

REMEMBERING THE OLD MAN: ERNEST MILLER HEMINGWAY

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[On Ernest Miller Hemingway 121st anniversary]

By **Pragya Ranjan**

Society defines a person on the basis of the degree of his success but a person defines himself on the basis of what he learnt on the way to his success, though he may not necessarily achieve it.

Hemingway's last masterpiece of writing and noble prize winner, *The Old Man and The Sea (1952)* describes such a story of success, failure and hope.

The old man, Santiago, who was a fisherman had gone eighty-four days without a fish. As the author describes him, "Everything about him was old, except his eyes and they were the same colour as the sea and were cheerful and undefeated." His eyes had a glitter of hope, which time could not deteriorate, unlike his body.

Ernest Miller Hemingway (July 21, 1899 – July 2, 1961) is known for his understated and economical style of writing, which he termed as iceberg theory.

"If a writer of prose knows enough of what he is writing about he may omit things that he knows and the reader, if the writer is writing truly enough, will have a feeling of those things as strongly as though the writer had stated them. The dignity of movement of an ice-berg is due to only one-eighth of it being above water. A writer who omits things because he does not know them only make hollow places in his writing."

—Ernest Hemingway in *Death in the Afternoon*.

Hemingway's concise narration that evokes feelings of those things also that has not been mentioned precisely; is truly evident in this book which is not even 100 pages long.

On the eighty-fifth day, Santiago went out far with his small boat and chased a giant marlin for three days before catching it. He ate raw fish without salt while he was on the sea. The real climax came when sharks came to attack his boat in order to eat the marlin. Although he fought bravely but he couldn't save the marlin from sharks, he was only left with an 18 feet long skeleton of the fish. Santiago's eyes only craved for the boy, whom he taught fishing since the boy was young – whenever he found himself in a fraught condition. He had a hope on which he could rely upon, which gave him a reason to go back after dreadful attack by sharks and loss of marlin. Hadn't he had reason to go back and meet the boy, hadn't he mustered the courage to go after the fish for three days. Hope gave him reason and so it does to every person alive.

Although Santiago had to return empty-handed with an 18 feet long skeleton in his boat, he remained optimistic till the end. After reaching the shore, he said to himself, "The wind is our friend...Bed is my friend...It is easy when you are beaten, I never knew how easy it was. And what beat you."

"Nothing" he said aloud, "I went out too far."

The old fisherman didn't regret his loss of fish but cherished that he went out too far and faced sharks alone. The story ends with an optimistic note that learning on the way to success is more important than success itself.

One of the most beautiful line in the book is, "He (Santiago) always thought of the sea as 'la mar' which is what people call her in Spanish when they love her....the younger fishermen..when the shark livers brought much money, spoke of her as 'el mar' which is masculine...But the old man always thought of her as feminine."

Hemingway was widely criticised at the beginning of his career for his style of writing. Once, in a letter addressed to him by his mother; she admonished him for using words like 'bitch' in his writing. But today we find him widely known for his narration itself. He revolutionised the way of writing and the Nobel Prize in Literature 1954 was awarded to Ernest Miller Hemingway " for his mastery of the narrative, most recently demonstrated in *The Old Man and the Sea*, and for the influence that he has exerted on contemporary style." Transforming a simple plot of the story into a masterpiece; Hemingway has given us one of the best modern classics in the world.

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