

JOHN STEINBECK'S PARABLE OF THE PEARL

It is worthy to note the essential story as John Steinbeck tries to tell his moral teachings through his novel and I have illustrated his main ideas in the introduction. And here I am going to describe the moral teachings of John Steinbeck's parable of "THE PEARL".

The story opened with the song of family as Kino awakened at dawn in his hut. Although the morning was young, the hazy mirage was up, the uncertain air that manifested some things and hung over the whole Gulf so all sights were unreal and vision could not be trusted.

The condition gives us the symbolic effect of the theme and setting of the story. Kino, a young pearl diver, hoped that what he had expected would come true not just like the weather and the condition of Gulf Region. Soon the song of family was followed by the song of evil, accompanied by Juana's Hail Marys, when a scorpion moved toward her son, Coyotito and stung him. Kino stamped the scorpion to death. All the neighbours advised him to bring the child to the doctor but he realised that he was poor and could not pay the bill. But anyhow he ventured himself to send his son to the doctor. Even Kino knew that his race was not the same as the doctor's and Kino felt weak and afraid and angry at the same time.

It is true that the doctor refused to see them because the doctor knew that they could not pay the bill. We are human beings with the same rights and we are not allowed to look down upon other people even when they are humble and poor. We can say that John Steinbeck wants equality and freedom for Kino's race.

On that same day, Kino went out to the sea with his wife to search for the pearl under water. When Kino dived into the bottom of the sea, he saw the shell was partly open and he saw a ghostly gleam and then it closed down. In this very beginning of the event, Kino should know that what was not certain could not be trusted; but Kino did not know about this signal. Kino found the great pearl of the world, perfect as the moon and as large as a sea-gull's egg and on the surface of the pearl Kino could see the promise of his future. After Kino found the pearl, the doctor came to Kino's hut to see the child.

Here we see that the doctor, who is an educated man would degrade himself by going to Kino although at first he had refused to help them. He is a greedy man and he comes only when the patient is a wealthy one. He knew that Kino had found the pearl of the world; so the doctor hoped to get it from Kino if he could cure Coyotito.

Not only the doctor was tempted by the pearl but also the brokers of the pearl buyer. They tried to possess the pearl too. It is understandable that everyone envied Kino's fortune and good luck and some of them hoped to get profits from it. In this novel the central figure is the pearl and it is the pearl itself that changes human's value and character. We must know that the pearl itself is a pearl beyond price which promised salvation to Kino. By selling this pearl Kino hoped that he could send his son, Coyotito to school, he could buy fine new clothes, a new harpoon, a rifle, a new canoe and he also could have a church wedding with Juana.

But Kino's hopes are too much and it is not good to have such hopes, we must be moderate in our hopes and ambitious to avoid disappointments because gods do not love men's plans and do not love success unless it comes by accident. In other words we must be content with what we have even if we are not satisfied with our condition.

It is not good to want a thing too much.
It sometimes drives the luck away, you must want it just enough, and you must be very tactful with God or gods.¹

In this case Kino hoped that the pearl would be a salvation to him. For it is said that humans are never satisfied with their condition, you give them one thing and they want something more and it is the same case with Kino. Kino's imaginations about his future turned into what he did not expect before.

The poor man who suddenly lucky cannot control himself, a foolish madness came over Kino, so he spoke foolish words and mumbled his hopes. And the priest advised him that he had to give thanks to the gods who had given the pearl of salvation to him and Kino knew that the gods took revenge on a man if he was successful through his own efforts. The vanity of human wishes: Our goals may be fine, but we just cannot reach them.

After the first attack on Kino by someone in the dark his wife, Juana said that the pearl was evil and it was like a sin and it would destroy them. So she asked him to throw it back into the sea or to break it between the stones or to bury it and forget the place. But Kino's mind was set and he was sure that he could overpower all the troubles that he might face in the future.

¹ Steinbeck, John - THE PEARL ; Bantam Pathfinder edition, New York, page 24.

But Kino thought that the only way to avoid the troubles was to sell the pearl. Then on the other day he brought the pearl to the pearl buyers but here we got a good look at the pearl buyers and the pearl brokers, who were really only one pearl buyer with many hands a kind of collective organism, whose purpose was to cheat the pearl fishers. But we cannot accuse them for they are only the men doing their job as well as they can. They offered so little for the pearl and they told Kino that the pearl was not really a good one and that he overestimated the price of the pearl. But Kino knew that he was being cheated and he was very angry at the pearl buyers and the brokers as well. He thought that the town dwellers were like the colonial animals because there were so many people who tried to cheat, to steal his pearl and furthermore tried to kill him for his pearl; they wanted to possess the pearl even they must kill the owner.

On his return to his hut, Kino decided to go to the capital himself to sell the pearl there for higher price. And Kino asked his brother's opinion about his plan to go to the capital but it was a trial and he must cross the Gulf and face many problems before arriving there safely. There were two hopes in his neighbours' mind, First of all they hoped that he would be content with his pearl which came to him. Secondly they hoped that sudden wealth would not turn Kino's head because it nearly always happens that sudden wealth changes a man and his character. That is why his neighbours hoped that Kino would be just the same man like he was. But in this case it appeared that not wealth changed the man but fate did. Kino had lost one world,

his happiness and his peaceful world and had not gained another, the world of which he was dreaming of.

