

Struggle of Santiago and Kuber: A Comparative Study between 'The Old Man and the Sea' and 'Padma Nadir Majhi'

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Abstract

Both Manik Bandopadhyay's 'Padma Nadir Majhi' and Ernest Hemingway's 'The Old Man and the Sea' are masterpieces in the world literature which show man's struggle to win livelihood from Nature and against Nature. This paper will show the similarities of two opposite world's fishermen's struggle to win livelihood. One earns from Gulf Stream and other from river Padma. But both of their struggles are almost same. One is old and other is young. Santiago has to live and feed alone but Kuber has to maintain a family. 'Padma Nadir Majhi' can be read in different interpretations. But this paper will exclusively focus only on the struggle of fishermen to collect their livelihoods.

Key words: Gulf Stream, Padma, Poverty, Survive, Livelihood, Struggle.

Manik Bandopadhyay was born in May 19, 1908 in West Bengal. He experienced the obscurity of human nature and activities and the shrewd spitefulness of the individual. He realized that it is man who makes society and has concretized it according to their own needs. He made a piercing analysis of human psychology, and his novels are the vivid depiction of his outlook.

Padma Nadir Majhi was first published in May 28, 1936. After that in May 1948 the English translation by Hirendranath Mukhopadhyay was published with the title *Boatman of the Padma*. It is categorized among the best of the world literary heritage.

Padma Nadir Majhi is essentially a psycho anatomy deals with the life and activities of the fishermen community surrounding the river Padma. It is mainly concerned about the nature of human mind and the intricacies and meanness, which have entwined the human beings in the post war era. The political context, on which the socio-religious ethos of the novel is set, vividly portrays the tensions and complications of the individuals, who are suffering from identity crisis.

The Old Man and the Sea is a novella by Ernest Hemingway, written in Cuba in 1951 and published in 1952. One of his most famous works that centres upon Santiago, an aged Cuban fisherman who struggles with a giant marlin far out in the Gulf Stream. *The Old Man and the Sea* led to numerous recognitions for Hemingway - Pulitzer Prize for Fiction in 1953, Award of Merit Medal from the American Academy of Letters the same year and Nobel Prize in Literature in 1954.

The Old Man and the Sea is about an epic battle between an old, experienced fisherman and a giant marlin said to be the largest catch of his life. It opens with this background that Santiago has gone eighty four days without catching any fish at all. People considered him so unlucky that his young apprentice, Manolin, has been forbidden by his parents to sail with the Old Man and was ordered to fish with more successful fisherman. Thus on the eighty-fifth day, Santiago sets out

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alone, taking his skiff far into the Gulf. By noon of the first day a marlin takes his bait. Two days and two nights pass in this manner, during which the Old Man bears the tension and pain of the line with his body. On the third day Santiago completely worn out and in delirium, ended the long epic battle by using the rest of his strength to pull the fish onto its side and stab the marlin with a harpoon.

While Santiago continues his journey back to the shore, many sharks are attracted to the trail of blood left by the marlin in the water. The first, a great mako shark, Santiago kills with his harpoon. Five sharks are slain and many others are driven away. But by night, the sharks have almost devoured the marlin's entire carcass, leaving a skeleton consisting mostly of its backbone which is eighteen feet from nose to tail. Tourists at the nearby café mistakenly take it for a shark. In *Padma Nadir Majhi*, Manik Bandopadhyay shows a vivid picture of riverside fishermen society. There are a few Muslim fishermen here and rest of them are Hindus. Among the Hindus there are strong caste divisions.

Both Santiago and Kuber are very poor.

"Santiago's shack 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 dirty floor to cook with charcoal." (Hemingway, Ernest, *The Old Man and the Sea*, 2005: 6)

Santiago is barefooted, he has no new shirt. "His shirt had been patched so many times that it was like the sail and the patches were faded to many different shades by the sun." (*ibid.*, 8)

Even he cannot afford electricity, not a good bed or a pillow.

"They had eaten with no light on the table and the Old Man took off his trousers and went to bed in the dark. He rolled his trousers up to make a pillow, putting the newspaper inside them. He rolled himself in the blanket and slept on the other old newspapers that covered the springs of the bed." (*ibid.*,13)

On the other hand, Kuber's home is described as such that 'nothing to say about it only there are two small rooms and weak fences'. In one of the room's narrow veranda is used as Kuber's wife Mala's delivery. She has given birth to a boy child. When Kuber hears about his new-born child who is very nice to look at, he cannot be happy. He is thinking that a new person has to be fed. Santiago does struggle in his entire life in the sea. Bad weather, strong heat of Sun, salty water-he takes all these things as taken for granted.

