

## NOVELS OF EARNEST HEMINGWAY: A TALE OF FEATS AND DEFEATS

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Ernest Miller Hemingway is a well-known figure in the world of English literature. He arose as a prominent figure and presented his personality and tendency to fight against the adversities of life. He won the world acclaimed Nobel Prize for literature in 1954. He is truly an experimenter and uses new techniques of expression. He explores human predicament through individual and universal experiences. In all his novels his heroes are shown with high degree of positive attitude which enable them fight against all odds of life and adversities. Amid the atmosphere of adversities and calamities his heroes struggle for their identity, life and finally emerged as a winner. But sometimes their fate has determined their actions, and they suffer despair and death. Hemingway himself enjoyed the life of adventure and action. So in his novels he depicted his personal experiences. He has experienced the life during the World War I and II. It was the age of horror, bloodshed and disbelief. Thus the problem caused by the outbreak of war, defeatism, disintegration of old values and injustice provides enough matter to his writings. His individual experiences helped him blending the story into a realistic portrayal. He himself was involved in activities like bullfighting and big game hunting. His heroes like him are adventures. Heroes like Frederic Henry of *A Farewell to Arms*, Harry Morgan of *To Have and Have Not*, and Santiago of *The Old Man and the Sea*, suffered physical and emotional agonies but finally surmounted the adversities and emerged victorious. In all his novels we see some visible and invisible forces that determine the fate of his characters.

His novel, *To Have and Have Not* reflects light on the realistic picture of society where poverty and struggle to survive becomes perceptible. The story revolves round Harry Morgan, the fishing boat owner and his suffering. Harry Morgan a native of Key West, Florida, devoted his life to the single-misdeed effort to keep his family. He makes his living by hiring out his boat to a wealthy man for fishing trips. But his fate played a different game and he is caught in the maze of illegal activities. He tries to smuggle some Chinese nationals from Cuba to United States which ends in disaster. A single illegal activity gives birth to several misdeeds. Thus I another episode he is nabbed while smuggling illegal liquor. Further he involved in gun battle and loses an arm. He then attempts to help four bank robbers in escaping. Finally he is arrested by the coast guard and the novel ends with his tragic death.

Cruelty appears at the top of the factors that governs his life. At first, Mr. Johnson assured him to give due rent of his boat but at the end of his expedition he flies away. This led Morgan into financial crisis and he selected the illegal means of earning money. To mete out hunger and suffering he surrenders to the means of illegal acts. But here also he met treacherous and cruel people. The most prominent of them are the four bank robbers. They took the help of Morgan to escape and finally decided to kill him. Morgan sensed the danger gave a strong fight and killed them but at the end he was also killed by one of the robbers.

The novel is full of violence, brutality, bloodshed and poverty. All these factors are responsible for determining his fate at the hands of an unseen force. Violence and bloodshed is quite visible in his action. When Morgan was involved in fight with custom officers, he lost his arm. He was poor and his poverty leads him to illegal action. He felt remorse of his misdeeds of helping Chinese, smuggling illegal liquor, and his fight with bank robbers. It is the poverty that decided his cruel and untimely death. There is a fine line of demarcation between “to have” and “have not”. Commenting on the element of poverty, Ramesh K. Srivastava said:

“Poverty becomes a major concern of this novel because the world is divided into two groups: the haves and the have not. The former exploit the latter”.<sup>1</sup>

Morgan though is poor, he is stuffed with courage. He fights bravely against all adversities of life. He did not lost hope in the atmosphere of despair. He fought courageously against poverty also with people who harm him. It is his courage that helps him to survive and it is his courage that leads him to death. Death appears as an unavoidable deterministic force. It is determined by his deeds and by his fate. Thus the novel is full of feats and defeats.

*The Old Man and the Sea* is the last complete novel of Hemingway. This novel made him immortal in the history of English literature. This novel brought him name and fame. It gave him Nobel Prize for literature. It is the story of an old fisherman from Cuba who shows courage to struggle against Marlin and Sharks of the sea. Nature which is presented in the form of sea, water, sharks, determines his fate. But Santiago is also determined to fight against all such odds to achieve his goal. It indirectly suggests the courage of Hemingway.

“ ‘But man is not made for defeat’ he said,  
A Man can be destroyed but not defeated”<sup>2</sup>

Santiago is an old Cuban fisherman who has been dreamt of catching a large fish. At home Manolin, a young boy was his companion with whom he used to talk of better days when he was a successful fisherman, the lions and the heroes of baseball. The old man has been unlucky for eighty four days in his attempt to catch fish. On eighty fifth day he decides to counter his failure and goes deep into the sea. Towards the afternoon he was lucky enough to hook a giant fish Marlin. The Marlin is eighteen feet long. It is two feet longer than the skiff that Santiago was rowing. Santiago is an old man, so he has no physical strength but he had a strong will-power. The strong Marlin tows Santiago and his skiff. For the day, night, the next day and night it continues to tow the skiff. Santiago is exhausted but he didn’t lose hope. In his struggle to kill it and bring it back to shore, he receives cramps and wounds. On the third day he succeeds in harpooning the giant fish and lashing it to the side of the boat. When he sets out on the return journey, he has another force of nature to fight with. A trail of blood of Marlin invites the sharks. They attacked the Marlin and ate it completely. Santiago gives strong fight to the sharks with all his strength but only with a small knife. Thus nature appears as a strong force in the novel. Sea is a great force that brings no luck to Santiago. His ambition of catching a big fish fulfills on eighty fifth day but the sea in the form of sharks takes it away from him. The sharks appear as a violent and destructive force of nature. Santiago who had no strength, who endured starvation of two days on the sea, does not want to lose hope. He kept the struggle against the Marlin. When he managed to kill it, several sharks came to attack it. But Santiago prepared himself for struggle. It is his courage and determination that made him victorious.

