INTRODUCTION

The reason for taking up a subject like this is the dynamic phenomenon of “humanism” and its pervading influence in literature. It involves every kind of sophistication and sensitivity required to make one glued to the subject. Amidst all chaos and confusion, we see an individual isolated and fragmented within the “self”. He is often the Hamlet pondering over things and trying to make some sense out of his scattered existence with nowhere to run and no one to blame. Then, what does such a man do? He comes to the old man (or perhaps the Son of God himself as Jesus claimed himself to be) and asks him to narrate his tale with the help of which he is able to gather and string together some of the scattered pearls of his own existence into one whole chain of humanity. Within this broad spectrum of humanism, the viability of my exploration will be investigated. I will also probe briefly into the views of eminent scholars and critics (without going into their dynamics) who incredibly laid the foundation stones of this magnificent “Human Pyramid”. The objective is to join hands from all directions towards comprehending a universal phenomenon (humanism) which I will gradually unfold in the following section.

Text

He was a fisherman, who fished alone in the deep waters of the gulf. After going without a fish for forty days, he was termed a “salao”, which is the worst form of bad luck by his village people. To begin at the beginning, why have Santiago as such a powerful protagonist and not any other man? Santiago is no ordinary mortal and the opening lines of the story affirm this, when the author says, “He was an old man who fished.” That one line spoke volumes about Santiago, whose pride would not be reduced by the passage of time. The conversation between Santiago and Manolin over fishing and the subject of “turtling” and its blinding effects on one’s eyes, also suggests this, when Santiago asserts that, “I am a strange old man”, hinting at his superiority over other people. The concept of pride is carried out in a subtle way rather than giving it a crude edge. There are many instances in the novella that allude to this “strange” attribute. The starkest one appears in one of his internal monologues, when he confesses to himself that he killed the fish not for a living, but out of pride and that because he was a fisherman. The pride, however (also a sin), if it stiffens is also shattered at last, when he gives in to the inevitable, and subordinates himself to it. In this way, he achieves humility.

Another feature of Christianity which is common to humanity is love, which Santiago has in profusion. The old man loves the boy and considers him a man and an
equal. He treasures every moment with him and is more than happy at the thought of having in the boy someone who respects him, takes care of him, waits upon him and is often anxious for him. Manolin is the treasure of his life.

One aspect of Santiago that comes out loud in the open is his courage and valour. The battle between him and the scavenger sharks is all about principles and righteousness and not a mere fish. Knowing the fate of his catch, which is susceptible to fall a prey to myriad of hunters at sea, he continues to struggle with them. "I will fight them until I die." His mettle and strength of spirit resembles the last splinter of a candle which refuses to blow off against relentless tempests. He fights till he runs out of all possible help.

Hope is a Christian virtue, which Santiago tries to follow in all earnest. The absurd hero finds solace in feeding his stubborn optimism (Eddins, 2001). "It is silly not to hope, he thought. Besides, I believe it is a sin." Santiago here refers not to hope as a sin which ironically establishes it as an existential virtue. But as Camus reflects, in this transgression, the absurd hero retraces his steps and clarifies and fortifies his position. "I have no understanding of it (sin) and am not sure I believe in it. Here, he also establishes that there are people such as priests, who are "paid" to think about sin and grace. He thus says, "Let them think about it. You were born to be a fisherman as the fish was born to be a fish."

Religious faith is a confounding proposition which stifles the simple mind of Santiago. The usual "Our Fathers" and "Hail Marys" mechanically uttered momentarily relieve him, but there is no relief from the suffering he has to go through, which escalates even further (Eddins, 2001).

After arriving at the harbor, Santiago falls again and again under the weight of the mast. Then he reaches his shack and collapses on his bed with his arms out straight and the palms of his hands up. This undoubtedly brings to our minds, the crucifixion of Jesus Christ and the greatness that is achieved.

Hemingway (2009) goes further in his discussion of the concept of sin and grace. "Perhaps it was a sin to kill the fish."..."You loved him when he was alive and you loved him after. If you love him, it is not a sin to kill him or is it more", forcing the imagery of Cain and Abel before our minds and a little more than that of the apostle Peter, who though he loved Jesus, yet denounced him in public. Later, he again professed his love for Him and by doing so was granted pardon and was half-justified, just as Santiago was justified for killing his sea brother.

Going out too far signifies going beyond the area of God's jurisdiction, an unknown place or region where "The falcon cannot here the falconer" and all is lost.

Going out too far may also be viewed through a Nietzschean reading of the novella which affirms that taking the greatest risk in order to achieve the greatest wholesomeness is the virtue of the heroic individual (Charles, 1981 to 1982):

“If we judge the novella in terms of victory/defeat also there is a religious significance. In worldly terms, he lost the marlin and suffered a defeat. But in moral terms he became victorious, when his feat was considered to be that of a martyr’s, like that of Christ or even St. Thomas Becket. Christianity refuses to accept death as a tragedy (It believes in an eternity of happiness after the soul gets released from all the agonies of life). That is why it calls the day of the crucifixion of Christ ‘Good Friday’.

