

Inferiority and Social Identity in Some Female Characters: A Study in Some Chicano and American Novels

By: Dheyaa Khaleel Nayel

College of Education, Kerbala University, Kerbala, Iraq, dhiyanile@gmail.com

المخلص

عقدة النقص والهوية الاجتماعية في بعض الشخصيات النسائية: دراسة في بعض الروايات الجيكانيكية والأمريكية على الرغم من النساء يلعبن دورا محوريا في تطور وازدهار أي مجتمع، غالبا ما يوصفون بانهم أقل مرتبة من الرجال. تحاول هذه الدراسة تسليط الضوء على نقطتين وهما عقدة النقص لدى النساء وهويتهن الاجتماعية في بعض الأعمال الأدبية لجون شتاينباك وساندرا سينروس حيث تظهر العديد من العوامل التي تؤدي إلى الأفكار الخاصة بعقدة النقص والهوية الاجتماعية وهذه العوامل يمكن أن تقسم إلى ثلاثة أنواع رئيسية وهي عوامل تاريخية وعوامل نفسية وعوامل اجتماعية.

لفهم النقاط المذكورة انفا سيتم أولا الإشارة إلى بعض النقاط في تاريخ الجيكانيين، ثانيا سيشير الباحث إلى العلاقة بينهم أي الجيكانيين و الأمريكيين و أخيرا فان الأوجه النفسية التي تظهر جليا في بعض الشخصيات النسائية يمكن أن تعود إلى المشاكل التي واجهتها النساء الجيكانيات في الماضي حيث من الصعب الفصل بين هوية الفرد و تاريخه .

يفرض المجتمع عادة خصائص محددة على النساء وهن من جانبهن راغبات او غير راغبات سيجعلون من هذه الخصائص جزء مهم من شخصياتهن وبعض هذه الخصائص ستؤدي إلى عقدة النقص لدى النساء. على سبيل المثال وبسبب شح فرص العمل يطلب من النساء أحيانا العمل في أماكن آمنه بالنسبة لهم او ان تلك الأماكن مخصصة تحديدا للرجال وعليه فعمل النساء هناك يبدو غريبا.

تحاول هذه الورقة البحثية كذلك الخوض في فكرة ان العيش في مجتمع ذكوري عادة ما يجعل الأمور صعبة بالنسبة للنساء حيث ان كل شي يتم التعامل معه من خلال نظرة ذكورية فهو السيد والقائد في المنزل وفي العمل وفي كل مكان.

سيتم التعامل مع الشخصيات النسائية في الأعمال الأدبية الثلاثة لجون شتاينباك "اللؤلؤة" "الرحلة" و "فئران ورجال" ورواية "منزل في شارع المانجو" لساندرا سينروس حيث ان لكل كاتب طريقتة الخاصة في رسم الشخصيات وتكشف هذه الورقة البحثية بان بسبب عوامل اجتماعية وثقافية فان الكاتبين رسموا شخصياتهم النسائية بصورة مختلفة.

Abstract

Although women generally play a pivotal role in the development and prosperity of any society, they are often labelled as being inferior to men. This paper attempts to shed light on two points: females' inferiority and their social identity in some literary works written by John Steinbeck and Sandra Cisneros. There appear to be some factors leading to the ideas of inferiority and social identity. Those factors can be divided into three main types: historical, psychological and social.

To understand the points we have just mentioned, we are going to refer first to some points in the history of the Chicano people. Second, the researcher will refer to the relationship between them and the Americans. Finally, the psychological aspects clearly noticed in some female characters can be attributed to the problems the Chicanas encountered a long time ago as it is hard to separate one's identity from his history.

The society usually imposes certain features on women, and they on their part, willingly or unwillingly, will adopt those features as a substantial part of their personality. Consequently, such features will lead to women's inferiority. For instance, due to lack of job offers, women are required to work in places where they aren't safe or those places are typically for men so working there seems odd.

