

**COLLISION OF FAITH AND SOLITUDE IN
'THE OLD MAN AND THE SEA'**

Swathika Y.S.
Teaching Associate
Reva University, Bangalore

Abstract

It is not uncommon for most of the writers to take refuge in the paramount system of religious beliefs facing the disillusionment of war. Nevertheless, an array of literary works that were produced during the crucial circumstances of war depicted the cultural alienation and its spirit to rescue the civilization. One such writer credited in stylizing the religious truth and escapade in its most celebrated essence is Ernest Hemmingway. The main aim of the paper is to analyze the attempts of the writer in revisiting and stabilizing the faiths concerning religion and humanity. The text chosen for analysis is 'The Old Man and the Sea' a recipient of Pulitzer Prize and the much acclaimed work throughout the world. The paper also proposes to study the journey of protagonist from the mainstream locale to a retreat of solitude in the novella.

Key words: *humanity, disillusionment, revisiting, faith, rescue.*

Higher Education &
Research Society

COLLISION OF FAITH AND SOLITUDE IN 'THE OLD MAN AND THE SEA'

- Swathika Y.S.

'There is no man alive today who has not cried at a war if he was at it long enough; sometimes it is after a battle, Sometimes it is when someone that you love is killed, sometimes it is from a great injustice to another, sometimes it is at the disbanding of a corps or a unit that has endured and accomplished together again, but all men at war cry sometimes, from Napoleon, the greatest butcher, down'. (Sean 24)

Thus wrote Hemmingway reflecting on the impact of war and its following upshot on mankind who were in its ravages of defeat. Mapping through the developments of Hemmingway's career it is apparent that Hemmingway was initially in alliance with the American Red Cross as an ambulance driver and later worked as a freelance reporter as he moved to Paris. The crucial years of war left Hemmingway exhausted and called out for peaceful withdrawal to a serene environment. But it came to him that during his stay in Cuba and its ongoing revolution that he authored '*The Old Man and the Sea*' a brief novella centered towards the yearning of mankind for the profundity of belief in particular and a pronounced seclusion in general. Set on the Gulf Stream the novella introduces to the readers, an estranged old man named Santiago, who sets off on an expedition for more than eighty four days and returns with the enlightened prize of wisdom on his back. The old man was called as '*salao*, the worst form of unlucky' (5) as he returned everyday without any fish. His habitat detains the aloofness surrounding the life as he lived alone in a shack that 'was made of the tough bud-shields of the royal palm which are called *guano* and in it there was a bed, a table, one chair, and a place on the dirt floor to cook with the charcoal. Once there had been a tinted photograph of his wife on the wall but he had taken it down because it made him too lonely to see it and it was on the shelf in the corner under his clean shirt.' (10) The peculiar traits of the old man's facade describes his yearning to explore the adventures of life which says 'Everything about him was old except his eyes and they were the same colour as sea and were cheerful and undefeated. 'The story befits to be an archetypal product of war as it explores the theme of Self exploration, cultural barrenness,

and fragmentation of religious beliefs. Nevertheless Santiago becomes a manifestation of modern man depicting the isolation of deflated spirit from the world. According to Rama Rao;

'Santiago is the modern hero of "our times" so, when he returns with his superior knowledge and love after his exciting adventures on the high seas, there are no crowds to welcome him and sing his praises. There is a sad irony in the lot of the modern hero.' (Rao 65)

When Santiago ventures out to catch a truly big fish it is interesting to note that he is abandoned on the backdrop of the sea to experience the tussle between the lost faith and the approaching seclusion. This indeed result in him talking aloud by himself and assigning human like qualities to the fish by talking to it frequently. Referring to the fish Santiago utters out on to the sea 'He took the bait like a male and he pulls like a male and his fight has no panic in it. I wonder if he has any plans or if he is just as desperate as I am'? (40) 'His choice had been to stay in the deep dark water far out beyond all snares and traps and treacheries. "My choice was to go there to find him beyond all people. Beyond all people in the world. Now we are joined together and have been since noon. And no one to help either one of us' (41) He also thought of many things that included the hand game he had played with the 'great negro from Cienfuegos' (58) in Casablanca, declaring him as a champion.

