

## Hope Serves The Purpose of Life: A Study of Rita Hayworth and Shawshank Redemption

**Lopamudra Jena**  
Research Scholar  
PG Dept. of English  
Ravenshaw University

### Abstract

*Rita Hayworth and Shawshank Redemption* was the first novella of the collection entitled *Different Seasons* by Stephen King, published in 1982. As its interesting subtitle: *Hope Springs Eternal* suggests, the novella, in the veil of a crime fiction and in first person narrative, details the story of undermined hope in the institutionalized prison life at Shawshank. King plays the card of hope in the budding friendship of two convicted inmates of Shawshank: Andy and Red. Andy made hope the only weapon to survive the atrocities at Shawshank. He was dressed in an attitude woven with hope which not only serves as a purpose of his life at the prison but also lit up the lives of the other prisoners like Red through inspiration. And in the end hope turned the tables and Andy became free. Moreover, the short novel reflects upon the power of hope in human life after being shattered in the storms of life.

**Key Words** : Hope, life, prison, Shawshank, indomitable, freedom, purpose, Andy, Red

### I. INTRODUCTION

Hope begets faith in one's self. As one of the greatest source of human strength, hope makes human beings believe in good things. In the face of adversity, it calms the human psyche and prepares one for a better tomorrow by channelizing one's action in right direction. It is the only thing that makes human bounce back after being knocked down by the blows of life. As King puts it into the golden words of Andy Dufresne, "...hope is a good thing ... maybe the best of things, and no good thing ever dies" (King 130).

The novella *Rita Hayworth and Shawshank Redemption* masterfully crafts the power of indomitable hope in the dark prison cells of Shawshank that helps in witnessing the dawn of freedom. Andy Dufresne, the protagonist and the emblem of hope in the narration, manifests hope through his action for a self-contained life despite all the hardship at Shawshank. Andy's strong determination and endurance took twenty-seven years to get Andy his complete freedom. He clung to the positive attitude possessed by his hope and, in the end, he overcomes all the obstacles to accomplish his dream.

## II. HOPE IN LITTLE THINGS

Human beings are unpredictable. Sometimes little things change the human perspective of looking at life and he comes out of the old shell to embrace a new one. The story of Rita Hayworth and Shawshank Redemption comprises several such incidents and objects that lead to the surfacing of hope and make the inmates of Shawshank imagine a life of containment beyond those bars. "The specific reference to hope arose explicitly and subtly many times in the story. The thread of hope—no-hope as a universal lived experience meandered throughout the narrative, surfacing with brief glimpses of moments of hope" (Parse 151).

The prison at Shawshank was a world within itself. The dark walls had not only separated the inmates from the outer world but also the prison authorities who were devoid of any sort of humanity. The institutionalized life at the prison had made the prisoners lose their identity as human beings and they were doomed to live a life which led to despair. They were confined both physically and psychologically which robbed them of hope to live a unregulated life again. Red said, "They give you life, and that's what they take- all of it that counts. May be they set you lose someday, but ..." (King 19).

Andy, on the other hand, found a purpose to survive the life at Shawshank. After establishing friendship with Red, Andy asked Red to get him a rock hammer to serve his hobby of sculpting. Though at first Red was skeptical of Andy's need, Andy's sculptors of rocks and pebbles made Red as well as other inmates admire Andy more. Those small figures on rock

serves as a hope for Andy as he found them a way to keep himself engaged in what he liked, especially in a place like Shawshank. Sculpting imparts him a sense of fulfillment in life. Unlike other prisoners at Shawshank, he never gave up his desire for a new life after Shawshank.

Besides sculpting, there were the posters of Rita Hayworth and the other female celebrities which gave Andy hope for a life outside the dark walls of Shawshank and dream of a life of freedom. Though the posters in the narrative were used by Andy to hide the tunnel, earlier the poster served to enliven the hope in Andy. And the title is self evident of the fact that the posters played equally significant role as the rock hammer in getting Andy a life free from the sadistic environment of Shawshank.

### III. ATTITUDE DRIVEN BY HOPE

Andy, from the beginning of his life at the prison, possessed an indomitable spirit against the life forced upon the prisoners at the prison. Starting from the Sisters to the Warden, who became blind to the truth of Andy being innocent before his selfish reasons to keep Andy with him for managing the paper works concerning the corruption at Shawshank.

Like every newcomer in the prison Andy too fell prey to the Sisters who forced him to have homosexual relationship with them but during his encounter with the Sisters, Andy didn't lose his strength and defended himself in order to keep his inner hope intact. Despite the tormentous encounter, he did not get derailed from his attitude constituted of hope and endurance.

There is a proverb that a little bit of light pushes away a lot of darkness. Likewise Andy severed as a little spark of hope to light up the prison life. There are some incidents on which Andy seemed to have sowed the seeds of hope in the hearts of his inmates. On one incident, while toiling the prisoners overheard the conversation between the guards and their head, Byron Hadley. Hadley was worrying about some sorts of claim worth 35,000 dollars and the tax to be paid. Andy on hearing their conversation fearlessly went to Hadley and offers the solution to his worries. At first Hadley lost his temper but later Andy's confidence over his knowledge of Tax system made Hadley accept Andy's demand of beer for his fellow workers in exchange of his

advice. Consuming beer, the prisoners, as described by Red, could feel themselves as free men though for a brief time. And seeing his co-workers enjoying beer after toil gave Andy a sense of satisfaction and it arouse a hope of becoming free in Red as well as in the other workers.