It should be remembered that Hemingway never attempted to advocate or preach any religious faith through his magnum opus, such as Taoism, Buddhism or Christianity. It is an independent work, which is independent of any of such beliefs or notions. They may be viewed only as avenues to his great humanistic manifestation in "The Old Man and the Sea". Hemingway admired the whole representation of Jesus on the cross and often pondered upon it. That definitely did not motivate him to write a book upon Him. Moreover, there have been several affirmations by critics till date to the fact that any writing composed with preconceived notions and symbols is hardly ever worth much and is relatively insignificant. From his home in San Francesco de Paulo, Hemingway would often visit the village of Cojimar, the village described in "The Old Man and the Sea". He would himself fish for sharks and marlins. He spends more than 20 years of his life in Cuba, had immense respect for the fisherman over there whose incessant toil and their battle for existence upon the sea moved him infinitely. Anselmo Hernandez is said to be the legendary "old man" who narrated his story to Hemingway, who delightfully took note of it and gave it a polished shape. While alluding to the Bible, it should be kept in mind that for Hemingway, Jesus was the quintessential epitome of a life of endless pain and suffering, where forsaken man is left alone with no one to heed his cry. At the same time, it must also be acknowledged that Hemingway does affirm the presence of a divine order which when merged with humanity may help one to find a purpose or give a fruitful meaning to dismal life (Schultz, 2006). He magnifies the human form into the divine and again reduces the divine form into the human. He also emphasizes the necessity to “go far out” and realize the limits of mankind. Hemingway knew that life was no easy ride and that there are bound to be bumps and pitfalls at every nook and corner of life. He probably believed as T. S. Elliot did, “the best of a bad job is all any of us make of it except of course the saints.” But this should never stop one from trying. By doing so, he chalks out a place for himself within this hostile universe.

Santiago finally wins his most prized marlin through his determination and courage. The two most celebrated virtues of human kind. But the fate of “the catch” and its subsequent loss is something beyond the control of
Santiago. Surely, beyond the control of any individual, even though he likes to think that he is in complete power of it and undoubtedly controls it. We remember here Tolstoy’s words that there is no such thing as free will. We are all involuntary tools of history and our actions are only in bondage to a whole course of previous history, predestined from times immemorial. Therefore, all passions, emotions, ambitions, apprehensions, enjoyments etc. come to nothing or sound dubious when confronted with the question of free-will. But one cannot live unless he believes he has it and as long as he lives, he strives. Then, once the action is committed, it becomes irrevocable and one with history.

Santiago is the “superman”. He has seen all, felt all and lived through all to champion the dynamic phenomenon of “humanity”. He is no Tom, Dick and Harry to fool around idle fancies to amuse himself. He entertains a passion, chases his goals, fights for its possession, fights for its preservation, is defeated, disappointed but not disheartened. That’s the victory of the tireless, undying and indomitable “human spirit” over all the odds of life. By his big catch, he proved to everyone that he had honestly fulfilled his job.

After losing the marlin, when Santiago returns to his shack, he sleeps in serendipity with the boy watching over him and once again dreams of the lions. This definitely establishes a moral triumph. If we follow up with the Hemingway code hero, the situation is not hard to guess. Hemingway’s heroes act superbly under strange pressures and finally reach a state of tranquility which is also called Santa Rasa (Fernando, 2003), according to classical Indian scholars. Hemingway prepares his heroes for ruthless pain and suffering but never to give up on life. In ‘A Farewell To Arms’, Frederic Henry not only bids farewell to the arms of warfare, but also to the arms of his beloved Catherine, thereby reaching a state of equanimity. In ‘For Whom The Bell Tolls’, Roberto convinces Maria to take care of herself and his unborn child, and enters a state of absolute peace and quiet. Similarly, in “The Old Man and the Sea”, the old man after losing his big catch to the scavenger sharks, returns to his shack and rests in quietude dreaming again of the lions in the eastern coasts of Africa. All this significantly suggests the working of the Santa Rasa which is tranquility and a sweeping victory against all the odds of life. This Rasa which is a combination of vibhava (cause), anubhava (result) and vyabhicarica (transient or impermanent feelings) helps to comprehend and explicate the unique dimensions of literature.

Just as in religion, fast signifies the inner purging of the self before the realizing of the spiritual. In the same way, in arts, literature signifies an inner dissolution of the self before the realizing of the eternal. We can trace it by making a splendid reference to the classics where it goes:

Agnirme vachi srirat vaghridayaye hridayam samritaye amritam brahmani
Vayurme prane srirat prano hridaye hridayam samritaye amritam brahmani
Suryorme chakshushi srirat chakshur hridaye hridayam samritaye amritam brahmani
Chandramame manasi srirat mano hridaye hridayam samritaye amritam brahmani
Dishome shrotre srirat shrotregum hridaye hridayam samritaye amritam brahmani
Apome retasya reta hridaya hridayam samritaye amritam brahmani
Prithvime sharesere srirat shareeregum hridaye hridayam samritaye amritam brahmani
Oshadhir vanaspatyome lomasu srirat lomani hridaye hridayam samritaye amritam brahmani
Indorime bale srirat balam hridaye hridayam samritaye amritam brahmani
Parjaniyorme murdhani srirat murdham hridaye hridayam samritaye amritam brahmani

This is Siva Sankalpa which means knowing me and the universe as one. In other words, all is Brahma (atharva veda, yajur veda).

CONCLUSION: AN AVENUE FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Over the years, a lot of research has been done upon the ripe field of the Bible, that is, its symbolism and influence in “The Old Man and the Sea”. Nevertheless, humanism and its essential “spirit” remain an ever fruitful area of research. Summing up its significance as “man is the measure of all things” is no more an end in itself as there have been several approaches ever since with respect to the subject. Existentialism is feasible up to a certain point (existentialism being humanism). But the classical Greek theory of the “tragedy” and much more than that the classical Indian theory of the “Rasa” apply more prominently to “The Old Man and the Sea”. The essence of humanism in impersonating and imbibing the impeccable virtues of Jesus Christ is a provocative presumption (merging the real with the ethereal, the concrete with the abstract, and the mortal with the immortal) which requires to be carefully delved on further.

REFERENCES

Eddins D (2001). Of Rocks and Marlin: The Existentialist Agon In
Camus’s The Myth of Sisyphus and Hemingway’s The Old Man And The Sea. The Hemingway Review. Moscow, Idaho. University of Idaho Press.

