

**Archaeological and Mythological Delineation of Human and  
Spiritual Evolution and Religious Conflicts portrayed in the  
Novel *The Source* by James Michener**

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**Abstract**

Religion has contributed immensely towards the development of civilisation. However many civilizations were lost their traces from the earth due to an unabated religious conflicts. The gulf region is constantly at loggerhead with each other as it has become the warzone of the three most popular religions of the world. The political polarisation in line with ethnicity, race, language and religion has aggravated the conflict further affecting millions of people pushing them to the edge of destruction in their own land. The humanity in the region had been living under fear and many generations perished from the pre-historic past to the present. James Michener undoubtedly the great contemporary writer has tried to bring out the important source of all these ongoing conflicts. This article tries to explore the historical root of human evolution and spiritual growth and how the ideological difference and belief clash with each other and aggravated the religious conflicts. This research further highlights the parallel development of human evolution and spiritual growth and how the both collided with each other at the cost of human cataclysm in Palestine and Israel. The contemporary genre of hybridity of history, myth, culture is very well intertwined into one single plot. Moreover the article foregrounds that the conflict between the major religions had the source in common region where the Jews, the Christians and the Arab Muslims inhabited together for centuries.

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## Introduction

James Michener was a prolific American novelist and a story writer. His successful novels deal extensively about the cultural, historical, geological, and genealogical narrative. *The Source* was published in 1965. It typically brings out the pre-historical past to the present crisis in the gulf region typically the cities now belonging to Israel and Palestine as the background. Michener delineates the significance of the city Makor by providing its meaning from Hebrew as source and from which other things spring. It generated water for one generation to other (Michener 19). The whole plot of the novel revolves around the Maker and the finds they got at the excavation. The story is spun around the archaeological findings and the story behind every level of digging and the positive result they are able to achieve. The genealogical process starts from the discovery of a flint, a Phoenician helmet, coins used by different dynasties. Then it goes onto the finding of Candlestick of death and then to coins, seals used during the invasion by the crusaders, the stones with cross and tablets and finally bones of human being indicating the place history to more than 30000 years back. In addition to the findings at the archaeological excavation and the mythical background the writer intertwines the fictional plots and characters to match the historical narration.

## The Tell Maker and the Artifacts

Tell Maker is the name given to natural mound laid down by tectonic forces. It is a place or accumulated residue of one abandoned settlement after another and rests upon the ruins of its predecessor (Michener 7). It is the place where the exact excavation has taken place. It has various layers with different depths and breadths. It is the source of water that has sustained many generations of civilizations. It is the place where the first Homo sapiens could have lived and wandered from Africa. It is made of rocks, muds and other minerals. It has lot of ruins as well as walls and natural fences and caves inside it. During battle, a group of people or rulers hid themselves inside. The shape of the Tell Maker has gone through many changes due to different invaders.

During the excavation, dig after dig, many artifacts were found. The first and foremost was the finding of a small piece of a flint, a phial, and a menorah which date back to 11800 years. The Homo sapiens wandered from Africa might have used to make fire and as a weapon to attack or defend from wild animals. The second find was a helmet that might have been used by the Phoenicians. The next finds were coins and sickles that must have been used

by Canaanites or Assyrians or Persians who conquered the Akko port and the Tell Maker one after another. The cubic stone was the other finding that had the symbols of Islam and Christianity encrypted in it. It might have been prepared during the period of Crusades and the consequent Arabs invasion. One of the most powerful finds of the excavation is candle stick of death. It has a story that a king who killed six generals and he was himself killed by the seventh general. The final most important find of the excavation was the human bones. They must be people inhabiting there millions of years before.

### The Human Evolution

Michener has narrated many fictional stories with historical characters to focus human evolution from the wandering Homo sapiens to the modern citizens having states of their own and fighting the same fight with sophisticated weapons. The earliest human beings that inhabited the caves and forests are depicted in the story of Ur and his family. They lived on hunting animals. The first story narrated in the novel begins with an archaeological account of farming tools such as a flint, Phial, and a menorah used in 9800 BC. Then follows the story of the advent of agriculture in and around Makor, leading to the construction of the first human settlement in Galilee and the founding of a civilized society. The old man was the leader of the family of twelve members. It was his son's death that changed his life style. For the first time the humanity saw death caused by a wild animal. So he started to think of safety and protection from wild animals. The second incident was more devastating to see his settlement and the grains were being washed away by the storm. The Ur family was very depressed and in enormous pain and in order to defend them from the fury of nature they built monolith and started all sort of sacrifice and ritual ceremonies to appease it. The other important story to be highlighted is of two brothers Aaron and Judah. When Judah was away Aaron forced his wife to bed with him. He succeeded in by force. She was shattered and waiting for her husband to arrive. The delay caused by the storm made her miserable. When Judah came to know about the evil done to his wife he wanted to take revenge on his brother. However having known the premonition, Aaron murdered his own brother and influenced the rabbi to help to get married to his brother's wife. According to the law of the Torah she was sentenced to marry her brother in law who murdered her husband. The lady was stubborn and gave herself in to the leader of the Arab who invaded the Maker easily as the Jews were divided between Aaron and his sister in law.

