

THE REPRESENTATION OF CLASS STRUGGLE IN JOHN STEINBECK'S *THE PEARL*

(REPRESENTASI PERJUANGAN KELAS DALAM NOVEL JOHN STEINBECK *THE PEARL*)

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Abstrak

Penelitian ini membahas tentang representasi perjuangan kelas dalam novel The Pearl karya John Steinbeck. Perjuangan Kelas merupakan gagasan Karl Marx yang menunjukkan konflik antara kaum borjuis dan proletariat yang tidak dapat dihindari dalam masyarakat kapitalis. Penelitian ini memiliki tiga pertanyaan sebagai masalah utama yang juga merupakan tujuan utama dalam melakukan penelitian. Pertanyaan pertama bertanya tentang bagaimana perjuangan kelas tercermin dalam tokoh utama dalam novel. Yang kedua adalah penyebab perjuangan tokoh utama dalam novel. Dan yang terakhir adalah dampak dari perjuangan terhadap tokoh utama dalam novel. Penelitian ini menggunakan pendekatan sosiologis. Dalam penelitian ini menggunakan teori Karl Marx terutama tentang perjuangan kelas dalam masyarakat kapitalis. Karena penelitian ini merupakan penelitian kualitatif, metode dokumenter digunakan untuk mengumpulkan data, serta metode induktif yang digunakan untuk menganalisis materi.

Kata kunci: Perjuangan kelas, Borjuis, Proletariat, kapitalis

Abstract

This research discusses The Representation of Class Struggle in John Steinbeck's *The Pearl*. Class Struggle is the idea, associated with Karl Marx, showing the conflict between the bourgeoisie and proletariat is inevitable in capitalist societies. This research has three questions as the main problems which are also the main goals in doing the research. The first question asks about how class struggle is reflected by the main character in the novel. The second is the causes of the main character's struggle in the novel. And the last is the impacts of struggle towards the main character in the novel. This research uses sociological approach. In this research uses Karl Marx's theory mainly on class struggle in the capitalist society. Since this research is a qualitative research, a documentary method is used to collect the data, as well as the inductive method which is used to analyze the subject matters.

Keywords: Class Struggle, Bourgeoisie, Proletariat, capitalist

Introduction

The Pearl is a novel written by a modern famous American novelist, John E. Steinbeck. The novel originally appeared in the magazine *Women's Home Companion* in 1945 under the title "The Pearl of the World." It was reissued as a novel in 1947 and also written during the time in which he is at the top of his popularity. John Steinbeck is an author who concerns with social problem. John Steinbeck's works reflected the issues of his era throughout his novels. It is proved by the fact that most of his writing talks about social problems happened around him at the time. John Steinbeck is an author greatly concerns with the struggle of the American working class.

In the novel *The Pearl*, John Steinbeck writes about social class struggle. Class Struggle becomes a necessity in any society with a wide gap between the "haves" and the "have not". Those people have their own dreams, problems, or their own struggle to reach what is the best for their life. Especially for the lower class of society who wants to climb into the higher one by continuous and hard struggle to be successful.

Based on the fact above, it is interesting to analyze the Kino's struggle as the main character. Kino struggles to be accepted in society and to achieve better life because Kino belongs to the lower class and there are different social treatments for upper class in *The Pearl*.

According to Barry (2002) Marxism sees struggles among the social class to get higher position (2002,157). It

means that Marxist theory talks the struggles that happen among the class society to get better life for the status they have because the more money someone has, and the power they can get in the society.

Karl Marx, a theorist and historian, he examined social organization in a scientific way; he believed that human history consisted of a series of struggle between classes. Those were between the oppressed and the oppressing. In short, the Marxist theory focused on the struggle of some classes to get better status, power, socioeconomic situation between different social classes, so they could achieve an equal status and acknowledgment in society.

Based on Marxism, many authors adopted Marxism to their literary work such as the novel *The Pearl* by John Steinbeck. Karl Marx's theory especially class struggle becomes an interesting topic to discuss. It shows the efforts of the working class in getting better life.

The approach is the general tool to solve the problem to discuss. In this research, I use a sociological approach. It is used to understand social and economical situation when the story was created or the problems connected to the society in general. Elizabeth and Burn (Endaswara,2008:78) said that the important perspective of sociological approach is that literature is not only the effect of social causes but also the causes of social effect. It shows the relation between sociology and literature, these two influence each other.