"The clouds were building up now for the trade wind and he looked ahead and saw a flight of wild ducks etching themselves against the sky over the water, and then blurring, then etching again and he knew no man was ever alone on the sea." (Hemingway, 41)

Other fishermen mock at Santiago, but he does not get angry. He is always optimistic. He believes that eighty-fifth day will be lucky for him. Every day he starts his job with equal interest to get any fish. He says: "To hell with luck. I'll bring the luck with me." (*ibid.*)

Whatever Kuber's physical condition, he has to catch fish as much as possible. He feels very sick; in the midnight, Padma's cold wind makes him weak, his wet clothes make him feel feverish, his eyes are red, but he continues his job. Because in the season of Hilsha fish he has to do good amount of income. Rest of the year he has to depend on this income. He does not have good net or boat of his own. He has to do income in share with Dhanonjoy or Jodu. As a result he gets a very small share and to get that he has to give highest physical labour.

Santiago's outlook says how much sufferings he faced earlier.

“The Old Man was thin and gaunt with deep wrinkles in the back of his neck. The brown blotches of the benevolent skin cancer the sun brings from its reflection on the tropic sea were on his cheeks. The blotches ran well down the sides of his face and his hands had the deep-creased scars from handling heavy fish on the cords. But none of these scars were fresh.” (Hemingway, 1) He is a professional fisherman and his physical feature says he struggles for many years.

“All my life the early sun has hurt my eyes, he thought. Yet they are still good. In the evening I can look straight into it without getting the blackness. It has more force in the evening too.” (*ibid.*, 19)

In *Padma Nadir Majhi* we see that Dhananjay gives less labour as he is the owner of the boat and net. He only sits on the top of boat to keep the boat’s direction straight. Kuber and Ganesh do rest of the works. Physical weakness, rough weather, hunger, sleep - nothing will show mercy to Kuber. He has to continue his work.

As Santiago couldn’t catch a single fish for last eighty four days, he is suffering from crisis of food. Manolin tries to serve him as much as he can. He brings beer for Santiago, food from hotel etc. Sometimes Santiago shows off that he has arrangement for rice and fish, but Manolin knows that he only pretends to have food.

“There was no cast net and the boy remembered when they had sold it. But they went through this fiction every day. There was no pot of yellow rice and fish and the boy knew this too.” (Hemingway, 7)

Every morning he drinks coffee with Manolin before starts his day.

“The Old Man drank his coffee slowly. It was all he would have all day and he knew that he should take it. For a long time now eating had bored him and he never carried a lunch. He had a bottle of water in the bow of the skiff and that was all he needed for the day.” (*ibid.*, 15)

When we see the cordial and affectionate relationship between Santiago and Manolin drinking coffee together before they start for sea, it seems the same affectionate relationship between Kuber and Ganesh. They take tobacco while they feel very cold and feverish at midnight in the river Padma. Ganesh is little bit foolish but he is always obedient to Kuber. He loves Kuber, cares him and honours him. At one scene, Ganesh does not take any more *chira* to let Kuber eat. He always shows concern to Kuber even if it is a matter of straw for their roof or rice. We find Ganesh in Manolin’s sincerity.

Little amount of *muri* and *chira* are found at Kuber’s hut. Mala feels hungry and asks for little amount of *chira* to Kuber, but he gets angry. Not Kuber or Mala or their children can eat with full satisfaction. They always struggle against hunger. Kuber has affection for his family but he cannot express it for his poverty.

We see how Santiago feels the Marlin. “Fish, I love you and respect you very much. But I will kill you dead before this day ends.” (Hemingway, page 36) He also says, “The fish is my friend too,” he said aloud. “I have never seen or heard of such a fish. But I must kill him. I’m glad we do not have to kill the stars.” (*ibid.*, 53)

He also admires the marlin. Against the sharks, both Santiago and marlin make a group whose target was to defeat the sharks.