The paper also attempts to explore the idea that living in a male-centered society usually makes things difficult for women as everything is viewed through the male's eye. He is the master and the leader at home, at work and everywhere.

The female characters in the three works written by John Steinbeck "The Pearl", "Flight" and "Of Mice and Men" and "The House on the Mango Street" written by Sandra Cisneros will be investigated because each one of the writers has his own perspective in delineating characters. The paper reveals that due to social and cultural factors, the two writers depicted their female characters differently.

Key words: women, inferiority, social identity, society, chicano(a)

Introduction

Women often play a fundamental role in the development and success of any society, and to get an idea about that role, we are required to say something about the society in which women live. Historically speaking and due to political and economic reasons, there used to be a conflict between the United States and Mexico and that conflict resulted in a large part of Mexican territory occupied by the Americans. In that struggle, the Mexicans, as a matter of fact, tried to defeat the invaders, but their effort went in vain as their enemy was strong and well equipped. As a result, those people were forced to flee their land and to experience the life of homeless people. Such an experience had its impact on the Chicano people.¹

It is known that history moves in the particular realms of time and place; it is limited to specific points like time and setting, and in this way it is different from literature which takes universality as its major component. Still, history can be taken into consideration in literary studies. For instance, some literary genres took history as one of their basic constituents, and the history of the Chicano people is full of examples about wars and displacements which can be taken as the roots of inferiority we find in some Chicano characters. Such historical facts are the raw material for the works written about those people as they also led to a state of loss and estrangement for the Mexicans.²

Not really far from the war and its terrible consequences and speaking of economy, the Americans decided to invade the Mexican territory because it is full of resources which were quite useful for the American economy. Those poor people were deprived from their own resources and they saw that those resources were used and enjoyed by their enemies. Not only men but even women were under the impact of such historical facts.³

Having in mind that “No literature exists in a vacuum”, we are tempted to give examples from the history to elaborate the points of inferiority because history is rather important for having a better understanding about any group of people. The literature of that group isn't to be viewed separately as it is the outcome of past and the present experience the writer has in his mind. In this case, knowing about history gives us an idea about society, people and literature. This shows that literature is as important as history.⁴

Let's talk about the word ‘Chicano’ which has been applied by Mexican Americans in a derogatory sense to refer to another Mexican American of a lower class”⁵

However, this negative sense doesn't continue as “it is being used as a term of self-esteem to identify the Mexican American as he is; that is “a product of a Spanish – Mexican – Indian heritage and an Anglo-Saxon influence”⁶

This ‘derogatory’ dimension and feeling of inferiority can also be felt in the sense that in spite of the fact that the Mexicans provided the necessary resources to cement the American economy, the Americans looked down at them and eventually those Mexicans were deemed inferior and this feeling had its impact on the Chicano character, in particular those living in the states.⁷

The idea of inferiority can be attributed to several factors. For instance, we have the social and the political factors. As for the political factors, we can notice that the war is of great importance. Due to that war, families from the Mexican territory fled to the states to witness a new life which is known for its hardships and unfairness of different kinds: social, psychological and political. For instance, families were forced to leave their homeland to settle in a different area, or to be ruled and controlled by foreigners. As a result, Mexicans lost their land and eventually their identity; the war with its violence and atrocities had its impact on the Chicano's identity.⁸

As a matter of fact the foxy term identity cannot be viewed alone; it is the outcome of the collaboration of different factors and one of those factors is the historical ties between the Americans and the Mexicans. In terms of those relations, the Americans made use of the resources available in the Mexican territory and this made them powerful. Therefore, it is really disheartening to notice that you provide a lot of things, yet you are often seen as inferior. The Chicano went through the same experience as their land was full of resources. Unfortunately, those resources were the reason behind their pain and suffering. Other powerful countries in fact occupied and oppressed them due to those resources. Regrettably, what seems to be a godsend turned out to be an indignation for the Mexicans as they were suffering and going through such troubles; due to this, they had no time even to think about matters like identity. In fact, they were more concerned with maintaining their own safety. In this paper, we mainly try shed light on some historical facts which are important in our attempt to say something about the point of inferiority which is apparent in some Chicano characters in general and women in particular.⁹