This study has several purposes. The first is to know class struggle reflected by the main character in the novel, the second is to describe the causes of the main character's struggle in the novel, and the last is to find out the impacts of struggle toward the main character in the novel. This study is expected to motivate and give advantages for readers in comprehending literature especially about class struggle. The study is also expected to give a contribution or as a reference for anybody who writes the thesis related to this topic.

Research Methodology

Since this research is the qualitative research, the data obtained are the qualitative ones. The qualitative data is non numeric data. According to McMillan (1992:9) "qualitative data are based on research that focuses on understanding and meaning through verbal description rather than through number". It is used in order to comprehend the meaning of verbal words in the story. The data are collected from the analyzed story. In this case the data will be in the written verbal form. Some supportive literary criticism books, especially the ones that are related to the theory of Class Struggle by Karl Marx are also taken.

This research only applies documentary method of data collecting. The primary data are selected data related with Kino's struggle which are taken from the novel *The Pearl*. The secondary data are used to support the analysis. The secondary data are taken from the dictionaries, articles, journals, internet browsing and the previous research of

the similar object but different topic. Three previous reseaches are chosen as the important information and guide in this discussion.

The data processing is done by categorizing the information acquired. All of the data from the novel and struggles of the main character are categorized in order to understand the novel better, as the representation of the class struggle which is represented in the main character of the novel.

Result

The result of this study is to show some problems which is related to class struggle in the real life of John Steinbeck as the author of the novel and it is represented on the main character of his novel, *The Pearl*. Hence, this research wants to elaborate the specific information and fact about Kino's struggle to more detailed information about what are the causes of the main character's struggle in the novel, and what are the impacts of the struggle towards the main character in the novel will be explained briefly in the next chapter.

Discussion

Steinbeck places his criticism of the American system which is about economic disparity. He writes about social problems with his own perspective on the state of rural America society. Steinbeck's character illustrates his experiences and circumstances that shaped his vision of America.

Steinbeck in creating his work is affected by other aspects of social impacts. He exposed the exploitation of the working class of society in his novel. Most his characters isolated and oppressed, and from his literary work he explains about struggle.

Marx's idea on Steinbeck is clearly seen in the beginning of the novel. In *The Pearl* is illustrated that the different class causes class struggle. Class struggle then becomes the motive force of human history that finally conducts social revolution. "From forms of development of the productive forces these relations turn into fetters. Then begins the epoch of revolution"(Marx, 1867:20). In this case, the work of art is the part of social revolution where it is applied to spread proletarian ideology. This scheme pushes Steinbeck to write his novel as the means of struggle. In explaining Marxist theory, Tyson conveys:

"For Marxism, getting and keeping economic power is the motive behind all social and political activities, including education, philosophy, religion, government, the arts, science, technology, the media, and so on. Thus, economics is the base on which the superstructure of social/political/ideological realities is built" (2006:53-54).

Steinbeck's work of art in this case is categorized as the superstructure basis. It portrays the change of social system because of economic system called capitalism. This situation creates a huge gap between bourgeois and proletariat that drives the between-class conflict. Moreover, in the novel *The Pearl* the very first words, "in the town" in the prologue, demonstrate that the novel deals with the capitalist activities as cities and towns are usually associated with economic competition of the capitalists and exploitation of the poor and marginalized class of society. In the novel *The Pearl* there are two classes that are the bourgeois and proletariat. The darkness of the Capitalist system and Kino's resistance to it is evident from the start of the novel. Kino belongs to the exploited strata of the society. He is a representative of the have-nots and he must struggle to get his rights.

The Depictions of Class Struggle by the Main Characters

In the system of capitalism, there are emergences of two class bourgeois and proletariat. The distinction shows the gap in social economic strata. We can not avoid the fact that there is differentiation between these societies later becomes the major point of social strata. This is also the step which class struggle happens.

Marxism sees progress as coming about through the struggle for the power between different social classes. The view of history as class struggle regards it as 'motored' by the competition for economic, social, and political advantage (Barry, 2002:156).

The statement above shows that the different social class appears, because the higher class is more powerful than the lower class in economic, social, and political affairs.

