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Abstract:

Race and racial inequality have powerfully shaped American history from its beginning. Most grievous issues of the day such as discrimination, prejudice, violence have found their way into the various forms of literature i.e. poetry, drama and fiction. Though Americans like to think and driven by the quest of freedom, initially religious and later economic and political liberty, but it must be noted that from the beginning, American society was equally founded on worst forms of domination, oppression and inequality that involved the complete denial for slaves. The purpose of this research paper is, understanding the ways in which racial oppression occurs and imposes harms on people in the racially oppressed society with special reference to *The Pearl* written by John Steinbeck. Marxist approach has been used besides the method of textual analysis to bring out the theme of racial discrimination in the novel.

Introduction:

Racial discrimination refers to a variety of practices, beliefs, social relations and phenomena that work to reproduce a racial hierarchy and social structure that yield superiority, power and privilege for some and discrimination and oppression for others. Racism exists when ideas and assumptions about racial categories are used to justify and reproduce a social hierarchy and racially structured society that unjustly limits access to resources, rights and privileges on the basis of race. In other words, when a person is treated less favourably than another person because of his race, colour, descent, national or immigrant status, is racial discrimination. For example, when Europeans arrived in what is now called U.S.A., they often justified the taking of land from the Natives by promoting the idea that Indians were not white, so they were inferior and did not deserve the land as the white people do. Less than a decade after the establishment of British colony in Jamestown (1607), white Europeans brought African slaves to the colony to tend the crops; they were forced to work for no money. In

the case of slavery, these men, women, and children were thought of more as a property than people, which was based on the belief that their race made them inferior to white people and they were only suited to serve their owner by performing manual tasks. They were treated as less than humans because of the colour of their skin. John Aurthur, in his book, *Race, Equality and the Burdens of History (2007)* defines racism as an attitude of racial contempt. He says: "Some writers have thought of it as an attitude; others claim that it includes beliefs, systems of oppression, or a combination of those. I argue that at its core racism is neither a belief nor an oppressive institutional structure. Instead, it is an attitude of racial contempt" (2). According to Aurthur, racism is an attitude people take towards other people in order to dehumanize the 'other' race.

According to social sciences, racism can take different forms and operates in combination with at least one another.

1. **Representational Racism:** is a tendency to cast people of colour as criminals and as victims of crime rather than in other roles, or as background characters rather than as leads in films and television. Racism has profoundly shaped American society and politics in ways that deeply affected the lives of white Americans as well especially the poor whites. Ruling class has often used race as a part of their strategy to divide and conquer to protect their class interests. For example, in 19th and early 20th century, employers used racial minorities as strikebreakers in industrial strikes. It weakened the ability of unions to win the strikes, and contributed to develop resentments against blacks and other minorities within the white working class. At the same time, racism has negatively affected the interests of less privileged class.
2. **Ideological Racism:** it refers to views, beliefs and common sense ways of thinking that are normal in a society or culture. For example, in American society many people believed that white and light skinned people are more intelligent than dark skinned people. Historically, this particular form of Racism is responsible for and supported and justified the building of European colonial empires and US imperialism through unjust acquisition of land, people and resources around the world.
3. **Discursive Racism:** it is often expressed linguistically in the 'discourse' we talk about the world and people in it, as racial slurs and hate speech, also as code words that have racialized meanings embedded in them, like 'ghetto', 'thug' etc.

4. Interactional Racism: means how we interact with other people when a person of colour is verbally or physically assaulted because of his race. Hate crimes are the extreme manifestation of this form of racism. It causes anxiety, stress, emotional and physical harm to people of colour, on daily basis.
5. Institutional Racism: takes form in the ways that policies and laws are crafted and put into practice through society's institutions. For example, the practice among real estate agents and mortgage lenders of not allowing people of colour to own property in certain neighborhoods and that forces them to accept less desirable mortgage rates. It preserves and fuels the racial gaps in wealth, education and social status.
6. Structural Racism: it refers to the ongoing, historical and long-term reproduction of the racial structure of the society through the combination of all the above mentioned forms. It manifests in wide spread racial segregation on the basis of education, income and wealth and gives rise to large scale inequalities in the society.

Sociologists observe a variety of racism within these above mentioned forms. Some may be overtly racist like use of racial slurs and hate speech, and others may be covert, kept to oneself, hidden from the public view.

Racial Oppression in American Society:

White supremacy extends over centuries in the USA; even abolition of slavery could not end racism. Instead it permeated through out the society in other ways in a racial caste system known as Jim Crow. More than a set of laws, it was a way of life that kept Black Americans from exercising their rights as full citizens.

Jim Crow sent a message that whites were superior to other races in all ways, including intelligence, behaviour, morality and social status. Legalized racism from federal and state governments continued in the USA until the late 1960s. And the racism is still going on in one form or the other in 21st century. According to Liza Lugo:

"Segregationist policy taxes all citizens not only on financial level, but on a civil, mental and emotional level with reduced property values, a strain on community relations, tensions and violence, depression and anxiety, the depression of being

deprived of the most basic needs, the threat of arrest and conviction and the confusion of changing law in rapid succession. The cost of ignorance and abuse is way too high and Americans simply cannot afford the bill anymore" (Lugo, 2014).

Racism is significant segment of the racially dominant group in American society, yet it is a form of domination that harms the racially oppressed groups.

