

A Study of Optimism in ‘The Old Man and the Sea’

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Abstract- *Ernest Hemingway is one of the famous American writers in English literature. His unique style of writing earned him plethora of honour. He was noted for intense masculinity of his style. The novel The Old Man and the Sea is Hemingway’s best novel. This novel gained him recognition of his position in contemporary literature. This novel is a short heroic novel about an old Cuban fisherman who hooks a giant fish marlin after a lot of struggle. But the fish is eaten by edacious sharks when the old man is on his way back to home. The prime motive of this paper is to bring out the instances of optimism in this novel. Optimism can be found everywhere, from beginning to the end, in the novel.*

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Introduction

Ernest Miller Hemingway was a noted American novelist and short story writer. He was awarded noble prize for literature in 1954. His lucid and understated style had a powerful influence on American and British fiction in the 20th century. His direct and deceptively simple style of writing spawned generations of imitators but no equals. He is one of the widely read authors of the 20th century. He is best known for his simple and direct style.

The Old Man and the Sea is Ernest Hemingway's best novel. This novel pushed him into winning the noble prize in literature. It is his masterpiece that revived his literary reputation. It is a short novel i.e. novella. Santiago, the old man, is the protagonist of the novel. It is a story of an old man, a young boy and a giant fish. Santiago, the protagonist, is extremely optimistic and does not lose heart in difficult situations.

In the very beginning of the novel the old man is described as 'salao' which is the worst form of unlucky. He is called 'salao' because he had been unable to take any fish for eighty four days. There is a boy with him for forty days but his parents send him in another boat when the old man is constantly not able to take any fish. The old man, when he is alone, does not feel discouraged. He goes to take fish on eighty sixth day. He still has an optimistic hope of taking a fish.

The old man has been explained with weak body. But the old man is optimistic despite his physical weakness. By describing his appearance Hemingway sums up the whole novel in his following expression:

"Everything about him was old except his eyes and they were the same colour as the sea and were cheerful and undefeated."

Hemingway's comparison of the old man's eye with sea symbolizes that his eyes are as much full of optimistic hope as the size and the abnormal power of the sea. Optimism, here, becomes more intense because it is an unbreakable courage of an old man, not a young man.

He works hard but cannot take any fish for eighty four days. He still has a hope that he will definitely take fish. He is the person who is of the view that a person should forget about his past failure and should always be ready for new adventures. According to him every day is full of new opportunities and one should always be ready for availing of these opportunities. The old man says:

"...but who knows? May be today. Every day is a new day. It is better to be lucky. But I would rather be exact. Then when luck comes you are ready."

The old man sees a flying fish and a bird which is trying to catch this flying fish. Every time the fish flies the bird makes movement to catch that fish. But the bird, whenever it tries, is unable to catch the fish. The fish keeps jumping out of the water. From this the old man extracts a positive thought that there are vast amount of opportunities if a person is not able to get success in his/her initial efforts. He/she should not lose heart and should be continued with his/her efforts. After some time he notices that the bird has caught that fish. This gives him an optimistic confidence that he can also take a fish with repeated efforts.

Santiago, the old man, thinks of a turtle's heart which can beat for four hours after it has been cut up. This thought gives him a thinking that he should also work, like a turtle's heart, until he is completely dead.

According to his own view, the old man is born for just one thing i.e. to take fishes. Having just one aim in life makes a person more optimistic despite failures in initial attempts. In the same way, the old man is optimistic in his profession of taking fishes instead of many failures.

Dreams have a vast amount of importance in this novel. Different images have been used as different symbols. Dreams of lions can be understood as a desire to achieve the, without caring for the situations in which you are working.

Time to time the old man thinks of DiMaggio who is a baseball player. DiMaggio is perfect in his game. His team wins most of the matches. Thinking of DiMaggio gives him a sense of positivity for his own work. DiMaggio gives him an optimistic confidence in two ways. First, DiMaggio is a master of doing everything right, despite his bone spur, in his game. This gives him confidence that he can also take fishes with his cramped hand. Secondly, DiMaggio's father, San Pedro, is a fisherman; through this knowledge the old man gained confidence and thinks that taking fish is not an ordinary profession.

At night, the weather is very cold. It becomes difficult for the old man to bear this harsh weather. But to encourage himself he remarks optimistically:

"Better weather for me than for you, fish."

The old man's view on looking at things is extremely optimistic. When the fish jumps out of the water, he thinks that it does so just to show him how big it is:

"I wonder why he jumped, the old man thought. He jumped almost as though to show me how big he was."

One evening he becomes very tired. To give himself more confidence, he remembers the game he played with the great Negro from Cienfuegos who was the

strongest men on the dock. This game goes very long. The match has started on a Sunday morning and has ended on a Monday morning. Ultimately, the old man wins the match. Remembering this adventure makes him stronger to carry on his struggle to take a fish.

The old man remains in the sea for two days. On third day, he becomes so weak that he feels faint. Although he is feeling faint yet he tries to hold the line tightly on which a giant fish is circling with its enormous power. He takes some sea water and rubs it on his head and back of his neck. With this he becomes conscious. At this time the old man tries to forget that his hand is cramped. The positive hope and optimism of an old man is at its best at this moment.

It is human nature that people becomes nervous when they are alone in a difficult situation. Secondly, when people become old, they also become less optimistic. Santiago is old as well as alone. The old man is different from other people. Although he is alone and old yet he is very optimistic.

The old man is very determined to take fish. His determination plays an important role in his optimistic approach. For almost three days he holds to the fish line that cut deep into his palms, causing a crippling cramp in his left hand. The old man says:

"I am a tired old man. But I have killed this fish which is my brother and how I must do the slave work."

Throughout the novel Santiago is ready for whatever is thrown at him whether it is a shark, lack of food or storm. He is mentally prepared that he will not be upset if he is not able to catch the marlin.

A reader can find an optimistic tone when the old man is praying to God. He says, "Blessed virgin, pray for the death of this fish. Wonderful though he is." When optimism is mixed with religious faith it becomes stronger. Here Santiago's optimism becomes more intense when his optimism is mixed with his religious faith.

Many sharks, on his way back to the shore, attack his fish. He kills as many sharks as he can. He is not discouraged with the power of giant sharks. He does whatever he can to save marlin from the sharks which are attacking and eating the fish.

When the old man's knife is not sharp enough to cut anything. He tries to make it sharp. He wishes if he had a stone to sharp the knife. But after a moment he says, "Now is no time to think of what you do not have. Think of what you can do with

what there is.” The view that you should do what you can do with whatever little you have is one the best sort of optimism.

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