

A Narrative Of Old Age And The Impact In The Life Of People: *The Old Man And The Sea.*

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Abstract

The purpose of the paper is to highlights the struggles and pains of old age. Horror of old age has worn out humanity since ages. Every age has its own fascinations and the old age has particularly its own. No one can escape the trials of old age, but shall plan to make them least trying. It is an inevitability which they must face cheerfully and make the best out of it. Through this paper I am trying to give the idea that how the trauma of aging faced by people. Old age is like an old song which its humanity melodies.

Key Words: Aging, suffering, physical weakness, loneliness, sleeplessness, struggles .

Old age is merely a stage of life in the sense that childhood and adolescence are stages. Age is a quality of the mind. Just as a child should be prepared for adulthood, so mature adult should prepare himself for the later maturity we call old age. As they aged, individuals sought to stay closely connected to their children and/or to more extended networks of kin. These relationships were structured around reciprocal obligations and notions of familial bonds and duties as well as around ties of real affection and attachment in many cases. Spouses, especially, gave vital support to one another, and children's duty to support their aged parents was but one strand of the thickly woven thread that bound together the elderly and their families in India.

Aging is something commonly shared. We grow older each moment of our lives from birth to death. Our only choice is how we decide to live the days of our years. Some people simply endure the aging process. They bear with stoicism the changes and chances of growing older. Others, even though they are aware of their aging, faces their weakening physical bodies and their diminishing mental capacities, manage to continue to like themselves, make new friends and live with love, laughter, peace and joy.

Growing old is a gift of life and growing into old age is a journey of challenge and faith. Old age is an autumn, filled with ripe fruit: it is also a barren winter, and we hear of its coldness, snow and frost. It has the sweet gentleness of a lovely evening. But it is also associated with the dark sadness of twilight. Growing old is not an easy proportion. At times it can be frightening and painful, but growing in any capacity as a human person is why we were created. God created a dynamic world, and each one is a part of that reality. It is the dynamism that invites a human being to reflect over God, and in this reflection there develops a relationship that grows with time and evolves into eternity. Growing old is the completion of the gift of life that will last forever.

However, there comes a time for everyone when the superficial changes of aging are beyond concealment. When the genius of childhood goes out, it goes out forever. People always say that from a worm there comes a butterfly: with mankind, it is the butterfly that turns into the worm through the stages of life. Consequently, whereas childhood and youth are the tomes when the human person is being formed and is completely directed towards the future and is coming to appreciate his own abilities- makes plans for adulthood, old age is not without its own benefits.

Throughout the seasons and years of one's life there are constant changes. Robert Browning in "Rabbi Ben Ezra" also aptly pointed out that old age is the completeness of life:

Grow old along with me!

The best is yet to be,

The last of life, for which the first was made

Our times are in his hand

Who saith 'A whole I planned,

Youth shows but half; trust God: See all, nor be afraid'! (1-6)

Looking 'old' is something most adult dread and try to avoid. Changes come to the body. One of the most obvious of these changes occurs in the skin, which becomes dryer, thinner and less elastic, producing marked wrinkling and making blood vessels and pockets of fat much more apparent. In addition, the dark patches of skin known as age spots are visible. Hair also undergoes obvious changes, continuing to become thinner and greyer and in many people eventually becoming white.

When people approach the old age they become physically weak. This physical weakness is common to everyone. They need the support and help of others especially from their children and from their fellow beings. The old people feel that they are not able to do anything by themselves. In *The Old man and The Sea* Santiago, the hero felt the tiredness in

his life. The novelist says that when the boy came back the old man was asleep in the chair and the sun was down. "The boy took the old army blanket off the bed and spread it over the back of the chair and over the old man's shoulder" (*The Old Man and the Sea*,14)

Sleeplessness is another feature of old age. Some of them think of the past days and they ponder on it. It is hard and painful for them to sleep. He grows weaker every day; his eyes become dim, his ears deaf; his strength fades; his heart knows peace no longer; his mouth falls silent and he speaks no word. The power of his mind lessens and today he cannot remember what yesterday was like. All his bones hurt. The old people do not have a sound sleep. Every now and then they get up from their sleep. They are vigilant to the happenings that are taking place around them. Santiago's young friend Manolin tells him that the old man is his alarm clock to which the old man gives his replies: "Age is my alarm clock" (*The Old Man and the Sea*, 20)

Adjustment is an active process that involves finding the right balance between maintaining one's normal activities and modifying one's routines to fit diminished capacities. For the healthy young-old, the changes may be minor, such as eating less, more frequent meals in between and devoting more time to stretching and warm-ups before heavy exercise. Loss of appetite is another feature of the old age. The old people find it difficult to eat. They have no interest towards food. Even if they eat something, they take a long time to eat it. Appetite not often frequented Santiago, because for a long time now "eating had bored him and he never carried a lunch" (*The Old Man and the Sea*, 24).

Most often when people approach the old age they experience poverty. They are always at the mercy of their children for their needs. Many don't have any pension or any financial support. They are not able to work by themselves and mostly they are ignored by their sons and daughters. In the case of Santiago, even 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. Besides, he was barefooted. Here again Hemingway sheds light on Santiago's penury:

"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." (*The Old Man and the Sea*, 20-21)

He was so poor that he has no pillow, no bed to sleep on, but only some old newspapers. Ernest Hemingway portrays the penury of the Satiago in the above sentence. There was no spare dress for him to change. With the same dress he goes to sleep. To make a pillow he uses his trousers. He makes a bed with the newspapers and sleep inside of the news paper.

