OF MICE AND MEN: AN OVERVIEW OF MIGRATED PEOPLE

Mrs. Kanchana Devi
Asst. Professor, Ph. D. Scholar
Shri Krishnaswamy College for Women
Anna Nagar, Chennai.

Of Mice and Men is a novella written by the John Steinbeck the Nobel Prize winner. It was published in 1937, it gives the story of two displaced migrant ranch workers, George Milton and Lennie Small, who travelled from place to place in search of new job opportunities during the Great Depression in California, United States. It deals with unknowledgeable and illiterate people who struggle to lead a life that is normal. The Great Depression began in August 1929, when the United States economy first went into an economic recession. Although the country spent two months with declining GDP, it was not until the Wall Street Crash in October, 1929 that the effects of a declining economy were felt, and a major worldwide economic downturn ensued. The market crash marked the beginning of a decade of high unemployment, poverty, low profits, deflation, plunging farm incomes, and lost opportunities for economic growth and personal advancement. Although its causes are still uncertain and controversial, the net effect was a sudden and general loss of confidence in the economic future.

This article gives a description about the hardwork and confidence that every human being has in their own capabilities. John Beintick gives the description of the downtrodden people and their dreams that are filled with their ambitions and the struggles they undergo to achieve those dreams by giving more importance to their life that they are leading at present.

'I was a bindlestiff myself for quite a spell. I worked in the same country that the story is laid in. The characters are composites to a certain extent. Lennie was a real person. He's in an insane asylum in California right now. I worked alongside him for many weeks. He didn't kill a girl. He killed a ranch foreman'. (OMAM p. 234)

John Beintick explains about the two migrant field workers in California on their plantation during the Great Depression. The first migrant is George Milton, an intelligent but
uneducated man, and the second migrant is Lennie Small, a man of large stature and great strength but limited mental abilities. They are on their way to another part of California in Soledad. They hope to meet and share their dream one day of settling down on their own piece of land. Lennie's part of the dream is so touching that it merely tends to feel the warmth of soft rabbits on the farm, as he loves touching soft animals, although he always kills them. This dream is becomes one of Lennie's favorite stories, which George constantly retells. They flee from their previous employment in Weed, California, where they run out of town soon after Lennie's love of stroking soft things result in an accusation of attempted rape. As he touches a young woman's dress, and would not let go. It soon becomes clear that the two are close friends and George is Lennie's protector, despite Lennie's antics irritating him. The theme of friendship is a constant throughout the story.

At the ranch after being hired, the situation appears to be menacing and dangerous, especially when the pair is confronted by Curley. The Boss's small-statured, aggressive son, with a napoleon complex who dislikes larger men, leaving the gentle giant Lennie potentially vulnerable. Curley's flirtatious and provocative wife, to whom Lennie is instantly attracted, poses a problem as well. In sharp contrast to these two characters, the pair also meets Candy, a kind, old, aged ranch hand with one hand and a loyal dog, and Slim, the kind, intelligent and intuitive jerkline-skinner, whose dog has recently had a litter of puppies. Slim gives a puppy to Lennie, as he does to Candy, who had a loyal, accomplished sheep dog that was killed due to its old age and uselessness.

In spite of the potential problems on the ranch, their dream leaps towards reality when Candy offers to pitch in $350, most of the money that they need, with George and Lennie so that they can buy a farm at the end of the month, in return for permission to live with them on it. The trio's is ecstatic, but their joy is overshadowed when Curley attacks Lennie. In response,
a bleeding and injured Lennie, urged on by George, catches Curley's fist and easily crushes it, reminding the group there are still obstacles to overcome before their goal is reached.

Nevertheless, George feels more relaxed, since the dream seems just within their grasp, to the extent that he even leaves Lennie behind on the ranch while he goes into town with the other ranch hands. Lennie wanders into the stable, and chats with Crooks, the bitter, yet educated stable buck, who is isolated from the other workers because he is black. Candy finds them and they discuss their plans for the farm with Crooks, who cannot resist asking them if he can hoe a garden patch on the farm, despite scorning the possibility of achieving the dream. Curley's wife makes another appearance and flirts with the men, especially Lennie. However, her spiteful side is shown when she belittles them and is especially harsh towards Crooks because of his race, threatening to have him lynched.

The next day, Lennie accidentally kills his puppy while stroking it. Curley's wife enters the barn and tries to speak to Lennie, admitting that she is lonely and how her dreams of becoming a movie star are crushed, revealing the reason she flirts with the ranch hands. After finding out that Lennie loves stroking soft things, she offers to let him stroke her hair, but panics and begins to scream when she feels his strength. Lennie becomes frightened, and in the scuffle, unintentionally breaks her neck. When the other ranch hands find the corpse, George unhappily realizes that their dream is at an end. George hurries away to find Lennie, hoping he will be at the meeting place they designated at the start of the novella in case Lennie got into trouble, knowing that there is only one thing he can do to save Lennie from the painful death that Curley's lunch mob intends to deliver.

George meets Lennie at the designated place, the same spot they camped in the night before they came to the ranch. The two sit together and George retells the beloved story of the bright future together that they will have, knowing it is something they will never share. He then
shoots Lennie in the back of the head, so that his death will be painless and happy. Curley, Slim, and Carlson find George seconds after the shooting. Only Slim realizes that George killed Lennie out of love, and gently and consolingly leads him away, while Curley and Carlson look on, unable to comprehend the subdued mood of the two men.

References

www. Of Mice and Men Key Facts on Sparknotes