On every step of his journey the old man strives to build a companionship with the diverse aspects of nature, he refers to the sea as '*la mar*' by attributing feminine virtues to it and then, observing its wilderness he remarks 'The moon affects her as it does a woman.'(23) He also attempts to converse with the bird flying around the boat by asking 'How old are you? Is this your first trip? Take a good rest small bird...Then go in and take your chance like any man or bird or fish.' (45-46) Commenting on Santiago's relationship with various elements of nature Clinton.S.Burhans.Jr declares that 'With all its Christian symbolism *The Old Man and the Sea* is a study in the relationship between the

individualism and interdependence, in the agony of active and isolated individualism in a universe which dooms such individualism.' (Ishteyaque 93-94)

The old man started 'rowing steadily and it was no effort for him since he kept well within his speed and the surface of the ocean was flat except for the occasional swirls of the current.'(23) However he was destined enough to 'experience a tentative pull' (33) that proved the presence of a big fish called marlin. 'Just then the fish gave a sudden lurch that pulled the old man down on to the bow...he felt the line carefully with his right hand and noticed his hand was bleeding.' (46)Treading through the thorny paths in hooking the fish Santiago makes every attempt to restore his beliefs pertaining to god by saying

'He'll take it,God help him take it...He can't have gone, Christ knows he can't have gone. (34) 'Iam not religious, but I will say ten Our fathers and ten Hail Marys that I should catch this fish, and I promise to the Virgin de Cobre if I catch him. That is a promise.'(54)

But paradoxically once he has hooked the fish and when the sharks begin to feed upon his catch he also says that 'I wish it were a dream that I had never hooked him. I'm sorry about it, fish. It makes everything wrong.'(94) Perhaps it was a sin to kill the fish... Even though I did it to keep me alive and feed many people, but then everything is a sin. (90) These illustrations portray Santiago as a victim of the consequences that the war offered to the mankind leading to the dilemma of Religion vs. Humanity.

The emptiness lurking within the Santiago's soul is reflected through the bare skeletons of the fish that Santiago carries on his back as a reward of his conquest on the sea, circuitously representing the seclusion.'He saw the white naked line of his backbone and the dark mass of the head with the projecting bill and all the nakedness between.'(104) On the contrary the old man is also enlightened with the superior knowledge of wisdom on his journey symbolic of the Religion thus bringing a collision between these two forces. When the arrangements are made for the tourist's party the readers are brought a reminiscence of the lost faith through the remains of the fish 'The long backbone of the great fish was now just garbage waiting to go out with the tide' (109) conveying that it was

a time to liberate oneself from the isolation and even out the values pertaining to humanity. However we see that the novella ends sanguinely allowing the old man to sleep and embark on his dreams about the lions on the beach.

Referring to Hemmingway's acquaintance with religion Joseph Waldmeir proclaims that,

'Hemmingway did not turn religious to write *Old Man and the sea*. He has always been religious, though his religion is not of orthodox, organized variety. He celebrates, he has always celebrated the religion of man: *The Old Man and the Sea* merely celebrates it more forcefully and convincingly than any previous Hemmingway work. It is the final step in the celebration.' (Ishteyaque 93-94).

Conclusion:

The Old Man and the Sea as the title indicates strives to bring an exemplary union between solitude and faith. The fish Marlin reflecting the lost faith and the sea emblematic of solitude collide with the Old man epitomizing the humanity. All the three forces interact to culminate into truth of religion, that is, the religion of man. A man lost in the midst of war, displaced and broken from 'Self' arriving with the realization of fact concerning the religious truth. Nevertheless Hemmingway offers to the readers an adventurous narrative of quest to eradicate the worthlessness of life and ushering the hope. Commenting on Hemmingway's disposition Gertrude Stein has this to say in regard, 'And that is Hemmingway, he looks like a modern and he smells of the museums.' (Rao 216)

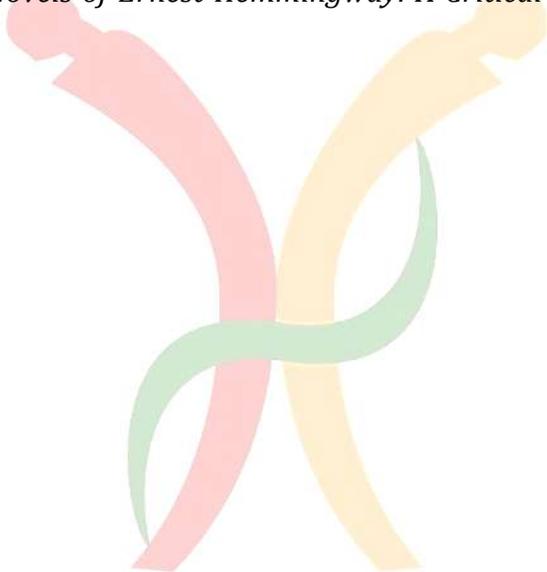
Works Cited.

Hemmingway Ernest. *The Old Man and the Sea*, Colourful Books International: Delhi, 2013. Print.

Hemmingway Ernest. *Hemmingway On War*. Edited by Sean Hemmingway, Scribner Classics, New York, 2012, Print.

Rao Rama.P. G. *The Atlantic Critical Studies: Ernest Hemmingway's The Old Man and the Sea*, Atlantic Publishers, 2007. Print.

Shams Ishteyaque. *The Novels of Ernest Hemmingway: A Critical Study*. Atlantic publishers, 2002. Print.



Higher Education &
Research Society