The prison library gave Andy's desire a boost to lead a normal life like any other human beings of the outside world. While working in the prison library, seeing its poor condition, Andy tried his best to improve the condition of the library. Andy didn't stop writing letters to higher authorities until the library was sanctioned with money for books and other equipments. "This hope-filled endeavor came to fruition when money, books, and other sundries came rolling into the prison. Andy continued to use his business acumen to gain protection from prison officials, while he was secretly and hopefully planning his escape" (Parse 150). Apart from this, Andy also helped some of the inmates of Shawshank in passing their high school equivalent examinations using the books of the library. He also planted new hobbies among the prisoners like soap carving, playing solitaire etc., and also developed a sense of purpose of life by getting them engaged in works like renovation of library.

Andy got close to the warden and guards of the prison while working in the library. Samuel Norton, the warden acknowledging Andy's knowledge regarding finance system appointed Andy in his office. Andy got to know the real face of the programmes held in the prison and scandals which the men of power are involved and it was the warden's office where he got the blueprint of the prison. In spite of knowing the corruption Andy went on providing his free service in order to accomplish his plan of escaping from the prison and preparing for the life beyond the prison walls.

During his service at the warden's office Andy came across a new comer named Tommy Williams. Williams appeared as a strong hope for Andy's freedom from Shawshank when he told Andy about his encounter with the real murderer of his wife. This information about Andy's innocence gave his hopes an unseen boost. He seemed to have lost his coolness as he got to know about the truth. He described his state of mind to Red:

it was as if Tommy had produced a key which fitted a cage in the back his mind, a cage like his own cell. Only instead of holding a man, that cage held a tiger. That tiger's name was Hope. Williams had produced the key that unlocked the cage and the tiger was out, willy-nilly, to roam his brain. (King 67)

But soon the strong sense of hope faded away. Andy's appointment with the warden resulted in the sudden disappearance of Tommy Williams from the prison and in Andy's spending days in solitary as Norton didn't want Andy to be free from Shawshank for his selfish needs. Andy's hope of being proved innocent and freed from prison got shattered; he returned to the Warden's office. Though it took Andy four years to come out of his gloomy mood, his spirit of hope was not dead and it reawakened with a second rock hammer.

#### IV. HOPE TRIUMPHS

Later in the novella, while in conversation with Red, Andy told him about his dream of owning a hotel in a small city of Mexico and asked Red to join him after freeing from Shawshank. As per his plan Andy made up a story for Red. And, during this conversation, Andy gave a hint of his escape planning and his words mark his intense desire for complete freedom:

It will be. But maybe not as many as the state and the warden Norton think it's going to be. I just cannot afford to wait that long keep thinking about Zihuatanejo and that small Hotel. That's all I want from my life now, Red, and I don't think that's too much to want. I didn't kill Glenn Quentin and I didn't kill my wife, and that Hotel...It's not too much to want. To swim and get a tan and sleep in a room with open window and space...that's not too much to want. (King 92)

Andy escaped from the prison after twenty-seven years with the help of hope, two rock hammers, and six posters of female celebrities. With his escape from prison he strummed the string of hope in the heart of Red. And, in the end, the hope triumphed with Red freeing from prison and embracing complete freedom as he uttered:

I hope Andy is down there.

I hope I can make it across the border.

I hope to see my friend and shake his hand.

I hope the Pacific is as blue as it has been in my dreams.

I hope. (King 132)

## V. CONCLUSION

Unlike the other well-known creations of Stephen King, *Rita Hayworth and Shawshank Redemption* discloses a universal truth of hope with utmost gentleness. The novella carries the distinctiveness of King's artistry in treating the theme of hope and its significance in human life. Though the narrative covers the gloomy life inside the prison wall, it showcases the irresistible hold of hope on human psychology that believes in good thing. "Nothing can dim the light which shines from within," writes Maya Angelou. Likewise, Andy Dufresne, the protagonist, is shown of having that inner light with which he enlightens not only his life but also that of Red. A desire for freedom, an optimistic attitude towards life, purpose, and persistent effort through endurance mark the story as a messenger of hope that serves the purpose of life.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

Angelou, Maya [@DrMayaAngelou]. "If one has courage, nothing can dim the light which shines from within. #MayaAngelou Please know that you are stronger than you may think. Continue." Twitter, 10 June, 2018, <https://mobile.twitter.com/drmayaangelou/status/1005835995227541504>.

King, Stephen. *Different Seasons*. Hodder & Stoughton, 2012.

Rizzo Parse, Rosemarie. "Hope in 'Rita Hayworth and Shawshank Redemption': A Human Becoming Hermeneutic Study." *Nursing Science Quarterly*, vol. 20, no. 2, Apr. 2007, pp. 148–154. *Sage Journals*, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0894318407299567>.

*The Shawshank Redemption*. Directed by Frank Darabont, Columbia Pictures, 1994.