The reason why John Steinbeck was chosen in this paper is the fact that “he spent his summers working on nearby ranches and later with migrant workers on sugar beet farms. There he became

aware of the harsher aspects of migrant life and the darker side of human nature, which supplied him with material expressed in such works as *Of Mice and Men*.” It is quite clear that this is part of his personal experience.¹⁰

Signs of Inferiority

In addition to the factors mentioned earlier, the language used by any group of people plays a basic role in the making of their identity so forbidding those people from using their native tongue is basically an attempt to erase the main part of that identity, and to make the Chicanos appear simply like an unidentified group. In this regard, we notice that the Chicano people were not permitted to use their language regularly and this lack of language adds a great deal to the idea of inferiority. For this reason, one can argue that the Chicano people were culturally oppressed, let alone the economic and political oppressions which were quite evident in the stories written by John Steinbeck who was largely encouraged by the way the Americans used to look at Mexicans which “has also generated feelings of racial superiority”¹¹. Due to this fact, in some of his stories, the Chicanos are often depicted as inferior and helpless and when it comes to women, they are considered subordinate and even oppressed by their male counterpart.

The point of inferiority is also deeply rooted in the Chicano history. True, this hasn’t lasted for a long time but it has its impact on the Chicano images in the works written by American writers like the one we have in this paper, John Steinbeck.¹²

Socially speaking, women have a basic role in the society which is largely determined by their relation with the male on one hand and with the society on the other. Women are oppressed by the male, and we have to bear in mind that the way people look at women plays a significant role in the weakness we notice in some female characters. More importantly, women are not far from the main stream of thought one can notice in any society, and very often this is due to some social reasons. For example, the family is often seen as the main social institution where the male is dominating and controlling everything.¹³

What we have in the society is usually portrayed in literary works as writers often convey the social issues either to suggest solutions for those problems or to encourage the readers to look at those troubles in a different way. In this regard, John Steinbeck followed the main stream of ideas in the American society. For instance, the idea of looking down at the Chicanos is seen in some literary works in which the idea of selling Chicanos is clearly manifested; in *Child of Fire*, we see that “honest Sancho shows a woman the mannequins along with an explanation of their more remarkable features”¹⁴

Chicano Literature

Although it is not easy to give a definition for Chicano literature, it is often defined as the literature written by writers of Mexican origin, and it often includes aspects from the American literature with those from the Mexican one. Moreover, Chicano literature is written in English, yet it doesn’t express the same thoughts like those we have in works written by American writers because it is not easy for the Chicano writers to mix with the American writers or even to express ideas cherished by them. In fact, those writers have their own experience and their own social background which make them quite distinctive in the way they look at things or basically in the topics they tackle. In other words, they are unique in having their own characteristics like language, themes and subject matter. For this reason, they can stand alone as a literary school.¹⁵

Another point one can mention about the writers in the Chicano literature is the feeling that the writers in that literature stand between the two traditions: the Mexican and the American; they in fact suffer from “the problem of belonging” and even in terms of religion they have the same problem because they are “catholic living in a protestant country”. They are also different in terms of language as they speak Spanish. This makes them different in terms of religion and language as the very important factors in the making of people’s identity. Moreover the thought of being rejected by the two sides forced the Chicano writers to work hard in order to have their own literature, which sheds light on their own experience. Being different in terms of the ideas mentioned before, the Chicano writers felt they are having a cultural gap with the Other.¹⁶

Even when we talk about race, we notice that the idea isn’t clear because we have different groups who are close to the Mexicans in a way or another. For example, we have the Hispanic, the Mexicans and those who are neither Hispanic nor Mexicans. In this case, the Chicanos are fighting for their uniqueness. They relentlessly attempt to know their Self, and this will encourage them to know more and more about the Other.¹⁷

When it comes to themes, we have a number of themes covering different areas of interest for the Chicano people like the relationship between the Chicano and the Americans and social issues faced by the Chicanos.