Each human being is in a world by himself or herself all time. Each is ruled by his own uncompromising dictums, dreams, aspirations, yearnings, emotions, secrecy, likes and dislikes etc. When a person is born a world is born which is secluded and covered, fenced and

guarded. There is no transparency but forced respectability because coming into existence is not one's own choice. When a baby is born, it is born with a bundle of uncertainties.

All these changes in appearances have serious, social and psychological implications in society, where the old are treated as old, in mechanical way. This fact is poignantly underscored by the reactions of the elderly themselves. Lillian Troll and Skaff Marilyn remark in their authoritative study that, "most older people consider their personality values and attitudes quite stable and, except for acknowledging that they may have slowed down a bit, do not feel that they have changed all that much from their younger days" (*Psychology and Aging*, 169). Therefore, when older people see a recent photograph of them, or catch an unguarded glimpse of them in the mirror, or merely notice how others treat them, they are often taken with surprise and regret, even in late adulthood.

Again, *The Old Man and the Sea* can be interpreted as a parable of mankind, showing man's life as a struggle against unconquerable natural forces, a struggle in which, through dignity, a kind of victory is won. Though he is waging a very crucial battle against the forces of the nature, he is a real Old Man like any other human being.

The old fisherman is engaged in an unceasing struggle with natural forces as he rows out into the Gulf Stream day after day, braving the elements to make precarious living. He has gone eighty-four days without catching a fish and he is regarded as *salao*, the worst form of unlucky. Santiago says: "I'm being towed by a fish and I'm the towing bitt." (*The Old Man and the Sea*, 42). Again the old man struggles with the fish. "It was difficult in the dark and once the fish made a surge that pulled him down on his face and made a cut below his eyes. The blood ran down his cheek a little way" (*The Old Man and the Sea*, 49-50).

The old man's struggle becomes more intense when his companion, the boy Manolin, has been forced to leave him. His sail patched with flour sacks, looks like "the flag of permanent defeat" (*The Old Man and the Sea*, 5). When it is furled, and yet his eyes are still "cheerful and undefeated" (*The Old Man and the Sea*, 6). Instead of giving up, like Tennyson's Ulysses, he decides "to strive to seek, to find and not to yield", (*A Selected Edition* 145). He feels that he is still strong enough to catch a really big fish.

Fear of old age has strained humanity since ages. The wise can face it with least trouble and little pain. Let us not forget that every age has its own fascinations and the old age has particularly its own. Those who long to live long should not think of escaping the trials of old age, but should plan to make them least trying. It is necessary, which they must face cheerfully and make the best out of it. Old age is like an old song with its sweet melodies.

Old age is indeed a pond into which all the foul waters run and which has no outlet but death. At times old age has been referred to as the autumn of life. We need but look at the changes taking place in the landscape over the course of the years, on the mountains and in the plains, in the meadows, valleys and forest, in the trees and plants. There is a close resemblance between human biorhythms and the natural cycles of which we are a part.

Santiago, the old fisherman has battled against the fish with courage and has faced his loss with dignity. He is physically exhausted, but mentally hopeful: he is ready once more to face the hardship of life. It is the knowledge that a simple man is capable of such decency, dignity and even heroism, and that his struggle can be seen in heroic terms that makes the story outstanding. The old man finally loses the battle he has won. He is undefeated because he has gone on trying. Santiago's victory lies in the fact that he has endured suffering without impairment of his belief in the worth of what he has been doing.

Suffering is another problem faced by the old. Such as physical, mental and psychological pains are more at this particular stage of life. For many of the healthy elderly, the most troubling part of aging is not how well they appear to others but how well they cope with others. Such social relationship depends on their ability to use their senses. Unfortunately all the senses become less sharp with each decade. Many old people were rendered isolated and vulnerable because of their inability to see and hear well. In the case of the Old Man his eyesight alone is clear because of his in taking of shark liver oil. Today however, most of the visual and auditory losses of the aged can be corrected or at least remedied.

The meaning of pain is one of the biggest questions of humanity. The pain of isolation is one of the biggest pains the old people face in their life. Pain causes perplexity because it raises questions which one cannot answer, and can even create within him a sense of profound indignation. But if he reflects upon the deeper meaning of suffering and Pain, his indignation will turn into amazement.

Perhaps all the people who had actually participated in war or had been its victims in one way or another were quite understandably disenchanted with life because of its horrors and brutalities. All things belonging to this world is mere vanity, in fact, vanity of vanities. People go on toiling all through their lives, but they hardly get anything out of what they do.

No doubt, people come and go; the sun appears and disappears; the wind blows to and fro; everything is perishable. There is a good deal of frustration and perversion and disenchantment in old age. The aging process is influenced by lifestyle, environment factors, health care, disease and genetic constitution. Increasing age is associated with increasing disability and loss of independence with functional impairments such as less of mobility, sight and hearing. A major challenge facing society is how it can maintain health and quality of life in an aging population. My message to the readers is that accept old age with tranquillity.

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