



Perseverance, honesty and struggle as characteristic spiritual streak in Hemingway's *The Old Man and the Sea* and Swarup's *The Accidental Apprentice*

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Received: 18 Oct 2025; Received in revised form: 16 Nov 2025; Accepted: 21 Nov 2025; Available online: 25 Nov 2025

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Abstract— Ernest Hemingway and Vikas Swarup can be critically found sharing nothing in common as the former is credited to have tried for transcendental while the latter presents kaleidoscopic facets of life with varied hues and colours. Nonetheless, in terms of characterization something runs as common thread in *The Old Man and the Sea* and *The Accidental Apprentice*. No critic would gainsay the fact that Santiago in the former novella represents, and serves as a metaphorical image, of a species (human) asserting his existential presence and obeying harmony with nature and other species. The perseverant protagonist does not give up to the colossal, human size in contrast to giant marlin is notwithstanding. The old man has been projected against the vast scheme of Nature wherein the novelist showcases man's eternal struggle against indifferent nature apart from his adjustability. The protagonist in another novel does share with Hemingway's old man in terms of true character in the vortex of life while passing through struggles and hardships. Sapna Sinha, though an ordinary proletarian girl, has strong perseverance and honesty to the given circumstances in her character. Through contrived plots Swarup puts the protagonist through odd vicissitudes as she has to pass the seven tests designed by Acharya Vinay. It is her streak of character with honesty, acceptability, perseverance that she emerges triumphant through hard tests; wiser, more refined and enlightened Sapna attains spiritual bit sublimity at the final pages of the novel.



Keywords— character, nature, protagonist, spiritual, struggle, perseverance

If critically taken into pieces, the works of Ernest Hemingway and Vikas Swarup, there would hardly come up something common between two. As a literary artist, philosopher, foreseer and visionary Hemingway holds a coveted place while Swarup is credited being a chronicler of socio-cultural shades of modern Indian life. The former author counts as one of the most representative literary novelists in twentieth century, not only in American world but across the globe. It is well-known fact that someone gets perennial niche in any arena not simply he is one like others in that field, but the one whose contribution in that field is marked with some unique sagacity. Towering figure like Hemingway would not conclude any literary-artistic piece merely by having penned down common shades and hues of life; he rather has taken the readers to the transcendental

heights and to the inner zones of one self with his spiritual touch. *A Farewell to the Arms* (1929) does not flatly falls in the category of documentary literature showing one's point of view and concerns over the horrid facets and consequences of war. Hemingway, in this narrative, does delineates ugly face of First World War I, however, he makes the readers realize the deeper anguish as the protagonist Henry has to undergo.

Similarly, Hemingway's masterpiece *The Old Man and the Sea* (1952), which has been taken herein for the research, has established the author as one of the potential voices of his times. The novella is not merely a story of a Cuban old fisherman's struggle but it aims higher as an epic saga of man's perennial struggle. Santiago, the old man, stands as the symbol of man who has been asserting his presence and

existence on earth, his story has attained rather transcendental heights. Hemingway comes up with the truth of human's persistent progression through the hardships and never give-up spirit of the protagonist. The old man does not surrender to the adversity of fiasco of having no catch for long eighty-four days. He epitomizes hard-core optimism because of which perhaps human species has been surviving.

Ontological study of life on earth may reveal that motley of species have succumbed to pain and adversity and thus gone extinct. Charles Darwin in his seminal book *The Origin of Species* (1859) has propounded the idea 'survival of the fittest' which came to be used and quoted very popularly in all branches of knowledge. Robert J. Richards quotes this Darwinian fact of survival supremacy:

In chapter 10 of the *Origin*, for instance, Darwin asserts that "the more recent forms [of creatures] must, on my theory, be higher than the more ancient; for each new species is formed by having had some advantage in the struggle for life over other and preceding forms". This is a universal proposition, not confined to a local population. (Darwin quoted at: <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2702795/#>)

Human race has been one such dominant and advantageous species in the race of survival, waging strife and consistently progressing ahead-- hostile terrains in the path, challenges and adversities notwithstanding. Metaphorically Santiago stands for that struggle and perseverance on the basis of which human being has survived. Dr Rommana Farooqui's analysis substantiates this point:

Just like Santiago, we all in this life are fighting in many different ways to survive as well as all the other creatures on this earth too. We can see how Santiago has a firm determination and intention to hook the fish and to show to others how he remains undefeated. It simply proved how strong he was, with a mindset of not quitting and not giving up, no matter how tough and challenging it would be. The novella shows Santiago's amazing and unbeatable willpower and mental strength despite his physical exhaustion due to old age. Santiago believed with positive attitude and hoped one can overcome all the hardships and challenges. (Farooqui, 2021: 186)

Santiago's struggle and undefeated spirit exemplify the universal truth that something or someone lacking inner strength does not last long while true character helps one in perseverant struggle in life. The old man here has substantial character that provides him determination in the

adverse circumstances. Marlin and other Sharks are far huger than him apart from hostile weather and the sea, yet Santiago is focused over his profession. In long process of loosening and tightening the line on Marlin he gets injured, fatigued, yet does not give up:

He took his pain and what was left of his strength and his long-gone pride and he put it against the fish's agony and the fish came over onto his side and swam gently on his side, his bill almost touching the planking of the skiff, and started to pass the boat, long, deep, wide, silver and barred with purple and interminable in the water.

The old man dropped the line and put his foot on it and lifted the harpoon as high as he could and drove it down with all his strength, and more strength he had just summoned, into the fish's side just behind the great chest fin that rose high in the air to the attitude of the man's chest. (*The Old Man and the Sea*, 1952: 71-72)

By showcasing such haughty perseverance of the protagonist Hemingway adduces the fact of man's perennial struggle and toughness against all adversities. It is obvious that what distinguishes Santiago from other fishermen is his honesty in character; the old man represents truthfulness to what he is, true to his character. In spite of criticism and mockery from others he does not let his mind be home for qualms about his abilities. Failure cannot shake the moorings of his boat and his true character. One who has duality of thoughts and shaken character is bound to give up, yet Santiago does not. Santiago stands for endurance and unchecked struggle while Marlin and the sharks stand for hardships, obstacles, adversity and challenges in life. Inevitability of pain, suffering and tragic experience serve as the very core of life; earned pleasure is rather meagre in contrast to such inevitable components of life. Thomas Hardy had unearthed this hard fact that-'Happiness was but the occasional episode in the general drama of pain.' Fatmir Ramadani explores this truth:

The story of Santiago shows not only natural tragic pattern, as the individual human life may do when seen as a whole. It can also stand as a natural parable. In this story, as in the life of man, the battle commences, grows and subsides between one sleep and another. In human experience there are many forms of both marlin and shark. Much is to be endured, and perhaps relatively little is to be enjoyed between the commencement of our human effort and its end. (Ramadani, 2022: 52)

The fact goes without saying that from inner true characters there reflect certain virtues in behaviour such as tolerance, nobility and altruism. Santiago knows well that angling the

fishes is his profession and thus he is bound to kill them; however, he imparts due respect to the catch and treats them tolerantly. In fact, there lurks autobiographical elements in the narrative as Hemingway knew much about the marine life and fishing profession. Tolerance and altruism that reflect from Santiago is extension of the mind of his creator. The old man valiantly wages three-day dogged battle against giant marlin and sharks, yet he gives ample respect to his foe. He addresses and refers fish using human pronouns 'He' and 'you' instead of 'it', "I want to see him, he thought, and to touch and feel him. He is my fortune." (OMS, 73) Being the representative of his creator and the essential human Santiago shows much tolerance to the otherness of others, to everything in the scheme of nature. Reeta S. Harode highlights this altruist humane attitude of Hemingway that reflects in the character of his mouthpiece:

This outlook of Hemingway is mirrored in Santiago who has deferential attitude towards his foe. He treats fish as a noble being instead of an uncivilized wild beast. When he offers sardine and bait to the fish as his initial strategic move in the act of fishing, his mode of addressing the fish exudes the affection of an elderly man offering food to a child in pampered words: "Come on", the old man said aloud. "Make another turn. Just smell them. Aren't they lovely?..." (Harode, 2013: 02)