“You are killing me, fish, the Old Man thought. But you have a right to. Never have I seen a greater, or more beautiful, or a calmer or more noble thing than you, brother. Come on and kill me. I do not care who kills who.” (*ibid.*, 66)

Manolin's affection for Santiago expresses thus—"You'll not fish without eating while I'm alive." (*ibid.*, 9) Even he does not want to give botheration to Santiago for thanking other who sends food for him. Manolin says, "I thanked him already. You don't need to thank him." (*ibid.*, 9) . Kuber told Ganesh that he was not so poor that he could not give Ganesh some rice as loan.

Santiago is thinking about the fish with full honour. It seems he can feel its pain of captivity.

"He is wonderful and strange and who knows how old he is, he thought. Never have I had such a strong fish nor one who acted so strangely... He cannot know that it is only one man against him, nor that it is an old man. But what a great fish he is and what will he bring in the market if the flesh is good." (*ibid.*, 32)

After two days long connection and communication with Marlin, Santiago feels a brotherhood with it.

"It is good that we do not have to try to kill the sun or the moon or the stars. It is enough to live on the sea and kill our true brothers". (*ibid.*,53)

Santiago gets hurt for the heavy cord. Whenever the fish leaps or jumps, he feels pain in his hand. Still he says, "I must hold his pain where it is... Mine does not matter. I can control mine. But his pain could drive him mad." (*ibid.*, 63)

He is desperate to catch the fish anyhow. It's his matter of prestige, pride, identity.

When he discovers that he is failure to save the fish from sharks, he repents thus: "I am sorry that I went too far out. I ruined us both." (*ibid.*, 84)

Santiago says, "I am a tired old man. But I have killed this fish which is my brother and now I must do the slave work." (*ibid.*, 68)

Santiago talks with the fish as if it can hear him. He appreciates the Marlin as his strong opponent. He sometimes enjoys this tension between him and the fish. He says,

"If I were him I would put in everything now and go until something broke. But, thank God, they are not as intelligent as we who kill them; although they are more noble and more able." (*ibid.*, 43)

Once Santiago and Marlin were antagonistic to each other, but after the entry of sharks, both form a group against sharks. Santiago takes very seriously to kill all the sharks. Though already the Marlin turns into a skeleton, but he is very angry for his and fish's bad luck. He says, "I'll fight them until I die" (Hemingway, 84)

Most of the time Kuber appears to be angry with others, like his friends and family members, but actually he is angry upon himself for his dissatisfaction to his income. He said to Ganesh, 'what will I do with a son whereas I can't manage food for my family?' Kuber is also very angry and upset on Dhananjay for his tendency to give Kuber less money. There is one Shetol babu who takes fish from Kuber personally but most of the time he makes delay to pay Kuber. Kuber theft some fishes for Shetol babu. Both of them are benefitted by this thieving. Poverty and Dhananjay's cheating made Kuber dishonest sometimes.

Santiago couldn't save the marlin. Though he killed few sharks but still he is defeated by the sharks. But he does not take it as a defeat. He thinks it's his fault to go so far. "But a man is not made for defeat. A man can be destroyed but not defeated." (Hemingway, 75)

They beat me, Manolin," he said. "They truly beat me." "He didn't beat you. Not the fish." "No. Truly. It was afterwards." (*ibid.*, 90)

Kuber gets very angry upon Dhananjay but couldn't express as he works in his boat. Every time

Dhananjay cheats with Kuber and Ganesh in counting caught fishes. He gets the lion share; still he takes some extra fishes, which Kuber understands but can't say anything. He weeps and thinks that he is poorer than other poor, lower kind of man than other lowers. Everyone takes him as granted to make him fool and deprive like other religious and social rules. He knows everything, but can't protest because he has no right of that.

Santiago thinks that anyone can be a fisherman in May. But he has some pride for his own fishing. He takes favour from Manolin. He treats Manolin as his friend of the same age.

"Thank you," the Old Man said. He was too simple to wonder when he had attained humility. But he knew he had attained it and he knew it was not disgraceful and it carried no loss of true pride.

"You did not 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 loved him after. If you love him, it is not a sin to kill him. Or is it more?" (*ibid.*, 77)

Santiago shows his extreme perseverance for his great catch. He convinces himself by saying that pain does not matter to a man. "I could just drift, he thought, and sleep and put a bait of line around my toe to wake me. But today is eighty-five days and I should fish the day well." (*ibid.*)

When Santiago's hand was cramping, he tolerates it and was saying, "Why was I not born with two good hands?" (*ibid.*, 61)

We can see Santiago's mental strength in his eyes. "Everything about him was old except his eyes and they were the same color as the sea and were cheerful and undefeated." (*ibid.*, 1)

He struggles with giving his best effort. But sometimes he cannot keep control over himself.

