



FOSTERING AND PRESERVING THE STRENGTH AND DIGNITY OF A MAN WITH REFERENCE TO JUANA IN JOHN STEINBECK'S THE PEARL

L. Ravi Shankar, Ph. D.

Associate Professor of English, Arignar Anna Government Arts College, Villupuram 605 602.

Abstract

John Steinbeck was a prolific and popular writer who received the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1962. His strength as an artist lies as much in converting the topical into universal. Steinbeck's women characters are stronger than their male counterparts. They try to be perfect counterparts to their men by making active contribution to their domestic, social, economic and political life. Undoubtedly, their prime concern is their duty towards their family, but they are not blind to the happenings around. A living example of it is Ma Joad in *The Grapes of Wrath* (1939) and Juana in *The Pearl* (1947). For instance, one may perceive both the angel and the tigress in Ma Joad and Juana. This paper aims to study on how Juana as a representative of womankind plays the role of fostering and preserving the strength and dignity of his man, Kino in the novella *The Pearl*.



[Scholarly Research Journal's](http://www.srjis.com) is licensed Based on a work at www.srjis.com

John Steinbeck was a prolific and popular writer who received the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1962. He has been variously called a mystic, primitive and a naturalist, but one character was constant: he was a good storyteller. Steinbeck's simple, touching novella *The Pearl* originally appeared in the magazine *Woman's Home Companion* in 1945 under the title "The Pearl of the World". This novel features a simple, visually evocative style that in many ways recalls the narrative flow of a film. Additionally, its simple prose style echoes the traditional style of a moral parable, particularly the biblical parables of Jesus. Its evocation of natural beauty and its use of the short, simple parable form may have influenced Ernest Hemingway in writing *The Old Man and the Sea* (1952).

Set in Mexican Indian village on the Baja Peninsula, the novella tells the story of Kino, an Indian pearl driver who discovers a massive, beautiful, and extremely valuable pearl. The pearl fills Kino with a new desire to abandon his simple, idyllic life in favour of dreams of material and social advancement. Kino, the protagonist of the novella, is a dignified, hardworking, impoverished native. He is a simple man who lives in a brush house with his wife, Juana and their infant son, Coyotito, both of whom he loves very much. After he finds the great pearl, he becomes increasingly ambitious and desperate in his mission to break free

of the oppression of his colonial society. Ultimately, Kino's material ambition drives him to a state of animalistic violence, and his life is reduced to a basic fight for survival.

Kino, Juana and Coyotito live a modest life until a calamity strikes. Coyotito being stung by a scorpion is taken to the doctor. Due to Kino's poverty the white doctor's servant rejects them. Later, the same morning, Kino and Juana take their family canoe, an heirloom, out to the estuary to go diving for pearl. Juana makes a poultice for Coyotito's wound, while Kino searches the sea bottom. As their surprise and wish, Kino surfaces with the largest pearl either of them has ever seen. Kino lets out a triumphant yell at his good fortune. But, Kino and Juana's effort to save Coyotito by finding a big pearl with which they can pay a doctor prove to do more harm than good.

Except his neighbours and his brother Juan Tomas and his wife Apolonia everyone around him become very much jealous about Kino's new finding and tries to steal it. Instead of a boon, the great pearl turns out to be a great threat to his family. Towards the evening, knowing Kino's new treasure, the doctor arrives, explaining that he was out in the morning but has come now to cure Coyotito. Kino decides to bury the pearl under the floor in a corner of the brush house. When the doctor inquires about payment, Kino explains that soon he will sell his large pearl and inadvertently glances towards the corner where he has hidden the pearl. This mention of the pearls greatly intrigues the doctor, and Kino is left with an uneasy feeling.

Before going to bed, Kino reburies the pearl under his sleeping mat. That night, he is roused by an intruder digging around in the corner. A violent struggle ensues, and Kino's efforts to chase away the criminal leave him bloodied. Terribly upset by this turn of events, Juana proposes that they must abandon the pearl, which she rightly considers as an agent of evil.

The next morning, Kino and Juana make their way to town to sell the pearl. Juan Tomas advises Kino to be wary of cheats. Indeed, all the dealers conspire to bid low on the pearl. Kino indignantly refuses to accept their offers, resolving instead to take his pearl to the capital. That evening, as Kino and Juana prepare to leave, Juan Tomas cautions Kino against being overly proud, and Juana repeats her wish to get rid of the pearls. Kino silences her, explaining that he is a man and will take care of things.