Women in Chicano Literature

The image of the Chicanas in works written by American writers is largely motivated by the stereotypical or conventional image those writers have in their minds and that very often has a negative aspect due to the writers’ subjective experience.¹⁸ They spend their life in a society where the Chicanas are continually belittled or even abused. For this reason, the female characters in Steinbeck’s works are often presented as being weak and less important or even have no distinctive feature of their own. Juana, for instance, in “The Pearl” can be taken as a model of the wife, and Curley’s wife in “Of Mice and Men” as an independent character defying the stereotypical image. The two characters belong to the same social background but they show different characteristics which render them distinctive. Juana knows her role as a wife and acts according to the prerequisites of that role and in spite of her awareness, she isn’t able to escape the negative aspects the writer tries to show. She often exhibits certain signs to give the impression that she is a strong woman. For instance, Kino, her husband, does not want to open the oyster immediately, but Juana prompts him to open the oyster.¹⁹

Her strength is planted in quite unsound environment where her ideas are not permitted to flourish, and where the society is divided between poor people like Juana and her husband and rich people like the priest and the doctor who are both eager to be close to Juana and her husband after finding the pearl; the two are moved by money. For example, the doctor refused even to receive Juana or to treat the son, but now, after discovering the pearl, he says that the son is his patient. More importantly, such people can do anything to make sure they will get the thing they are looking for. In this regard, doctor cheated on Kino and his wife by giving their already cured son a medicine to make him sick again; in this case there will be a chance to cure him again and why not to ask for the money he wants.²⁰ Although Juana belongs to a different ethnic group, she can manifest a number of her personal traits referring to her strength and defiance in standing against the tiresome conditions in her totally strange society.

In that society, she is deprived. She doesn't have a chance to treat her son. What made it possible for her to treat her son is the appearance of the pearl. This pearl opened a new horizon and new possibility for establishing a relation with her society, especially the doctor. As for Curley's wife, she does not go with the model provided by Juana and her attempt to defy the social norms doesn't even give her the chance to have her own identity because we know her as Curley's wife. She doesn't have a name - doesn't have what is essential for us everywhere- OUR NAMES. As a matter of fact, a name is the main element in defining our identity. Presenting this character without giving her a name indicates that the writer doesn't pay attention to the character and to her identity.²¹

However, in the works written by Chicano writers, women are delineated in a positive way because the writer's social and cultural background is the central factor in the making of the writer's style of characterization. Sometimes the writer tries to depict his own life. For instance, the "House on Mango Street" is an attempt to portray the writer's personal experience, and the female characters in this novel are often seen as strong, positive and full of energy.

The reason we have such a negative image is due to the writer's cultural background. The negative aspects can also be seen in the sense that American writers often use unpleasant language in describing the Chicana by highlighting her physical features, and they also try to reduce the Chicana to merely an object, and property belonging to someone else. In fact, the writer's way of looking at women from the minorities is not far from the stereotypical images already available in his social and cultural life. In this regard, she is seen in terms of what is required in the society. The society imposes how we look at women. For instance, in a masculine society, women are presented as weak characters as everything in the society should take the masculine dimension into consideration.²²

Women in a Male- Centered Society

Generally human societies are all dominated by the male and the females are usually if not continually given the second chair, and such a fact has for sure its negative impact on women. Moreover, the way we understand the role of women is largely determined by what is provided by the "male- centered" society. Due to such cultural standards, we can refer to situations or examples in the history of the Chicanos themselves; for instance, the Chicanas are not permitted to speak publically about violence in case they face that at home or elsewhere, and it is needless to say that hidden violence usually makes inferiority a permanent character trait.²³

