

The Struggle for Survival in Ernest Hemingway's *The Old Man and the Sea*

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The *Old Man and the Sea* is a wonderful novel of Ernest Hemingway. The writer depicts the struggle of its protagonist for survival. It is a story of Santiago, an old Cuban fisherman who lives near Havana. Striving in poverty, the man sleeps in a shack and goes out for fishing to earn a living. The novel revolves around the old man and an extremely large fish, Marlin. He has been unsuccessful in catching a fish in the eighty four days and he considers himself unlucky. His fellow fishermen laugh at him for his failure. He determines to be successful in catching a fish at any cost and not to return until he catches a fish. This determination leads him to a long journey of struggle and suffering. "Some fishermen made fun of Santiago, but he never lost his temper for he was a strange old man, aware of his inner strength and peace and had only love for others" (Rao, 2007). Eventually, he succeeds in catching a very big fish. The character of Santiago is portrayed as larger than life and it is, of course, justifiable because his unbending commitment to his principles such as self respect and to explore for his capability to act and not lose daring under adversities. The novel ends with Santiago's emerging as a triumphant and a changed person.

Manolin, a young boy, is another important character of this novel. The old man was accompanied in this journey by a young boy named Manolin for the first forty days. He mainly appears in the beginning and at the end of the novel. His presence is felt even in the middle of the novel. He follows Santiago and learns the art of fishing from him. He has reverence for the old man. He takes care of the old man by working as his jovial attendant. He often brings for the old man coffee, food, newspapers, a clean shirt and other necessary things and makes him happy by discussing the baseball matches. Unfortunately, his father is a conservative

man and he does not allow him to go with the 'unlucky' old man, Santiago because the old man was unsuccessful to catch any fish. The relationship between Santiago and Manolin is of intense love and loyalty. Santiago does not treat Manolin as a trainee but as an equal. They share insuperable amount of admiration and truthfulness for each other. The relationship is obvious in the novel-"the old man had taught the boy to fish and the boy loved him". Though he appears as an unwilling obedient to his father, at the end, he is ready to let down his father and shows absolute faith in the old man. Santiago gifts him the spear. He emerges as a praiseworthy heir, who will definitely carry forward the legacy of the old man. This young boy can be seen as an external manifestation of Santiago himself. The old man has merry and unassailable eyes, which symbolize energy and bravery. Constant failure has made the old man an entity of fun and criticism for the fellow fishermen. However, Manolin has profound confidence in the capabilities of Santiago. For him, there are many good quality fishermen and some great ones. But none equals to Santiago. The boy provides Santiago with all the necessities of life. Santiago, who likes sports, discusses baseball matches with Manolin. This is an indication of his sportive spirit. Manolin's presence, at the end of the novel, symbolically indicates the idea of permanence of life. His assurance and determination symbolically confirm the old man's motto that human beings can be ruined but cannot be conquered.

Marlin, an eighteen feet fish, is the third and important character of this novel. Santiago succeeds in catching and bringing this marlin to the shore. The major part of the novel moves around the immeasurable courage that the fish shows after getting caught by Santiago. At the end, the fish is described by the novelist as a heroic figure and it gets love and admiration from Santiago, its killer.

Joe DiMaggio, a minor character, does not directly take part in the action of the novel. But his existence is often felt throughout the action in the form of loving remembrance. He is presented as a role model for Santiago. The specialty of this character is that he played out the concluding years of his career with a hurting bone spur on his heel and contributed to the victory of his team in numerous matches. Santiago's motto in life is that a human being can endure pain but cannot give up the battle. He also derives his positive inspiration and undefeatable strength from this great baseball player. A few references to this player in the novel generate sportive spirit in the action. He was playing baseball for the New York Yankees when the novelist was writing this novel. Due to the continuous failure, Santiago is determined to catch the fish. He is optimistic about his success. "The old man as a symbol of someone who has optimistic life. The writer calls him as the optimist. He has all values as considered as the elements of optimistic life" (Setyaningsih, 08).