Related to the life of lower class society in America *The Pearl* is one of the novels that describes about class struggle in the American society. Class Struggle is reflected through Kino because he belongs to the lower class and there are different social treatments from the upper class. Kino is a poor Indian who lives near the town of La Paz, Mexico, on the Gulf of California. The conflict starts when Kino's son is stung by a scorpion, Kino tries to ask a doctor in the city to help his son, but the doctor refuses him because Kino has no money to pay him. And then Kino struggles, he finds the Pearl and is able to get medical help for his son. When Kino finds a great pearl, he is overjoyed and begins to aspire to a better life, a grand wedding, clothes, guns and he announces that he will send his son to school, which will liberate Coyotito from the yoke of colonialism.

1. Getting Better Treatment (Service)

The Pearl shows the way Kino's struggle to get his rights, having a good medical treatment for his son Coyotito. At the doctor's house, Kino knocks at the gate.

He both fears and resents the doctor, a powerful man not of his own people. Presently, the gate opens to reveals one of Kino's own people, employed in the doctor's service, but the doctor rejects him because he has no money.

"Has he any money?" the doctor demanded.
 "No, they never have any money. I, I alone in the world am supposed to work for nothing-and I am tired of it. See if he has any money!"
 (Steinbeck, 1973:6)

The doctor is refusal to cure Coyotito because Kino lacks of the money to pay him represents colonial arrogance and oppression.

After he was refused by the doctor, Kino takes their family canoe, an heirloom, out to estuary to go diving for pearl. And he finds the great pearl, perfect like a moon as large as the seagull's egg.

Kino, in his pride and youth and strength, could remain down over two minutes without strain, so that he worked deliberately, selecting the largest shells. Because they were disturbed, the oyster shells were tightly closed. A little to his right a hummock of rubble rock stuck up, covered with young oysters not ready to take. Kino moved next to the hummock, and then, beside it, under a little overhang, he saw a very large oyster lying by itself (Steinbeck, 1973: 9).

Kino deftly slipped his knife into the edge of the shell. Through the knife he could feel the muscle tighten hard. He worked the blade lever-wise and the closing muscle parted and the shell fell apart. The lip-like flesh writhed up and then subsided. Kino lifted the flesh, and there it laid the great pearl, perfect as the moon. It captured the light and refined it and gave it back in silver incandescence. It was as large as a sea-gull's egg. It was the greatest pearl in the world (Steinbeck, 1973:10).

In the quotation above, Kino tries to struggle to get their rights by looking for a lot pearls, and then he can help his son's treatment. He finds a pearl which has never been seen before and extremely much more precious than the others. After finding that pearl, Kino hopes his wife's happiness and his son's better education. He wonders what the pearl will be worth. And he wonders whether it is necessary he baptizes Kino's baby, or marries him for that matter.

2. To Get Good Price

However, Kino is not fortunate when he sells the great pearl. He faces so many troubles because the price of the great pearl is beyond his thought. He thinks that the price of the pearl can be expensive, but the fact the buyer can only offer a low price

He suspected their conspiracy and refused to sell the pearl. He decides to take the pearl to the capital in order to sell it on fair price.

'I am cheated', Kino cried fiercely. 'My pearl is not for sale here. I will go, perhaps even to the capital. 'The dealers glanced at each other quickly. The first offered fifteen hundred pesos, but Kino was already pushing through the crowd with Juana beside him (Steinbeck, 1973:27).

The statement above explains that Kino feels that he was deceived by the buyer just because the buyer wants to get more profit from that pearl, but Kino still struggles to get the price that he hopes in the other places.

3. Defending his Property

Kino killed a man while protecting the pearl. He ran from the men who wanted his pearl and once they caught up to him and he killed them too. Kino acted wildly and killed a man trying to steal the pearl, "He heard the rush, got his knife out and lunged at one dark figure and felt his knife go home..." (Steinbeck, 1973: 31). Kino's attempts to safeguard the pearl predispose him to violence in defense of his property.

The Causes of the Main Character's Struggle

1. The Unfair Treatment

In the life of the lower class society there are so many discrimination, pressure, and unfair treatments. As Kino, he tries to get his rights, when his son Coyotito is stung by a scorpion. Kino looks for help since he is poor and not able to afford the medical expense, but the doctor rejects him because he has no money.

The doctor never came to treat the poor villager, so Juana decided to go to the doctor. Kino and Juana reach the doctor's house, but he refused to see them because he knew about Kino's poor financial condition. (Steinbeck, 1973: 4).

