



---

**ABSOLUTE POWER OF NATURE IN ‘THE OLD MAN AND THE SEA’**

**Dr. Shesham Rajesh Shriniwas**

Associate Professor, Dept. of English,  
Deogiri College, Aurangabad MS

**Abstract:**

*Through ages, human beings are persistently trying to satisfy all their needs for their life. However, in their attempts, they isolated themselves from their very origin- nature and natural world. With modern and scientific advancement, man went under the impression that he made himself denying the most powerful force on this planet- the nature. Thence upon he is continuously fighting in vein against nature to prove his superiority.*

*Nevertheless, he must realize the fact that he is hopelessly helpless in front of the authoritative nature. The present paper focuses upon the limitation of human capacities in the widest and most powerful strength of the nature.*

**Key-words:** *The origin, scientific advancement, fighting in vein against nature, superiority, authoritative nature.*



In the course of human civilization, man has been struggling with nature for various gains. In the so called 'advancement', man has forgotten that he is a part of this wide ecosystem and has been boosting himself to be supreme to the very nature that has been long unremittingly and unswervingly providing him with his wants. With scientific progress, man is able to know the nature and natural changes very closely, and started thinking that he is becoming more powerful than nature. In this state of mind, he regards himself to be unique creature on the Earth, but nature is supreme. At last he has to accept the fact that he can never defeat the nature.

The present paper is such an attempt to analyze Ernest Hemingway's *The Old Man and The Sea* which makes it clear that no one can overcome the commanding clench of Nature. Hemingway is one such author who explored the vital and powerful side of the nature around us. He is recognized as the most noteworthy writer of 20th century American literature. In his *The Old Man and The Sea*, Hemingway describes how menial is the man in the grudges of natural world. How helpless situation a man feels in the totalitarianism of nature. The story of then mentioned novel centers on an old aged fisherman, Santiago who struggles with a giant marlin in the deep waters of Gulf Stream. The story provokes thoughtful insights of the readers.

It is said that Hemingway has made use of his personal experiences in many of his stories. In the struggle of the old protagonist, Hemingway's struggle can easily be traced in terms of his determination and his literary vicissitudes. One can also make out Hemingway in the old man Santiago's style of setting about his business with care and precision and extraordinary courage. The strong desire of the old fisherman to establish his reputation once more makes his struggle fearlessly, ignoring all thoughts of pain and suffering. In spite of overwhelming difficulties, Santiago manages to catch the huge and magnificent fish-marlin, though finally he is defeated by the sharks.

Yet, he is happy that he has not lost either to the fish or to the sea. In Santiago's determination to go far into the sea, the reader can make out Hemingway's courage seeking new experiences. The author holds that a good writer is like the one who stands in majestic isolation, where no one can help him. He once remarked "a good writer must put his image of the artist in an isolated figure struggling alone in the face of eternity, a kind of cosmic Santiago, courageously trying to land a masterpiece single-handed beyond time and place". Thus, the book can be considered as a triumph and assertion of Hemingway's own work as a writer. The book is rather a representation of life as a struggle against unconquerable natural



forces in which a kind of victory is possible. The symbolism in the novel is not restricted to the personal level only. One of the leading critics, Patricia, one of the critics, calls the story “an epic metaphor for life, a contest in which even the problem of right and wrong seems paltry before the great thing that is the struggle”. Santiago, the protagonist suffers and struggles like any other normal human being in this world. His suffering continues till the end of the novella. In the opening pages of the book, Santiago is characterized as someone struggling against defeat. He has gone eighty-four days without catching a fish.

Like any other parents, even the parents of his young, devoted apprentice and companion, Manolin, have forced the boy to leave the old man in order to fish in a more prosperous boat. Yet, the boy continues to take care and help the old man upon his return each night. Santiago has not lost his confidence even after unproductive eighty-four days, he refuses defeat at every turn and he resolves to sail out beyond the other fishermen to where the biggest fish promise to be. He believes that his unproductive streak will soon come to an end. To his fate, on the eighty fifth day, Santiago as promised himself sails his skiff far beyond the island’s shallow coastal water and ventures into the deep waters of the Gulf stream. He prepares his lines and drops them.

The morning of the eighty fifth day passes without any fish and at noon, a big marlin takes the bait that Santiago has one hundred fathoms deep in the waters. The old man cleverly hooks the fish but as soon as he does so he feels the need for the boy. The fish was too strong that the old man, with all his strength, fails to pull it. Instead, the fish begins to pull the boat. Fearing the fish would snap a taut line, Santiago bears the strain of the line with his shoulders, back and hands. The fish pulls the boat all through that day and night and then through another day and night. During the struggle with the fish, Santiago misses Manolin very dearly. He feels the need of a partner to help him with that giant fish. Although Santiago is wounded and weary, he feels a deep empathy and admiration for that enormous creature and its struggle and strength.