In such situations people and women in particular are required to express themselves because if they remain silent, they will suffer a lot. This gives us the impression that societies in which the male has the upper hand often give no chance for the females to talk even about their own problems. Moreover, women are not permitted even to show their intelligence and sensuality, and Curley's wife in "Of Mice and Men" can be taken as an example in the sense that she tries to defy the already established rules of being totally controlled by her male counterpart.²⁴

In the novels written by John Steinbeck, we find a double-faced problem in the sense that the female characters are looking for success and recognition on one hand, and fighting the domination of men on the other. This point is manifested in "The Pearl" in which Kino treats his wife badly, but he soon changes his attitude after realizing the wisdom provided by her. The Chicana is looking for recognition both as a mother and as an individual in the so called "anti- woman" society.²⁵

The typical role a woman can play is within the boundaries of her family and those of her society. In the house, she can be the leading figure in her family; she is the princess as she has the right to move, to act and to do the things she likes. In fact, the family is the social entity in which a woman can really prove her fundamental role as a mother, a daughter and a wife; this role or the success in this role doesn't mean having a weak personality. On the contrary, a woman can take the role of the educator in her family as the children will be close to her asking her to provide them with sufficient pieces of advice. In this regard, she is the source of mercy and she is the embodiment of love and kindness. Such a role is achieved within the limits of the family as we have different set of relations out of the house.²⁶

In spite of what we have just mentioned, some look at the woman as merely a "generative tool"²⁷ and this adds to her inferiority. The word 'tool', as a matter of fact, forces us to look at the woman as being devoid of humanity or more importantly, as a thing, or property belonging to the male. Reducing the woman to this state means that she has been created to serve not to live, to be dependant not to be independent. For this reason, lacking such features makes women weak if not spiritually lost.

The idea of having weak women is also noticed as one of the features of class society. In fact, in different areas women are culturally, economically and even politically abused, and this is taken to be one of the aspects we find because of the advent of capitalism. Capitalism widened the gap between sexes. In spite of the strong grip the male had in the society, women were recently able to stand against that prominent role and to leave their own places where they used to spend their time at home. True that the male domination is no longer vividly seen, yet this doesn't really refer to the end of inequality.²⁸

"One of the noticeable features of capitalism, and of class society in general, is the inequality of the sexes. Men are the masters in economic, cultural, political and intellectual life, while women play a subordinate and even submissive role. Only in recent years have women come out of the kitchens and nurseries to challenge men's monopoly. But the essential inequality still remains"²⁹

Feminine Identity

In line with what we have just mentioned about living in a male-centered society, we can also refer to Shannon Wilson who thought that the identity of a female character can be seen in terms of her role as a mother, a wife and a daughter.³⁰

When we look at the stages of the development of the class society and the position women have in that society, we notice that the idea of inferiority is as old as this society itself. The slavery stage, feudalism, and capitalism which are the stages of class society, are all marked as being male centered. The female identity can also be formed depending on the fact that "When the usefulness of primary identifications ends, the individual's identity begins to form, depending, in turn, on the process whereby the community in question identifies the individual"³¹

Each identity has its own set of meanings which are suitable for that identity. For instance, a mother is required to know how to run a house and how to take care of her husband. A daughter, on her part, is also one of the basic roles a woman can play in her family and such a role is often seen in terms of the relation we notice between the daughter and her parents. It is needless to say that the family conditions also play an important role in formulating the female identity. Even after

marriage, the woman has her role as a wife and that is one of the basic roles a woman can have in her life time but this life is different from the life she experienced with her parents because her role as a wife is often associated with her role as a mother.³²