From this quotation, that the lower class usually does not get better treatment, because he is a fisherman and doesn't have money to pay the treatment. To struggle to get his rights, Kino and his wife Juana decide to meet the doctor, but the doctor does not respond and refuse to treat Kino's son Coyotito. The doctor as the high class tends to be selfish and never cares with the others especially the lower class because they only think that money is the most important thing for him.

Class struggle happens because there are any resistance that causes from the different social condition, because of that case arises to struggle their rights.

Marx hypothesis is about the proletariat who feel that they have been exploited because of their position in their class of capitalist society, so they will rise up to stop the oppressor from

the other class who has higher position (Soekamto, 1982: 184).

The statement shows the gap in social economic strata. We could not avoid the fact that there is different of social classification as it exists. This difference between these societies later becomes the major point of social strata. This is also the first step the class struggle happens.

2. Exploitation

The pearl buyer used to exploit the poor fishermen for their owner to gain their commission out of the profit: "They waited in their chairs until the pearls came in and then they cackled and fought and shouted and threatened until they reached the lowest price the fisherman would stand" (Steinbeck, 1973 :11).

Kino tells as the idea of Marx that the task of human being is to destroy exploitation by uniting in a group which results in classless society. Proletariat is the victim of capitalist system conducted by the bourgeois class. Benn in Dobbie states that the bourgeois becomes the holder of the authority.

"The Marxist is aware that the working class does not always recognize the system in which it has been caught. The dominant class, using its power to make the prevailing system seem to be logical, natural one, entraps the proletariat into holding the sense of identity and worth that the bourgeoisie wants them to hold, one that will allow the powerful to remaining in control" (Dobbie, 1998:85).

Based on the explanation above, the proletariat class is always controlled by the bourgeois because bourgeois becomes the dominant class and more powerful than the proletariat.

All the pearl buyers in the village have been cheating the pearl divers for years. They agree in advance to buy pearls for much below their true value. When Kino shows his pearl to the appraiser the man tells him that is like fools gold, nothing but a curiosity.

In anger Kino refuses the offer, stating that the pearl is worth fifty thousand pesos. He announces that he will take the pearl to the capital, where he can get a fair price for it. In defying the pearl dealers in this way Kino threatens the entire structure of life in his village. The pearl makes him think great thoughts and makes him wish to break free from the oppression of the rich people who have abused the Indians for so many years.

"Marx's calculations determine that, the amount of surplus value equals the degree of exploitation performed by the capitalist" (cited in Balci, 1987:20). In other words, the capitalist intrinsic motive for exploitation his /her worker is to gain profit.

3. To Get Better Life

Kino's struggle to get the pearl to change his life and get better social status is the struggle to get the same rights from the society to avoid exploitation and oppression. Class consciousness appears, Kino as lower class feels oppressed and exploited by the higher class, so he consciously struggles for his rights.

In the novel *The Pearl*, Kino's struggle to get the great pearl is a kind of struggle to survive and to fulfill his daily needs. Kino tries to sell the great pearl in order to get the big benefit, the pearl is related to good fortune and hope weaken and the pearl becomes associated more strongly with human plans and desires. Kino good and can give education for his children.

"Now that Kino has the pearl he can dare to let himself dream of things that were before impossible. Kino's brother Juan asks "what will you do now that you have become rich man?" Kino thinks carefully. "we will be married-in the church." Kino can see Juana and himself standing before all the others in the church. "we will have new clothes," Kino says. From there is but a small leap to further extravagance: The rifle breaks down all barriers in Kino's mind. If he can have a rifle then he can have anything he wants, all thanks to the pearl." (Steinbeck, 1973:12)

From the statement above shows that the pearl association with good fortune and hope, and the pearl becomes associated more strongly with human plans and desires. Kino hopes that he and his family get better life. Kino details his plans : a proper marriage in the church, new clothing for the family, a harpoon, and a rifle.

Marxist theory focused on the struggle of some classes to get better status, power, and socioeconomic situation between different classes, so they could achieve an equal status and acknowledgement in society.

The Impacts of Struggle Towards the Main Character

1. Materialistic

Kino started to believe when he found the pearl is the most important object. He becomes a materialistic person because his desire is to get much more money from the sale of the pearl and he hopes his life will be better.

Kino hits his wife and becomes more evil after he has found the pearl. Also, Kino has lost his humanity and becomes like an animal.