In the middle of the night, Juana steals away the pearl to throw it back into the sea. But Kino wakes up and tackles her, takes the pearl back, and beats her violently, leaving her in the

crumpled heap on the beach. As he returns to the brush house, a group of hostile men confronts him and tries to take the pearl from him. He fights the men off, killing one and causing the rest to flee, but drops the pearl in the process. As Juana ascends from the shore to the brush house, she finds the pearl lying in the path. Just beyond, she sees Kino on the ground, next to the dead man. He bemoans the loss of the pearl, which she presents to him. Though Kino explains that he had no intention to kill, Juana insists that he will be labelled as a murderer. It is the resourceful Juana who suggests and decides that they must flee. Kino rushes back to the shore to prepare the canoe, while Juana returns home to gather Coyotito and their belongings.

Desperate to find refuge, Kino, Juana and Coyotito duck into Juan Tomas's house, where they hide out for the day. At nightfall, Kino, Juana, and Coyotito set out for the capital. Kino discovers that three trackers are following them. He decides that they must hurry up to the mountain, in hopes of eluding the trackers. A breathless ascent brings them to a water source, where they rest and take shelter in nearby cave. Kino attempts to mislead the trackers by creating a false trail up in the mountain. Kino, Juana and Coyotito then hide in the cave and wait for an opportunity to escape. Just as Kino prepares to attack, Coyotito lets out a cry. When one of them fires his rifle in the direction of the cry, Kino makes his move, killing the trackers in a violent fury. In the aftermath, Kino slowly realises that the rifle shot struck and killed his son in the cave.

The next day, Kino and Juana walks side by side into the town. They are going back to their brush house. Juana carries her dead son slung over her shoulder. They walk all the way to the sea, as onlookers watch in silent fascination. At the shore, Kino pulls the pearl out of his clothing and takes one last, hard look at it. Then, with all his might, under a setting sun, he flings the pearl as far out into the sea as he can.

Against Juana's better judgement Kino's desire have wrecked their family. Juana, Kino's young wife, is reflective and more practical than Kino. Sensing the evil effects of the pearl, she pleads with Kino to destroy it. When he refuses, she herself tries to throw it back into the sea itself. As a reward for her efforts, she gets a hard beating. Defeated in her attempts to dispose the pearl, she resigns herself to the will of her husband and stands by him in his desperate state of mind. Juana, in her women's soul, knew that the mountain would stand while the man broke himself; and the sea would surge while the man drowned in it.

Juana proves herself a perfect counterpart to her husband. As Dr. K. Sreenivasan has observed, “But ultimately she owns not by opposing him anymore but by coming to his aid and succour whenever he needed them the most. And her success owed primarily to her understanding of his nature and also of the significance of their relationship” (Sreenivasan 126). She is a living soul full of strength that radiates confidence around. Throughout the novel, she remains steadfast, loyal and committed to the family. Like a mother, she tends Kino when he is wounded, rushed to help him when he is attacked, and drags the body of the man he murdered into the bushes. She is strong-willed sustainer. She sustains her husband, and their being together is a hope for their future children. As Gladstein rightly observed “When his determination flags, she encourages him, when situation becomes dangerous; she will not leave him, though he tries to make her go” (Gladstein 52).

Juana’s unbelievable display of mental strength and practical wisdom is seen at the end of the novel when the worse has happened. Their child is killed by the trackers. It is here that she acts like Ma Joad and Hemingway’s Pilar and lets his man regain his sense of dignity, who is to be filled with renewed strength. Realising the futility of his ambition and Juana’s better judgement Kino offers the pearl to Juana to throw back into the sea. But she refused to do the job and insists her man to do the job himself. By making Kino throws the pearl away himself she gives him a chance to recover some of his manhood and his ruined honour. Thus she helps him to maintain his dignity as a man. Dr. K.Sreenivasan says of Juana: “The growth and maturation of Kino’s personality would never have taken place but for the preservative role played by Juana” (Sreenivasan 125). She is the invisible mother-goddess to her man who needs comfort. She realises rightly that it is the man who is to protected against evil, if the man lives on more children will follow. Thus, with the above cited illustrations from the novella *The Pearl*, I conclude this paper that Juana is a real representative of womankind. She undoubtedly plays the worthwhile role of fostering and preserving the strength and dignity of her man which is absolutely proved in this simple and touching novella.

Works Cited

- Arya, Sushma. *John Steinbeck: A Study of his Fictional Women*. New Delhi: Shirpra Publications, 1999. Print
- Gladstein, Steinbeck’s *Juana; A Women of Worth*. Minneapolis: Minnesota Press, 1979. Print.
- Steinbeck, John. *The Pearl*. London: Pan Books, 1970. Print.
- Sreenivasan. K. *John Steinbeck: A Study of his Novels*. Trivendrum: College Book House. 1980.