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TRACING THE THEME OF GROUP BEHAVIOUR IN JOHN STEINBECK'S 'THE PEARL'

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ABSTRACT

The following paper is a study of tracing the theme of group behavior in John Steinbeck's novel, *The Pearl*. Steinbeck's individuals exhibit group behavior that exerts significant influence on others. They form the foundation for the long span human survival. Steinbeck's group-man theory rested on the view of human psychology and on the Darwinian understanding of cultural evolution. Steinbeck ultimately wished to convey a theory of human behavior grounded in a particular kind of biological naturalism. Steinbeck says there is a difference between the individual and as part of a group. He says that group is a unit often with a drive, intent, an end, a method. Steinbeck reveals some observations about the man's behavior, both as an individual and as part of a group, a theme which is repeated in his other novels too. The ideal group formation, in the writer's view, is one in which the members act as individuals and at the same time contribute creatively to the formation of a harmoniously integrated whole. This article explores the presence of group behavior in John Steinbeck's *The Pearl*.

KEY WORDS: Constructive and destructive group behavior - human society - individual reactions – well being of the common man

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INTRODUCTION

Steinbeck explores the potential of both constructive and destructive group behaviors in *'The Pearl'* (1947). Steinbeck says that while the constructive group behavior elevates the human nature, the destructive group behavior only leaves man with destruction, war, migration, hatred, and fear. Steinbeck thus saw a powerful force standing above individual men that made them components of a bigger entity, even as it threatened or debased their existence by destroying their individuality and working in irrational ways they could not understand or control. The Pearl's message is universal which identifies the danger of materialism in it. The study explores the group behavior of the characters present in the novel as of constructive group behavior and destructive group behavior. The neighbours and the beggars are analysed under constructive group behavior while the doctor and the priest are observed under the study of destructive behavior.

THE INDIVIDUAL REACTIONS

Steinbeck's La Paz village depicts a world in which, for the most part, humans shape their own destinies. They provide for themselves, follow their own desires, and make their own plans. The pearl divers plunge beneath the waves hoping for divine blessings. Kino's men are portrayed as good souls who are primitive but helpful. When Kino finds the pearl everyone comes to know about it very quickly. In addition to the general reactions evoked by the discovery of the pearl, Steinbeck gives the various individual reactions. First, the priest wonders if Kino will contribute to the church. The doctor thinks of his past life in Paris and what he could do now with the money. The beggars remember that a man made newly rich is often generous and that they may receive alms from Kino. Each of the pearl buyers thinks of the pearl and wishes that he could get it in order to make a new start in life. In general, the pearl affects the entire town and becomes everyone's pearl or everyone's dream of greatness. Kino's brother Juan Thomas and all the neighbors gather in his house with immense happiness.

KINO, THE PROTAGONIST

The story points out Kino's family, which is completely cut off from his house due to voracious people. In the course of the story, Kino's development is seen throughout the novel. It can be described as a realization. He realizes the dark potential of the human beings. It also tells about the group behavior of the characters present in the Steinbeck's novels who is completely involved in attaining their goal. Steinbeck's Kino in *The Pearl*, is the protagonist of the novel whose behavior changes after finding a great pearl. Kino is a dignified, hardworking, impoverished native who works as a pearl diver. He is a poor yet simple man who lives in a brush house with his wife, Juana, and their infant son, Coyotito, both of whom he loves very much. He is happy as a husband and a father and is happy with what he has. After Kino finds a great pearl, he becomes increasingly ambitious and desperate in his mission to break free of the oppression of his colonial society. First, he wants Coyotito to go to school, second, he wants to give a proper marriage for Juana in church, and, third, he wishes to have a rifle. His behavior changes because of his wishes after getting the pearl. He becomes cold-hearted and even kills people in order to protect his wishes. Ultimately, Kino's material ambition drives him to a state of animalistic violence, and his life is reduced to a basic fight for survival. When the pearl opens his eyes for a larger world, he as a complete man wishes to become a good husband and a father. Hevelin (2000) observes,

"The distinguishing personal mark of practically all Steinbeck heroes is their leadership and complete involvement in a communal action." (92)