Racial Discrimination in *The Pearl*:

John Steinbeck, like Dos Passos, has the same Idea and the vision towards America after the World War I. He presents a class based, fragmented and racist American society during 1920s and 1930s. Although Marx ignored racism, he described the process that created modern racism. His explanation of the rising of capitalism put the African slave trade, the extermination of indigenous people in America by Europeans and colonialism at its heart. Much of the social analysis that focuses on the injustices and inequalities in the US society has been influenced by the ideas of Karl Marx and the Marxist tradition. Marx further connected his explanation of slave trade in the rise of capitalism to the social relations that produced racism against Africans. In his *Wage Labour and Capital*, he clearly says how the economic and social relations of emerging capitalism thrust the blacks into slavery. Colonial slavery and capitalism are linked as slavery provided the main source of accumulation of wealth that led to capitalism in Europe and North America. Exploitation of workers especially Black people led to a racist ideology to justify racial oppression that continued up to the present period.

The Pearl by John Steinbeck, depicts the theme of racialism and prejudice in various ways through out the novel. As the novel was written in 1942, it addressed a number of social issues that gained prominence during that period and remained chief concerns of the 20th century society as growing awareness of more sinister aspects of colonialism and domination of natives by European settlers, and the powerlessness of the economic underclass.

Kino, the protagonist and his wife Juana, swallow their pride and go to the white European doctor for the treatment of their scorpion bitten son Coyotito. The doctor was a member of the race that has "beaten and starved and robbed and despised Kino's race" (*The Pearl*, p.15). Doctor refuses to help saying that he is a doctor "not a veterinary" (p. 17). It is a blatant expression of his racial contempt towards Kino and his people whom

he treats as animals. But when the doctor comes to know about the great pearl that Kino has found, his attitude towards him, not his race, changes. He says: "He is a client of mine... I am treating his child for a scorpion sting" (p.128). The doctor uses an overbearing self confidence to trick Juana and Kino into thinking that their son might be still at risk from scorpion bite.

Similarly, Kino's racial and economic powerlessness is further demonstrated in dealing with the priest and the pearl buyer. They all do their best to keep the poor peasants ignorant and docile. They use whatever method they can to accomplish this financial instability, religious ceremonies, and threats of eternal damnation. When the pearl is discovered, however, each power controller makes the mistake of thinking he knows how to have his way with Kino, the pearl finder. But Kino may be ignorant but not mentally deficient.

The priest of the town is "graying, aging man with old skin and a young sharp eyes. Children, he considered these people, and he treated them like children " (p. 33). He is another symbol of power, keeping Kino and his race down. Moreover, he encourages his congregation to be submissive to the authorities. When he hears about Kino's luck, he tries to recall whether he has done service to his family and calculates how far the pearl might go towards repairing the Church. He reminds Kino of his duty towards church. So priest is not different from doctor.

Another example of racialism in the novel occurs in the way in the which the pearl buyers, who are all Spanish, manipulate and take advantage of Kino's lack of education and knowledge of the value of pearl. The pearl buyers offer Kino a low price for the great pearl. The pretence of the open market and the price wars, fake lead the Indians to think they are getting a fair deal. Although the Natives feel that they are active participants in the economic order but actually they are kept ignorant to be exploited. As Kino could not get a fair price for his pearl, he decides to go to the capital; and in doing so, he rebelled against the system and the society, and placed himself in a dangerous position. Each and every inhabitant of the town wants a piece of Kino's pie. In a society both colonialist and capitalist, the richer only get richer, and poor are not allowed to get any benefit of their labour, how hard they may work. The Spanish colonizers control the wealth and resources of the town while the indigenous people are forced to live in poverty and work for low wages.

If Kino is oppressed by the situation, Juana, his wife is subjected to Kino. She has no role in buying or selling the pearl; she is never even once consulted by Kino about the course of action regarding the pearl. And when she says that the pearl is an evil and Kino should throw it back to where it belongs, she was hit by Kino thereby asserting that he is a man and Juana has no recourse. Kino being a man oppresses the woman's better sense just as the colonialists oppress the natives of La Paz.

Even the name of the town is ironical. La Paz means peace. But the town is peaceful because the majority of people are demoralised. Their peace is one of an oppressed people. The Pearl stirs up this peace and only bloodshed restores calm.

Marxism views colonialism as a form of capitalism, exploiting the resources of the occupied countries. Marxists believed that colonialism is the highest phase of imperialism and its origin is in the capitalists' nature of expansion for profit. Europeans created colonies to tackle the problem of constant and cheap labour, raw material and availability of markets for manufactured goods. We can see that racist ideology is refashioned to justify imperial conquests of some countries. A handful of world powers vied to carve up the poor nations into colonies for cheap raw material and labour. For centuries people of the world were portrayed as inferior races, incapable of determining their own future. And racism remained as a means to justify the domination of millions of people by various European powers, the United States and later by Japan. As Lance says, "Because racism is woven into the fabric of capitalism, new forms of racism arose with changes in capitalism. As the U. S. economy expanded and underpinned U.S. imperial expansion, imperialist racism - which asserted that U.S. had a right to dominate other people such as Mexican and Filipinos - developed...anti-immigrant racism developed " (Roots of Racism).

Conclusion:

The Pearl exposes the harsh reality of racialism and discrimination that existed in the Mexican society during the early 20th century. Through the novel Steinbeck throws the light on the injustices and hardships faced by the indigenous people who were subjected to racial prejudice and discrimination by the Spanish colonizers.

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