In different societies, religion plays a significant role in shaping the way people look at women and in some societies it gives the woman her unique identity. One of the main issues facing the Chicano women is that living in a society which is religiously strange to them. They are catholic people living in a protestant community, and such a thing will complicate their life. Such complexity can be seen in the sense that those people are not able to mix easily with the new society. In fact, women face a complicated sort of brutality which has two levels: one as a woman, the other as one belonging to an insignificant group.³³

The Chicano movement emphasized two things: a strong women and a well-structured family and Juana, in "The Pearl", appreciates the role of the mother and she is seen as a strong woman in a divided society. Speaking of the divide in the society, we can pick a good scene from the novel is when the buyers are presented as having their own rules and it is quite difficult for Kino to understand those rules or even to manage the bargain with them.³⁴

"Juana's main function is that of Kino's wife. As a member of a primitive race, the woman is the helpmate of the man. She prepares Kino's breakfast for him while he sits outside the brush house, and she attends to Coyotito's needs at the same time. She seems, at first, to be completely subservient to her husband and without any life of her own. She seems to be only the hardworking and loyal wife to a simple fisherman, and she does not complain about her lowly state. Yet, when the scorpion bites Coyotito, there suddenly emerges a new and different Juana."³⁵

Culture and Identity

Culture plays a fundamental role in the making of people identity and in the light of this we can notice that the female characters in the works we are studying belong to two different cultures. "in social identity theory, the social identity is a person's knowledge that he or she belongs to a social category or group"³⁶In "The Pearl", Juana belongs to a different culture which has nothing to do with what we see in other characters culture. For instance, her culture makes her even different from the doctor who is supposed to take care of her son and because of this difference, a huge gap is seen between her group and the doctor's group. It is important to mention that "The core of an identity is the categorization of the self as an occupant of a role, and the incorporation, into the self of meanings and expectations associated with that role and its performance"³⁷and "When she is told that the doctor will not come, without hesitation, she decides that they must take Coyotito to the doctor — an event so strange that the entire village follows along behind them". This is a new development in her character as we notice her strength vividly portrayed through her speech and in her attempt to visit the doctor-something none of her group ever dreamt of. It is one of the signs of strength we find in this female character which is demonstrated despite her weakness.

In this part, it is clear that the weakness is not merely an attribute of Juana alone but an attribute of her whole group. She seems to be quite powerful in the sense that she wants to go to the doctor to treat her son. As a matter of fact, "Juana is the prototype of the primitive native wife — strong, loyal, obedient, yet independent and courageous when the occasion demands such qualities"³⁸ and because she belongs to a lower group, the doctor is tempted not to meet her and her people. He knows that such people can't pay the amount he will ask for.

Being Mexican American means social and psychological implications resulting from the idea of belonging to two different sets of social thoughts because each one of them illuminates ideas akin to its own culture. In this regard, we can refer to the fact that “once in society, the people derive their identity or sense of self largely from the social categories to which they belong”³⁹ In fact, she has the values that has enabled her to face the difficulties in her life.

Female Characters between American and Chicano Writers

The images of women character belonging to the Mexican heritage and emerging from Anglo-American literature reflect the social and cultural attitudes which have colored the relationship between the two sides. In other words those characters are the outcome of that relationship. Often felt that Steinbeck’s ideas and the characters from the minorities we have abundantly in his works to show the pity for the problem of the workers,⁴⁰ and this is clear in “The Pearl” in which, in addition to the workers, we have the woman, Juana, who appeared to be strong in some situations and weak in others.

Curley’s wife in “Of Mice and Men” is totally seen in terms of her husband. We know her as Curley’s wife; her name isn’t important, and we get the impression that the writer is trying to objectify her.