THE CONSTRUCTIVE GROUP BEHAVIOUR

Steinbeck portrays Kino as an innocent pearl diver who is content with his simple life in the beginning. However, two occurrences, Coyotito's scorpion sting and Kino's discovery of the pearl bring Kino into the civilized world. As Kino begins to covet material wealth and education for his son, his simple existence becomes increasingly complicated by greed, conflict, and violence. According to Burkhead (2002),

"Thus, Kino's world can be compared to Eden, a place for contentment and innocence. His wife, his son, his canoe, and the energy taken from the rising sun fulfill Kino so that he appears to have no yearnings beyond his simple existence." (110)

When Kino finds the pearl, his discovery travels quickly. Everyone in the town knows that he has found 'the Pearl of the world', even before Kino returns to his brush house. People of every group in the town from the beggar to the businessman's dream of how Kino's pearl can help them. Kino and Juana ignorant of other's jealousy, delight in their good fortune. They invite their family and friends to share their joy in their newfound treasure. All of the neighbours stare at the mighty pearl with a mixture of hope and fear at the enormous changes that lie ahead. Juana revives fire and the neighbours overstay even when the dusk approaches. Steinbeck uses his voice to present the beggars' opinion of the doctor. The beggars know of the doctor's

ignorance, his cruelty, his greed for money. They also know about his clumsy abortions and his little pennies he gave sparingly for alms. They have seen his corpses go into the church. The neighbours and the beggars were eager to join the procession when Kino was about to sell the pearl. Even his brother Juan Thomas with his wife Apolonia and children takes a great care for Kino and wants to protect him from the evil world.

THE DESTRUCTIVE GROUP BEHAVIOUR

Steinbeck portrays the characters of both the doctor and the priest, so unsympathetically in the pearl. The doctor has no good qualities and his actions show him to be the most dreadful, heartless individual that one can encounter. The mere mention of his name creates fear among the villagers. So, when he comes to see Coyotito, Kino allows him to see his son with utmost suspicion. *But the trap was set. He couldn't take the chance.* (32) He never cares about anyone and never indulges himself in anything about the welfare of others. When he attends Coyotito he gives the baby something so that the doctor can return in one hour and pretend to cure the baby of the scorpion bite. Juana has already applied the seaweed poultice and has taken care of the bite. So the doctor's actions and the treatment are only pretence and acts of inhumanity which are completely against the ethics of his profession. He then tries slyly to get Kino to give him the pearl for safe keeping. This shows the doctor's greed and his evil in its full extent.

The priest comes to deliver a benediction. He reminds Kino to give thanks for the pearl and also offers his blessing. The priest asks Kino to remember the church in new prosperity after been attracted by the beauty of the pearl. Juana tells their intention to be married in the church and the priest leaves them with a kind word. A sense of evil overcomes Kino after the arrival of the priest. The neighbours disperse and Juana begins to prepare a meal of baked beans. The priest is not presented as evil as the doctor, but shown as a person not really concerned about the spiritual well-being of his people. He does not act as a person who represents the church. He does not even know who Kino is in the beginning, but immediately thinks of the repairs which the church needs and which can be done if he can get Kino's pearl. The villagers know why he comes to visit Kino since his visits to the village are so rare. The doctor has no redeeming qualities, and his actions show him to be the most despicable, heartless individual that one could encounter. Steinbeck says that this is the way of life of the poor pearl divers of the La Paz village. The simplicity and the hardship of the life of the fishing village is exploited by the group behavior of the civilized people. The village community, though aware of the evil doctor, the priest, and the well organized and corrupt pearl divers accepts them as their lives are restricted within the coastal region.

CONCLUSION

The chapter thus examines the group behavior in John Steinbeck's *The Pearl*. The novel present the powerful characters to strive towards a perfect end and to reach out to illuminate the path of mankind, step by step, searching for that perfect combination of influence and love to guarantee a creative, democratic community for all. Steinbeck fixed his gaze on the marginalized and dispossessed migrants and conveyed a palpable empathy for ordinary folk. The characters exhibit both constructive and destructive group behavior in the novel. The primitive people of La Paz still sustain their priceless qualities even when they come across the valuable pearl. Steinbeck invites readers to see the migrants as he saw them- people who had dignity and grace, who stepped forward with gritty will. The effective portrayal of group-man is seen in this novel, which carries Steinbeck's masterful messages though the decades.

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