"And rage surged in Kino. He rolled up to his feet and followed her as silent as she had gone, and he could hear her quick footsteps going toward the shore. Quietly he tracked her, and his brain was red with anger. She burst clear out of the brush line and stumbled over the little boulders to the water, and then she heard him coming and she broke into a run. Her arm was

up to throw when he leaped at her and caught her arm and wrenched the pearl from her. He struck her in the face with his clenched fist and she fell among the boulders and he kicked her in the side." (Steinbeck, 1973:31)

Kino's possessiveness for the pearl causes him turn against his family that he loves.

Through his materialism, Marx recognized that humans are like other animals and live in and through inorganic nature, in practice; this interaction with material objects is a direct means of life (Marx, 1998:63).

2. Greedy Society

After Kino discovers the pearl, each person is consumed by greed and imagines himself as the one who has found the pearl. Everyone fantasizes what he or she would do with the wealth that the pearl represents, including the doctor, who previously refused to help Coyotito but now says that the baby is a patient of his. The danger from the scorpion poison has already passed, but the doctor takes advantage of Kino and Juana's ignorance to tell them that the baby is in mortal danger. The doctor gives Coyotito a medicine.

The doctor said, "I was not in when you came this morning. But now, at the first chance, I fear too, for the hundreds of years of subjugation were cut deep in him.

"The baby is nearly well now," he said curtly.

He said: "sometimes, my friend, the scorpion sting has a curious effect.

"sometimes," the doctor went on in a liquid tone, "sometimes there will be a withered leg or a blind eye or a crumpled back. Oh, I know the sting of the scorpion, my friend, and I can cure it."

(Steinbeck, 1973:15)

the quotation above explains that the doctor wants to give medical treatment for Coyotito after he knows that Kino found the great pearl, and the doctor hopes that he is paid more by helping Kino.

Since the pearl buyers all work for only one man, they will not make any personal profit from the purchase of a great pearl such as Kino's. Getting the greatest pearl for the lowest price possible is now beyond a simple thrill. Escaping from one to the other of the buyers, it almost seems a mouse trying to get away from the hungry felines. Kino feels that he is being cheated, for they have agreed not to push up their price.

When a tracker attempts to steal the pearl, Kino is described as he defends his home and the pearl in complete darkness. Never is the tracker seen directly by him for there is no light within. Kino is struck on the head by the thief, but he is unconcerned by it. She realizes that this great pearl is the source of evil because the desire has awakened in the people surrounding them. She tells Kino of the evil he has brought and as a great sin which should be got rid of immediately. Kino is determined more than

ever that the pearl will change their condition and status in the societies.

The phenomenon of making money as a priority is characterized by quick and short options: selfishness, exploitation and assassination. All these misdemeanors lead inevitably towards brutal behaviors. These oppressors like all oppressors first have to dehumanize poor people in order to better exploit them. In reality, it is always easier to exploit people once you debase them just as the black people were degraded under the slavery. This is what provokes the murder of people among themselves in order to survive.

In the end of story Kino lost his son, when he protects the pearl. Kino lays down the pearl, takes out the pearl and throws it into the water. He failure to struggle in achieving his rights. He realizes that he cannot do anything to against capitalism system.

The injustice of his dispossession is also considered like a tragedy as one can see through *The Pearl* story which is an allegory of materialism and its horrible consequences. All these facts demonstrate the danger of prosperity in a society where people think every method is good to reach one's goals even if it is necessary to use violence. It is interesting to notice that Steinbeck relies on Marxist predictions that capitalist domination creates its loss through its own victory. In other words, the excessive materialism of landowners leads to their ruin.

Conclusion and Suggestion

Marx's idea on Steinbeck is clearly seen in the beginning of the novel. In *The Pearl* illustrates that the different class causes class struggle. The concept of class struggle defines the history of all human civilization. In capitalism two basic classes confront each other, the proletariat and bourgeois. The contradiction between these classes is immediate reflection of the fundamental contradiction of capitalism.

Based on the thought of Marxist about social class (Bourgeois and Proletariat) the conflicts that are appeared; injustices because the high class is more powerful than the lower class especially in economic dimension. So the effects of different class influence the social life of people such as the emergence of class struggle.

From this research, it results a conclusion that Steinbeck tends to give the explanation of the lower class (proletariat), that they cannot do anything against capitalist systems. In this novel, Kino just can give up and cannot do anything; he realizes that he is always controlled by bourgeois. This is proven by Kino's failure to struggle in achieving his great future.

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