"The Old Man felt faint and sick and he could not see well." ...But he does not stop to catch the fish. He gives strength himself. He said, "Get to work, old man." (*ibid.*, 69)

He is feeling very weak physically but his mental strength remains same from the beginning.

Santiago triumphs over his age and body.

"For an hour the Old Man had been seeing black spots before his eyes and the sweat salted his eyes and salted the cut under his eye and on his forehead. He was not afraid of the black spots." (*ibid.*, 62)

We see how he makes himself encouraged and try to control his concentration on his job. "I could not fail myself and die on a fish like this...now I have him coming so beautifully, God help me endure." (*ibid.*, 63)

Manik Bandopadhyay's characterizations in *Padma Nadir Majhi* are outstanding. We don't find a versatile character like Hosen Mia in the *Old Man and the Sea*. Mala, Kapila, Jugi, Pitom Majhi, Aminuddi, Rashu, Jugol, Gopi – all of them depict the real picture of fisherman area of Bengal. We don't find so many varieties of characters in *The Old Man and the Sea*. Hemingway emphasizes on Santiago's struggle. He does not have any family now. So he has to manage food only for him. He does not remember his wife any more even he does not see any dream of her. But we see Kuber as a father who seeks groom for his daughter Gopi. He asks for money and ornaments to Jugol and Rashu for Gopi. Kuber's everything depend on the Hilsha fish. He wants to buy happiness anyhow with the cost of his highest level of labour. We find a fighting attitude in Santiago and Kuber. Though Kuber escapes from Ketupur with Kapila to Moynadip but Santiago remains there and hopes for again a greatest catch. May be Kuber would never leave Ketupur if he was not trapped by Rashu. When Kapila forbade him not to go Moynadip instead she prefers for him to go to jail, but Kuber foresee that he would have to go to jail repeatedly.

Both Santiago and Kuber show great struggle to earn their livelihood. Both of them are destroyed but not defeated. They triumphed over every obstacle with the power of their love for own professions. Santiago at first shows his patience for eighty four days without catching a single fish, later he shows his extreme mental and physical strength to catch the marlin. Though it is his opponent first, but when it is attacked by the sharks, Santiago feels brotherhood feelings to it. He tries his level best to save the marlin from the sharks and in this way he repents for his sin to go far away than his range. Both Kuber and Santiago try their level best to manage a somewhat comfortable life. These two literary pieces are very famous in the two world of literature. Nature is their friend and also opponent force. They try to triumph over Nature. Santiago's struggle is called an 'epic struggle'. Kuber always fights against all obstacles, poverty, neighbours, all deprivation, natural calamities etc. Hemingway emphasizes that "No good book has ever been written that has in it symbols arrived at beforehand and stuck in. ... I tried to make a real old man, a real boy, a real sea and a real fish and real sharks. But if I made them good and true enough they would mean many things". In the same manner we can say that Manik Bandapaddhay also created a real fisherman, a real river, real struggle of fishermen community. Both literary pieces give us a holistic picture of those people who fight every moment for being alive. It proves that all the human beings' feelings are almost same, only difference is their language. Both *Padma Nadir Majhi* and *The Old Man & The Sea* give us the real essence of fishermen's lives. They always try to continue and keep happy the Gods and Goddesses of hunger, laughter and cry, unseen creator etc. They are tired of quarrelling for their rights with family members and neighbors for their survival. Again and again they start their fight after few moments of interval. Here a new born baby is taken with sorrow. Life means only to hunger and thirst.

Manik Bandapaddhay said in their language that God exists in the good and gentle society, He is not found here in the fishermen community. Like Santiago, Kuber and other fishermen no more dream of any fortune or romance, they only pass their present time to survive. No future planning. Target is only from one full season of catching fish to another season. *The Old Man & The Sea* ends with another dream of Santiago about the lions. He will be mentally energetic again and will try for another fight to bring good luck. *Padma Nadir Majhi* ends with the departure of Kuber and Kapila from Ketupur to Moynadip. They will start a new life. We see in Kuber's eye the indomitable spirit of Santiago – "But man is not made for defeat. A man can be destroyed but not defeated."

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