooperative rather than individualistic ideals during hard times. The colloquial speech represented in the novel shows the different speech dialects in the state of Oklahoma. Steinbeck involved himself deeply in the lives of these migrant labourers. The Grapes of Wrath was accused of exploiting the poor, using lewd and obscene language and portraying life in a bestial, mean way. There can be any negative criticism about the novel, but Steinbeck had rightly pointed out the exact situation of America during World War II, like people suffering from depression, Dust Bowl etc.,

## **6. Conclusion.**

“She looked up and across the barn, and her lips came together and smiled mysteriously”

This is the last line of the novel “The Grapes of Wrath” where the author clearly examines the extreme poverty holds the people of Oklahoma. Rose of Sharon whose child was stillborn and feed her milk to the dying person. This shows the real humanity of a person. Tom Joad who happens to become the identity for his indigenous people of Oklahoma. The indigenous people who happens to move out of their own native places, they lose their identity and they become scattered. Finally, they become the people of shattered identity. They lose their indigenous identity and on the whole become the non-indigenous part of another region.

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