Death, luck and fear play an important role in the novel. Death is visible in killing Marlin and sharks. The old man Santiago has no physical strength to give strong fight against the strong forces of nature. While harpooning and killing the Marlin, he receives various wounds. At this he

only uttered ‘God, Oh, God’. God gives him strength to combat. Santiago does not die in the novel. In fact killing of Marlin gives him strength. He addressed the Marlin:

“You are killing me, fish..... But you have a right to Never have I seen a greater, or more beautiful, or a calmer or a more noble thing than you, brother come on and kill me. I do not care who kills who”.<sup>3</sup>

Santiago had no good luck for eighty four days, but he did not give hope of catching a big fish. When his persistency in attempt brought him success on eighty fifth day in the form of Marlin; his ill-fate comes in the force and his prize Marlin was taken away by sharks. Everyday day he hopes that:

“Only I have no luck any more. 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”.<sup>4</sup>

It shows his determination and courage. Despite all odds he keeps himself busy in pursuing and fulfilling his desire. He does not have fear of death but has a fear of loneliness. He thinks that no man should live alone on the sea. He does not hesitate to kill the Marlin. He declared:

“You didn’t kill the fish only to keep alive and to sell for food, he thought. You killed him for pride and because you are a fisherman. You loved him when he was alive and you love him after. If you love him, it is not a sin to kill him”.<sup>5</sup>

He fights with the sharks with all his strength. When he reaches the shore he is completely exhausted, and what is left is only the skeleton of Marlin. He has been defeated but his victory lies in his heroic struggle. The story ends with Manolin crying for Santiago’s bruised hands. Santiago sleeps on and dreams of past experiences. Courage is an integral part of life. It is directly associated with manhood. It is the courage that gives strength to the old man to fight against the strong forces of death.

As E. M. Holliday comments:

In the image of the crucifixion, which has haunted Hemingway from “Today is Friday” (1929) to “The Old Man and the Sea”, it is the unique courage of the forsaken and crucified man-God that takes his attention.... We are part of a universe offering no assurance beyond the grave, and we are to make what we can of life by a pragmatic ethic spun bravely out of man himself in full and steady cognizance that the end is darkness.<sup>6</sup>

The novel speaks the story of feats and defeats. There are various visible and invisible forces in the novel that controls the action of the old man Santiago. He has the power of endurance, strength and valour.

*For Whom the Bell Tolls* is yet another novel that speaks about the feats and defeats, violence, love and sacrifice. The story is based on an incidence during the Spanish Civil War. Robert Jordan, the central character of the novel is an American volunteer. He is assigned the task blowing up a bridge in the hills to stop Fascist force. Jordan finds that the guerillas are disorganized. Jordan then seeks the help of Pilar, a gypsy woman and Anselmo. Pilar’s husband Pablo is against the destruction of bridge. Jordan meets Maria, a rape victim who was brutally raped by the Fascists. She suffers from mental trauma. Jordan starts to love Maria intensely. After a lot of difficulties, Jordan succeeded in blowing up the bridge. But he falls from a horse and receives grave injuries. The novel unravels various aspects. The bridge, love, war and poverty governs all actions of the characters. The bridge plays an important role. It is the symbol

of military power of enemy force. Pablo is against its demolition while Pilar understands its utility. During the Fascists movement common people suffers the blows of hunger, unemployment and poverty. Pilar sees death in poverty. After demolition of the bridge, Jordan decides to stay back for the safety of guerillas. War stands as a symbol of destruction. It kills the ambition of Robert Jordan who wants to become professor. It kills innocent civilians. It makes thousands homeless or orphaned. Jordan continues to fight for his people but unfortunately dies. His love for Maria proves a source of inspiration for all his actions. Sensing his devotion, Maria also starts to love him. Both of them find solace in each others company. The novel is primarily associated with mankind. It shows a clash between two different groups of political interest.

Hemingway effectively uses different forces that determine the tendency and fate of his characters. These forces appear as symbols. The real temperament and strong willpower makes his characters enable to fight against the destiny. The brilliant use such internal and external forces shows Hemingway's craftsmanship.

### References:

1. Srivastava, Ramesh K. *Critical Studies in English and American Literature*, (Jalandhar: ABS Publication, 1991) p. 147
2. Hemingway, Earnest. *The Old Man and the Sea* (London: Penguin, 1972) p.103
3. Ibid. p. 82
4. Ibid. p. 26
5. Ibid. pp 94-95
6. Holliday, E.M. *Hemingway's Ambiguity: Symbolism and Irony* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1959), p. 299.