After Kino had insulted the pearl buyers who told him that the pearl was of no great value, his brother Juan Tomás said to him "you have defied not the pearl buyers, but the whole structure, the whole way of life, and I am afraid of you"; but anyhow Kino tried to do so. He wanted to change his life and to go to the capital.

After the second attack, Kino still refused to give up his pearl and said that the pearl had become his soul. If he gave it up he would lose his soul. This suggestion extends not only to the pearl itself, but also to the characters and setting as well.

That night when Kino was sleeping his wife, Juana took the pearl from its hiding place and she walked quietly toward the sea shore trying to throw it back into the sea because she thought that the pearl was evil and brought troubles to them. But she did not know that Kino had known her intention and he followed her to the sea shore; when she held up her arm to throw the pearl back into the sea Kino held her arm and wrenched the pearl from her. Kino struck her and they had an argument about the pearl but there was no anger in Juana's heart.

Kino had said that he was a man who is not afraid of facing troubles and that meant certain things to Juana. It meant that he was half insane and half god, on the other hand it meant that Kino would drive his strength against the sea to go to the capital. Juana in her woman's soul knew that Kino wanted to raise their race and his family. Of course she would follow him, there was no question of that.

Juana had been trying to rescue something of what they had had of the time before the pearl was found.

On the way home Kino was attacked by someone in the dark and at the end of the fight he killed the man with his knife and the pearl disappeared from his palm. But it fell down on the ground and Juana found it and returned it to Kino; and then fear covered them because they had killed a person and hurriedly went home to the village, but as soon as they came, they saw their hut was on fire and they directly went to Juan Tomás' hut and hid themselves there to avoid being caught.

This is another trouble that Kino had to face to get his new world and from this event we knew that his brother still tried to help Kino and brotherhood supports Kino's hopes either from his brother or from his neighbours.

When Kino found that his canoe was destroyed by some else he was distressed and sad because his life depended upon this canoe but anyhow he did not have any idea to take or to borrow one of his neighbours' canoes and instead of going to the capital he fled away to the mountainous inland area.

.... it did not occur to him to take one of the canoes of his neighbours. Never once did the thought enter his head, any more than he could have conceived breaking a **beat**.²

Kino inherited this canoe from his father and his father again from his grandfather and he must keep his canoe in good condition because he could not afford a new one.

² Steinbeck, John - THE PEARL, page 80.

And now someone had destroyed the canoe, it was the most terrible thing that happened to Kino because this canoe was the most valuable thing he possess.

After some consideration, Kino decided to flee to the hills and he took the pearl with him; and Juana, carrying Coyotito accompanied him. Relentless trackers came after them. Kino finally killed his pursuers, one of whom had killed Coyotito when he fired a rifle up the mountainside. Then Kino and Juana walked openly and silently in broad daylight back to town and through the streets to the beach.

It was a final decision for Kino to give up the pearl after having so many troubles. From this experience Kino realised that wealth not always brings happiness. And the pearl of salvation brought disaster on Kino for it caused strife between husband and wife, made that someone destroyed their canoe, set fire to their hut and killed their beloved son. Furthermore Kino's loss was gods' punishment upon him for trying to leave his station. Therefore we must be content with what we possess and we are not allowed to be dissatisfied with our condition. At last Kino went back to his station, having lost everything because he had not been satisfied with what he had.

The people say that the two seemed to be removed from human experience; that they had gone through pain and had come out on the other side; that there was almost a magical protection about them.³

³ Steinbeck, John - THE PEARL, page 116.

What a pity it was that the pearl had destroyed this family and finally Kino had to admit that his wife Juana was right about the pearl. It was evil and it is like a sin and it would destroy them.

We recalled how Kino struck Juana brutally when she had once tried to throw the pearl into the sea. And we also remembered how his brother, Juan Tomás pointed out, that Kino was not engaged in a private struggle and that he was not just defying the pearl buyers, but the whole structure, the whole way of life. And what Kino wanted was not luxury and riches, but more advantages for himself and for his family; a better return for his labour. That was what the pearl offered him and what he threw away with the pearl. The narrator told us that it was quite proper for a man to increase his wants.

"..... it is one of the greatest talents the species has and one that has made it superior to animals that are satisfied with what they have.⁴

When they came to the beach, Kino first offered the pearl to Juana to throw it back into the sea. By doing this he admitted that she had been right about the pearl and that he, the leader of the family, was wrong. And we understood that in Kino's simple gesture Juana recognised her triumph and the humility of her husband. But she refused to throw the pearl away, and so she gave dignity and pride once more to her husband, whose position was to do such important things. And all this was understood by Kino as he accepted again his position and threw the pearl back into the sea.

⁴ Steinbeck, John - THE PEARL, page 32.

Kino's hand shook a little, and he turned slowly to Juana and held the pearl out to her. She stood beside him, still holding her dead bundle over her shoulder. She looked at the pearl in his hand for a moment and then she looked into Kino's eyes and said softly, "No, you". And Kino drew back his arm and flung the pearl with all his might. Kino and Juana watched it go.⁵

Kino, however, taking the pearl that promised salvation, rejected it and returned to familiar and comfortable poverty. Having said:

"This pearl has become my soul.....
If I give it up I shall lose my soul."⁶

he did give it up for the pearl of salvation became damnation for Kino. And Kino went back to his station, having lost everything because he was not satisfied with what he had.

When Kino had thrown the pearl back into the sea where it belongs he became a free man again.

5 Steinbeck, John - THE PEARL, page 117.

6 Steinbeck, John - THE PEARL, page 87.