Basically, at this juncture, Santiago feels a sense of compassion with all the creatures on the Earth. He feels that turtles too have a heart, feet and hands. Similarly, all other living things have same emotions that of human beings. There is also a oneness in the old man and the huge fish he has caught the sight of which is still in his clutches. On the first day of a journey together, Santiago has his own monologue addressing to the marlin that he loves the fish and also respects it much. Nonetheless, he would kill it before the day-break. As the day comes to its climax, Santiago feels a certain degree of pity for the fish. He tries not to disturb



marlin at the Sunset as he feels that the Sun set time has always been quite difficult for any fish.

As any noble person sees nobility in another person, similarly, Santiago recognizes the great nobility of the fish, and takes it as one of siblings in the light of nature. Though the old man feels overjoyed with victory, he has a great concern for that water animal which has also the right to live. As their journey continues, Santiago watches marlin's struggle for life and his respect for the fish goes on increasing and at this point he is utterly moved with emotions that are developed in him for that giant fish. He has a second thought now in his mind leading being killed by marlin saying that it doesn't matter who kills who". On the third day, the fish gets tired and so does the old man. The tired and wounded Santiago manages to pull the marlin close enough to kill it with a harpoon and sets sail for home. But the blood of marlin attracts the sharks in the water.

Santiago tries to defend himself and his fish with harpoon which he loses in the struggle with the sharks. He makes a crude spear by lashing a knife to an oar and kills several sharks and by the time night falls, the sharks devour the marlin's precious meat leaving only skeleton, head and tail. His feeling for this noble creature is one of deep love and respect and so when the sharks destroy the fish, Santiago's sorrow is almost unbearable. In his final defeat Santiago apologizes to the fish for going out too far. He finally arrives his home and falls deep into sleep. In the next episode, all other fishermen are perplexed at the sight of huge skeletal carcass of the fish, which is still lashed to the boat. The young Manolin is very happy to see his master Santiago to come back safely. Santiago's commitment, his pride and determination to change his luck enables him to achieve his most true and complete self and also helps him earn the deepest respect of the village fishermen.

Through the character Santiago, the author seems to point out the great lesson that is not the achievement that matters but aspiration- a man may grow old and lose his luck, he can still dare, stick to his rules, continue striving in the great trouble times and can make his failure a thing to be proud of, a kind of victory. Some critics hold the view that this story is a chronicle of man's battle against natural world and also how man tries to satisfy his ego in vain. Similar to Santiago, even marlin displays qualities of pride, honor and strength. Both are subject of same eternal law: to kill or to be killed. The world is filled with predators, and no living thing can escape 'death'. Even Santiago reflects the same, when he watches the tired warbler fly towards shore, where it inevitably meets the hawk. Santiago's belief that man is not made for defeat make him to continue his struggle against the sharks and also the



darkness. One can find in the novels of Hemingway the nature as the best remedy to all sorts of human problems provided that nature's indications are understood properly.

In *The Old Man and The Sea*, the protagonist, Santiago continuously and intensely comes into the contact of Nature. All his actions and reactions are controlled by the Nature. Rather, Nature can be considered as an invisible character in this novel that has really vital role to play. The realization that Santiago comes lastly is no one escape from nature. In more philosophical terms, Nature is source to realize the true 'self' of human being. Furthermore, Nature is 'mother'. The novel is not a story of just one man called Santiago. It is the story of all people who struggle for the best in life whether he fails or succeeds. Man must believe in himself and in God to have grit and nobility to push through every in hurdle he might undergo and at the same time one must realize, recognize and adore the power of nature.

#### References:

- Frederick John (Ed.). 1964. *Out of the Midwest: A collection of Present-Day Writing*, 64. Whittlesey House, New York.
- Valenti Patricia. 1975. *Understanding The Old Man and The Sea*, 26. Greenwood Press, New Jersey.
- Ernest Hemingway, 1962, *The Old Man and The Sea*, Scribner, New York.
- Cowley, Malcolm. 1952. "Hemingway's Novel Has the Rich Simplicity of a Classic." New York Herald Tribune Book Review
- Schorer, Mark. 1965 "With Grace under Pressure." New Republic
- Young, Philip. 1971. *Ernest Hemingway*. New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston

