

## Impact Of Social Realism On Moralistic Perspectives in John Steinbeck's The Pearl

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### Abstract

The Present Paper introduces Kino as a man with responsibilities towards his family and values learnt from life. In this article, we bring out the true essence of life not being materialistic but by relinquishing a lavish life style . Kino is described as a self-learner with personal ideas, thoughts about his actions and place in his town.

Kino's acquisition of The Pearl from sea tests his character which has been already complicated by his 'Pride, idealism, greed, strength, despair and honor' which guides all men of those times.

Kino wants to sell the pearl in order to send his son to school and prosper ; so he demands a fair price to buyers but the greedy towns men decides to rob him instead showcasing 'The World' corrupted values of the society. Steinbeck implicates Social Realism to the extent the society is exacting on the psyche of Kino's small family and the subsequent realization of not being moral amidst the greed and corruption in making money for oneself. The irony is of implicating morality of men and is the crux of the novel. It tries to differentiate self-respecting idealism of few to all men to greed.

Kino wants to live in reality, decides to throw the pearl away. He flung it, to disassociate with the 'sense of possession and insanity', that drew him to greedy buyers. His act of decadence vanishes as he relinquishes his final rare asset 'the pearl'. This renunciation helps him to regain peace for his soul. Hence, The Pearl is a 'parable' where salvation is relevant to the current age.

**Keywords:** Social Realism, Illusion, Parable, greed.

### Introduction

Kino the protagonist of the novel demands justice to endanger his family. There is an ambiguity between right and wrong as everything bears with a price. Kino's heroism is proved disastrous but admirable, the expression of an innocent man. Kino, the protagonist of the novel is pictured with intensity and vividness his flight, pursuit and desperate struggle to save his family, in the context of mercantile interest of the town, dominated his search.

Steinbeck, the novelist, depicts Kino as a responsible man in search of one's values. He positions Kino as a learner in his quest for values, so as to redeem through personal thoughts and action. Kino's pride in possessing The Pearl is an irony as his strength is challenged with tragic sense of inescapable curse of the pearl that could destroy his family or enrich them altogether.

Kino's character is sketched as a youth overwhelmed by his 'Pride, idealism, greed, strength, despair and honor' all 'The Man's' action and thoughts. Kino, the central character, acts upon Juana who is the source of strength. She combines her admirable qualities of wife and mother to withstand hunger better than Kino, 'like a strong man'.

Mimi Resiel Cladstein observes, "Kino is the learner, a pilgrim in search of values, while Juana is a constant. Kino learns of the evil, that greed engenders peaceful life, while Juana instinctively is aware of her surroundings. Her values neither change nor waver from beginning to end, that of preserving loved ones, her man and child". When Kino agrees to throw the pearl and wanting her to throw it away, she says, "No, you".<sup>i</sup>

Peter Lisca points, "By her refusal to throw the pearl, she gives dignity and pride to her husband, whose position is to do final things".<sup>ii</sup>

Steinbeck highlights the increasing implicates inducing conflict between values and the range of universal objectives, imaginary facts will and determination. He insists through simple narrative that of human awareness about oneself and a false 'standard of value' to accomplish his idealistic theme, *The Pearl* is a 'parable' yet a panoramic representation of reality, irony and authenticity with credibility. From the novel's parabolic significance, *The Pearl* can be considered as an authentic documentation of 'social realism of men' of its times.

### **Moralistic Intervention**

Kino is the protagonist of the novel *The Pearl* Steinbeck studies the character of a man who learns 'Laws of Life' from fall and rise in personal life. Kino, an ordinary Indian living with family, is content with simple necessities, and however, by chance he finds precious pearl. *The Pearl* kindles dormant negative traits of greed, selfishness and possession in him as he becomes blind to dominating forces of evil and is crucified in suffering.

Juana, Kino's wife, is a homely woman who possess knowledge of good and evil by instinct. She is aware of Kino's greed, and so she protects him to symbolize watchfulness, nursing and nourishing her home with eyes open: "Kino could never remember seeing them closed when he awakened. Her dark eyes made little reflected stars".<sup>iii</sup>

Juana is a woman and to her the pearl is an intrusion. Whereas Kino wants to make riches by selling it, live happily and provide wealth for the family. But Juana could not accept what *The Pearl* symbolizes, 'greed, possession and selfishness'.