## Reconciliation

The three characters involved in the dig are symbolically from three major religions. Dr. Cullinane is the chief archeologist who belongs to a devout Catholic Irishman from Chicago. Tabari is good companion is an Arab Muslim and Dr. Eliav from the Holy land. The conversation between the three is quite normal and not aggressive. However they three defend their own religious principles sternly and never belittle other's doctrine. The spiritual evolution is coming to the culmination to the contemporary intellectuals of various rival religions. The way they have the matured conversation with one another is a welcome note to the reconciliation they are able to reach. Like a family, a nation can survive only its good relation with the neighbouring countries. Michener is strong on this view as he states through Dr. Eliav:

Throughout history this bridge-land of Israel has been able to exist as a viable nation only when it maintained sensible economic relation with neighbouring lands like Syria and Lebanon or neighbouring Empires like Egypt and Mesopotamia So the present enmity between the nations of this area has got to be considered a temporary interruption of an historic process, and I have found that where temporary interruptions go against the grain of history they do not long endure. (Michener 905-6)

## The Spiritual Evolution and the ensuing Conflicts

Michener reconnoitres the evolution of religion and divinity from a primitive farmer's desire to comprehend the concept of God to achieve a final set of moral laws and collective wisdom. Michener's themes are ever-present in each event narrated as he theatrically and meticulously guides us through the evolution of spiritual growth. Michener has used the mythical evolution of divine origin here. When the human folk could not withstand the fury of nature and the calamities, they surrendered to the invisible God in the form of Monolith they erected hoping that would alone protect them from the natural calamities such as storms, flood, heavy rains and the wild animals. Their earliest gods started from El Shaddai and in the middle shifted their loyalty to other gods such as Baal and Astarte. The mythical story of Ur and his family is one among them. They made sacrifices and performed various rituals to make the monolith to hear their miseries and get protection and other favours. In the middle of the conflicts the Jews started worshipping invisible God and all powerful God Yahweh with no image as taught by their prophets earlier. The invisible God has become their

protector throughout their slavery and freedom and their settling down in Israel in the Palestine land.

For each of the archeologists it was a mystic rite, huddling there in a cavern: to Tabari it was a return to the ancient sources of his people; to Elaiv it was the spot where man had begun his long wrestling match with the concept of God; to Cullinane it was the beginning of those philosophical analysis with which he would be engaged for the balance of his life; but to all it was the source, the primeval spot where the growth of civilisation had begun. (Michener 1064)

The arrival of Christianity was a revolt against one god of Judaism. The Christians belief in Trinity and the divinity of Jesus have brought another development of spirituality in the Middle East. So the conflict between the one invisible God of Judaism and the three visible Gods i.e. Trinity became inevitable. The Crusaders were organised and set to save the Holy land could not tolerate the Jewish belief and they blamed them for the crucifixion of Jesus. Hence they started to persecute the Jews when they refused to believe the living God of Christianity. The Jews neither accepted Christianity nor Islam that contrasted their own belief. Now it was the chance of the riders of the desert to annihilate both Christians and the Jews for not accepting the only God Allah.

Due to the invasion of Israel by the Crusaders, Constantine Empire, the Arabs they suffered innumerably. They lost their people in huge number as convert and many were persecuted as they were unwilling to convert either to Christianity or to Islam. The Crusaders used unspeakable methods to persecute Jews and pagans who refused to convert. The Arabs used inhuman method of killing the infidels. Michener wants the rulers understand each other and work for the betterment of the future society. Through the character Volkmar the count explain to his child,

The secret of wealth is to have many people working, but in the old days we did not understand this, so we slaughtered all who lived on the land because they were of different religion. But we quickly learned that in doing so we were killing ourselves, and the land lay idle until we could find hands to till it. Our first count was among the earliest to discover this truth, and that was why through the years our family prospered while others did not. (Michener 701)

## Conclusion

Michener wants to bring reconciliation between the warring groups of the Jews who follow Judaism and the Arabs who follow Islam and the Christians. The Jews got

independence as they were able to defend their territory from the all mighty forces of Arab nations. The Arabs who lived in Israel left their land and ended as refugee in the neighbouring countries. They were reluctant to return fearing persecution in Israel dominated by the Jews. It is a foregone expectation to make these two races of people reconcile and live together peacefully as they had experienced many violent persecutions from the pre-historic past to the present. The archeological survey was conducted with the help of the fund mostly donated by a Jews living in America. It is a heroic survey of history of Judaism and its relationship and conflicts with the Christianity and Islam that sprang from it. He blends facts and fiction in the novel to reach the wider readership of literature. The conversation between the fictitious characters in the novel reveal the philosophical and theological conflicts they generation of people living there underwent during the calamities they faced due to different invasions. The story of Aaron and Judah is a significant to bring out how the rights of women could be misused in spite of laws given by Moses in the form of Torah. With the parallel evolution of monotheism, there is also the development of community, individual prosperity, and then laws to govern the society with the vested power from God to the political state.

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