He starts his mission by surpassing the island's coastal shallow waters and ventures to start rowing his boat into the Gulf Stream. He is firmly unwavering and hopeful. He believes that every day is a new day. It is better to be lucky. But he would rather be exact. When luck comes he must be ready. "He wanted to catch either a very big fish or no fish at all, for he took his occupation as a challenge and wanted to prove himself as the best fisherman" (Rao, 2007). Luckily, at afternoon, a large fish takes the bait that Santiago has placed one hundred fathoms deep into the sea. As the fish was very large, it starts pulling the boat towards the deeper sea. In this situation of crisis the old man misses the young boy. In this regard, P.G. Rama Rao observes, "The old man, who lives with, knows, and loves the Gulf Stream, is alone on it struggling with the marlin and the sharks and the stream" (Rao, 2007). Santiago is afraid of the possibility of the marlin going deep into the sea or dying. The old man's boat was being towed by the large marlin in the night. Under such critical crisis, he is determined to struggle and get fish back- "But I will do something. There are plenty of things I can do".

For the old man, fishing is not an act of sin. The obstinate Santiago believes that either he will die

or the fish will die- "Fish, I'll stay with you until I am dead. Come on and kill me. I do not care who kills who". Interestingly, he calls the marlin as his brother- "He is my brother. But I must kill him". Here the old man is sensitive about the fish but he is also aware about his profession and failure. "It's also important to emphasize Santiago's regard for the marlin. He apologizes profusely to the fish, but he still respects it and is motivated to win. He describes it as honorable and occasionally expresses regret over the pointlessness of a life that leads people to abuse the delicate animals of nature" (Sinha, 1214).

During the fight with the fish, Santiago receives injuries. A gush of the fish makes Santiago fall and he gets a cut below his eyes. He realizes that at that point, he must keep his strength unharmed and therefore consumes the tuna which was primarily to be kept as bait. Suddenly, the fish makes a wonderful leap into the air; Santiago observes that it is bigger than any he has ever seen; it is two feet longer than the skiff itself. To be successful in catching the marlin, he vows to offer divine worship and pilgrimage. Even though the old man is frozen with pain, he claims to be prepared for the expected fight when the marlin will finally start getting tired. Though the old man is determined to kill the marlin, he on the other hand feels sorry for the act. He thinks that the fish will feed many people even though they are not worthy of being fed such a wonderful creature.

In the course of the struggle, the old man's left hand receives the severe cut. He gets completely exhausted at this point and feels as if the fish will have an upper hand and will be able to kill him. At last, Santiago succeeds in pulling the fish close to the ship and killing it with his harpoon. He also succeeds in binding the marlin to the ship and begins his return journey. Though Santiago is extremely tired, his struggle does not end there. The marlin's blood attracts the sharks, with which Santiago has to fight again. Unfortunately, Santiago loses his harpoon and the marlin is half damaged by the sharks with no meat was left on the marlin's body. "Santiago is a man fighting against defeat. Yet Santiago never gives in to defeat: he sails further into the ocean than he ever has before in hopes of landing a fish, struggles with the marlin for three days and nights despite immense physical pain and exhaustion, and, after

catching the marlin, fights off the sharks even when it's clear that the battle against them is hopeless" (Deshmukh, 343). Eventually, he returns only with the skeleton of the marlin. On Santiago's arrival, the young boy comes back to Santiago's hut and learns that Santiago suffered a lot while being on the sea for three days and the spectacle of Santiago's injured hands makes him cry. He is now more determined to spend his future time with Santiago, though his parents have negative opinion about the old man. Other fishermen of his place, who had often made fun of him, know from the length of the fish that Santiago is still capable and a master fisherman. "In the process of fighting with the big fish and the sharks, he successfully depicted the good symbolism of the strong hero image by his confidence and courage" (Sanjo, 95).

Conclusion:

Struggle for survival is one of the important themes of this novel. It is observed in the novel through the struggle of its protagonist, Santiago. He is eighty four years old and he has work for living. Though he is an experienced fisherman, he cannot get the fish constantly for eighty four days. It is a great failure of his life. Failure and insulting remarks of his fellow fishermen make him strong and he determines to struggle to be successful. He is courageous, brave, energetic and capable for any struggle and he decides to use all these qualities for his self-respect. Santiago is a gifted fisherman but in his struggle the role of his trainee Manolin is also important. He is a young and energetic boy. Santiago considers him as his heir. When he was struggling with the fish he got inspiration from Manolin. Like this young boy, the protagonist also gets inspiration from his role model, the renowned baseball player Joe DiMaggio. This player played with hurting bone and won many medals for his team. Santiago is also injured while fighting with fish but he does not give up his struggle. He is optimistic and his principle in life is not to give up battle. His own qualities and inspirations from the young boy and baseball player make him strong for the struggle for survival. Finally, he returns only with the skeleton of the fish but through his struggle he ends his failure and proves his ability.

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