Being an indestructible woman, she recognizes the evil, the hellish nature of the Pearl which might bestow on her husband, herself and their son. As Kino starts to lose his peace and spiritual mind, Juana maintains her loyalty and devotion to him. Her sense of sacrifice and recognition of the world is inhabited by pearl buyers, "blind jackals", "structured bulls" (the doctor) and "tigers with ulcers" (the pursuing horsemen).

### **Social Realism**

Pearl buyers represent Social Realism and The World involved in values that are 'competitive', but in reality they represent one parasite 'thing' without dignity, justice or life.

The town is therefore, unnatural. This truth is concealed by custom and by the teachings of the church. The priest as a townsman by preaching conceals the truth about evil, but as Kino refuses to become 'a thing' by those pearl buyers, he insists on his manhood by demanding the true value for his pearl.

The town brings violence and murder to the family as corruption is, pervasive and powerful than organic village life. Few fishermen are afraid of its influence and Kino's supporters evince, "From his courage we may all profit."<sup>13</sup> Kino is practical in demanding a fair price wherein "The World" corrupts his values.<sup>iv</sup>

Steinbeck implicitly and ironically implicate morality as the crux of the novel by differentiating the self-respecting idealism to greed.

Kino progresses from selfish desires like, 'church marriage, clothes, rifle- to selfless, idealistic thoughts of sending Coyotito to school: "my son will read, open books, will write and know writing. Will make numbers to make us free as he will know and through him we will know."<sup>v</sup>

The possessive "my son", and the revelation pearl buyers would understand, 'words and numbers' is indirect and objective for a man to stumble through mercantile thoughts whilst Steinbeck indicates the corrupting influence of "The World" on Kino's organic values.

### **Illusion and Reality**

The irony of the contrast between the "literal pearl" that Kino finds at sea and Coyotito, 'the son' is the symbolic pearl precious to the family. When Coyotito was stung by a scorpion, the town doctor refuses to come to Indian village unless paid Coyotito's need for treatment forces Kino to forgo his family values and obey world's command.

While Steinbeck suggests Juana to cure Coyotito with traditional medicine, "some brown seaweed, good remedy than the doctor's"

before Kino sets out to hunt a pearl to maintain the original “natural” value than “artificial” cash nexus and town values.<sup>vi</sup>

Kino is proud after Coyotito’s natural recovery to realize, the pearl is his, the symbol of strength, to own and sell as opposed to his rising fear for future. Kino’s needs for his family is provided by the Canoe, Our father who art in nature as it is explicitly part of their organic life. It is their only property and source of food, as the man of house with the boat guarantees his family to eat something.

Coyotito’s illness occasions the pearl hunt. Juana ‘prays out’ a pearl in response to doctor’s demand for money. She prays to find a pearl to pay for treatment rather than the recovery of her child forcing Kino to find the pearl given “By God or The Gods”.<sup>24</sup>

Coyotito recovers and hence no organic need for the pearl. But they did not escape the pearl’s evil influence until Kino flings it into the sea as Juana stands “beside him, still holding her dead bundle over her shoulder.”<sup>vii</sup> 25

Organic values of life and the artificial life are set in balance by the unconcerned sea. It is an anthro-pomorphic form of penance, a burial, a token of return to genuine organismic life, shaded by death which no human act can alter. While Coyotito recovers as Kino sees ‘the pearl’, thinks it is lovelier than anything but when his son dies later in the story, he finds “the pearl as ugly, grey, like a malignant growth.”<sup>viii</sup>26

The Pearl creates an upheaval in psychological and emotional consciousness of Kino and sends waves of shock to the whole town. Steinbeck compares the town to ‘a colonial animal’. A town has nervous system and has whole emotion. Discovery of the pearl makes ‘nerves of the town pulsing and vibrating’. But in-fact it serves as force of evil in the town.