When we look at the other writer, Sandra, we notice that in her work “The House on the Mango Street”, Esperanza moves with her family to a new house. She is positive and well developed as a convincing woman. Her development as a character stems from the fact that she represents the writer’s cultural background and due to this, positive attributes and aspects are given to this character.⁴¹

Although Steinbeck’s women are often seen as inferior to men, and this is due to the stereotypical role, Juana, the wife in “The Pearl”, seems to stand out of that role in the sense that one can sympathize with the woman by presenting her as a strong-willed woman who encourages her husband to ask for the doctor to treat her son. Juana is presented as a wise woman, and this makes her more prominent than her husband in an “anti-women” society. The way of delineating Juana represents a change in Steinbeck’s characterization because she doesn’t go with his traditional way of stereotypical delineation.⁴²

In one of the scenes in “The Pearl”, “Her mouth was still swollen where Kino had struck her, and big flies buzzed around the cut on her chin”⁴³ ; this really shows the male domination over the female and Juana felt that domination, but she didn’t try to stand against it. That’s why we said earlier that this woman combines the two sides: a strong woman and a weak one.

This can be taken as an example referring to the relation between man and women, and to the fact that living in a male-centered society will reduce the female to no more than an object belonging to the man. Some critics strongly belittled the way Steinbeck look at women due to his sympathy with those we described before as the morally corrupted, and this isn’t true because once we approach Curley’s wife for instance, we notice that this woman isn’t only running after fleeting desire. In fact, she is looking for someone who is able to listen to her; unluckily, the one who appears to be able to listen to her, is mentally unbalanced, and instead of cherishing her and putting an end to her loneliness, hushed her forever.⁴⁴

The domination of the male is seen in the “The idea that Kino goes first followed by Juana behind him shows Juana’s strict adherence to, if not reverence for, the customs and traditions of her culture, in which man is considered “half god” whose words are commands that must be obeyed without even questioning them”⁴⁵ This is simply because of the role of the culture in which man plays the central role.

In the chicana women, we can notice a number of identities like workers and housewives. In fact they have more than one dimension in their characters. As a matter of fact two important aspects are quite evident in those characters; they belong to a rich past in addition to their role as women. By having the two aspects, they can provide a strong character and in this way they can even get rid of the stereotypical image imposed on them.

“Over time and down through history, Chicanos have sought their maturity and cultural identity from a place of defeat and marginality.”⁴⁶ Esperanza Garcia tries to pinpoint that proving the identity for the Chicano people has never been an easy task.

Conclusion

The main findings can be seen in terms of the female characters and the society in which they live. We also notice that the writer’s cultural background plays a significant role in the making of his characters. Writers having the Chicano culture will definitely present their Chicano characters in a positive way. For instance, Esperanza , in “The House on the Mango Street” is different from other female characters in the stories we have in this study in the sense that she is positive and has the will and impetus to act as an independent character. In fact such features are seen in her ability to move as a free woman. Not only has this but even the writer given her a name makes her different from other characters.

In *Of Mice and Men* by John Steinbeck, Curley’s wife doesn’t have a name of her own. This method of delineating the female character is also attributed to the writer’s cultural and social background. The writer lived in a country in which the minorities are belittled or even abused, and this is part of the writer’s way of looking at people from the marginalized areas.

When we consider Juana in “The Pearl”, we can say that this character represents the real wife in the fishing society as she follows her husband obeying his orders. However, her strength is well demonstrated if the situation really needs that strength. In this case, her weakness is not the individual one but the weakness of her general group. Her people are weak and submissive and this makes it difficult for her to defy the already established rules in her own society. In fact, living in a primitive and weak society makes us weak as we cannot go beyond what is already determined.

To solve the problem of inferiority faced by women in a minor group, similar powers should be given to the representatives of the mainstream culture and to those belonging to the minor culture; those working in the fields should receive the same attention just like those working in tall buildings.

Living in a male centered society, and adhering to the thoughts of superiority and inferiority harvests nothing but innumerable problems both physical and psychological.

The road of life has many detours and if we really look at her as an important member in the society, we are going to cherish the woman and empower her role; if not, the woman will appear as no more than a sex tool.

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