The Buyers decide to possess it using tactical strategy as Kino contacts them they offer low price. The Buyers symbolize greed. Kino sees in the buyers ‘the creeping of fate, the circling of wolves, the hover of vultures. He felt the evil coagulating about him, and he was helpless to protect himself’. They constitute the system and Kino defies ‘the whole structure, the whole way of life’.<sup>ix</sup>

### **The Nature of Men-Contrast between Kino and the Townsmen**

The whole structure is force of hell on earth with human soul wavering between temporal and timeless values of life. Juana's sane voice is, 'The thing is evil. It will destroy us. Throw it away, Kino. It has brought evil. Kino, my husband, it will destroy us'. But Kino declares, 'This pearl has become my soul. If I give it up I shall lose my soul'.<sup>x</sup>

The forces of violence, greed and evil creep on Kino and his family. In darkness of night, his assailants try to dispossess him of the pearl. He does not give it when attacked and his hut was ransacked and burnt down. Kino decides to run away from town to go into the world.

Kino's family's life is full of sensibilities, as he and Juana entered the town with inner unity but the destructive power of the town demands more from them. Being poor, they suffer from the fear of authorities; an omniscient discontentment prevails between their healthy vigor and rage and corrupt means of their town.

The family sets out to the north to sell The Pearl in a city, but are forced towards west into more barren desert to escape death. The trackers pursuit confirms Kino's determination to kill them or be killed by them, "There is no choice" unaware that his child would die. As such Coyotito, their small son is killed by chance accidentally.

Juana tries to reason with Kino's "strength of his movement and speed" but 'fate' intervenes with her reasoning, pride and money mongering to contrive and relieve of their only asset, their son, built from a neutral object, "the pearl of the world".

### **Conclusion**

The Pearl is a consummate work of fiction wherein its thematic structure is a parable. The novel elaborates on an Indian man who finds The Pearl at a beach and dreams of prosperity but corrupt town men cheats him of its high value. The pearl considered as the object of salvation becomes a symbol of evil pursuit.

The novel symbolizes the theme of temptation of possession and at the same time the story of a human soul failing in its state of innocence to experience and pass through the state of suffering and finally rise to the state of redemption. Kino, the protagonist discovers The Pearl serving as security against his worldly wants

and as the means to salvation on earth. The pearl manages to possess his soul as the symbol of light, Joy and earthly happiness.

The moon suggests an illusion represented by the pearl, its nature waxes and wanes between perfection and imperfection of characters. It associates with "Sea-Gull" to suggest greed and lust magnified by size and the world's implications of temptation and greed as "in the surface of the great pearl he could see dream forms".<sup>xi</sup>

Kino exchanges his moral and spiritual goodness for The Pearl for the necessities of earthly life. Steinbeck uses images of sea and from such grotesque animal existence, 'the pearl' comes to surface. He suggests a state of confusion between "illusion and reality".

The landscape represent such a confused state of Kino's consciousness. He cannot discriminate between illusion and reality, dream and actuality, temptation and uncertainties. The Pearl is involved with forces of violence inherent in Kino tearing open 'the mother-of-pearl': "Kino deftly slipped his knife into the edge of the shell, He worked the blade lever wise, the lip-like flesh writhed up and then subsided".<sup>xii</sup>

The landscape again is the symbolic state of affairs. It is Kino's unspiritual journey through that wasteland strewn with rocks and spiritual chaos. As he is pursued by evil mongers to possess the pearl, the unsurmountable obstacles and lack of security brings self-knowledge and commences the beginning of spiritual journey. He kills the pursuers but loses his own son in this act of violent escape. All his sights become unreal and he could not trust his own vision as the uncertainty magnifies to blot out the vision and clarity towards vagueness of a dream.

He decides to part with The Pearl. He goes back to Juana seemingly remote and removed from Heaven as he holds the great pearl in his hand looking into its gray surface and the light of burning. Suddenly he finds the pearl as ugly, a malignant growth, distorted and insane".

Kino throws the pearl away with all his might. As he flung it away, the "sense of possession and insanity" associated with it is gone. The greatest ritual of his life, the rarest action of renunciation is performed to regain peace of his soul. Thus, The Pearl is a parable of purgation and salvation relevant to this modern age.

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