Santiago has attained universal acclaim being the true representative of essential human, showcasing the virtues of tolerance, altruism, perseverance, dogged persistence for continuous struggle. All such characteristic virtues and attributes owe to his spiritual streak as the old man and many like him leave exemplary marks in the world with their good deeds. One's characteristic spiritual streak exudes in one's such action and behaviour as in Santiago's. Socially, culturally, experientially, professionally, in age and in gender the protagonist Sapna Sinha in *The Accidental Apprentice* (2013) is entirely different entity from the old man discussed earlier. The narrative of the novel is set in modern day twenty first century India, the world far away and far different from the Carribbeans. In the character of Sapna, merely a salesgirl, Vikas Swarup has tried to bring home the idea that spiritual streak and honesty in one's character serves as impetus for determined actions, perseverance and courage to face adversities. Swarup has placed his protagonist in the narrative in such a way that she has to be through varied vicissitudes and hardships in life, yet she emerges triumphant each time. Vinay Mohan Acharya, the owner of multi-billion ABC company, has been assigned the job of making ploys for Sapna and make her to pass through the designed paths and test her character.

Sapna, an ordinary salesgirl, is the choicest pick for Acharya who is in search of someone exceptional; who esoterically stands apart from mundane crowd; someone who is naturally bestowed with characteristic spiritual streak and honesty. Being mouthpiece of his creator Acharya resourcefully and craftily designs seven tests for Sapna to pass in a way that she proves herself and learn in each one. The protagonist girl has to be through each test in her routine life as a puppet who is uncertain about what is in her store next. What Acharya wants to testify and verify in his next CEO is how she tackles imposed problems and hardship. Swarup, like Hemingway, is successful in establishing the fact that it is one's perseverance, honesty in character that he or she gets through challenges and vicissitudes in life. For his exceptional streak in character, determination, tolerant and altruist approach Santiago in the former novella emerges as one of the finest characters, Sapna in this novel qualifies to be distinguished person with essential attributes of a human. In each test her character is proven, her triumph in each situation owes to her honesty in character.

It goes to architectonic art of Swarup that Sapna's real life events are made so intermingled with Acharya's ploys for her that she and the readers stay clueless to differentiate the real ones and the designed ones. Accordingly, the chapters in the novels have been designed with the progress of her ventures into the traps and plots made by the man holding dices, Acharya. In the first chapter 'The First Test: Love in the Time of Khap' Swarup artistically brings forth virtue from the character of the protagonist viz. Leadership. Proving herself a leader in the perilous dark Haryana hinterland is almost impossible for an urban salesgirl; however, her success amidst such hostile self-styled khap bigotry owes to the truth in her character and her honesty for the cause of love. For her streak of perseverance in her character she not only comes out unscathed, but also saves the dignity of love.

In spite of her economic insecurity Sapna proves herself as someone who does not fall prey to all-empowering greed in the second test or the second chapter 'Diamonds and Rust'. Her characteristic honesty gets better of any need or compromise as she returns the Bollywood actress Priya Kapoor's precious ring and wins hearts. Acharya tests Sapna's integrity by putting her through examination to learn from the school of life, she passes it with the distinction of pure gold in her character:

'Integrity means much more than just honesty, Sapna. The real test of integrity is to be honest even when no one is looking. You proved you have solid sense of right and wrong. Remember, a good leader must have an exemplary character. Only

then can he or she inspire trust. Nothing damages an organization more than the dishonesty of its employees. And if the CEO himself is crooked, heaven help that company.' (*The Accidental Apprentice*, 2013: 148)

As Santiago does not give up to the colossal size of the opponent and acute adversity here Sapna is endowed with such spirit that she can summon up courage from her inner self when there is shadows of fear and vulnerability. In the third test and chapter 'Locked Dreams' anyone would have preferred to avoid and escape the mafia of child labour racket, but Sapna has spiritual streak in her character and faces all lethal threats courageously. It is the test of 'courage' for her, the business tycoon testifies her:

'I still don't get how courage applies to a corporation.' 'It's simple,' Acharya smiles. 'The most common fear in a CEO is the fear of failure. A good leader has learnt to conquer the fear. He or she takes calculated risks boldly, knowing that the greatest fear is not taking the wrong action, but not taking action at all. That is the fear of regret, the regret of not having tried.'

I nod. It brings to mind a quote of Kierkegaard I read once: 'To dare is to lose one's footing momentarily. To not dare is to lose oneself.' (185)

In successive tests 'The Blindness of Fame', 'The Atlas of Revolution', '150 grams of Sacrifice', 'The Acid Rain'—shades of Sapna's character come forth as her foresight, resourcefulness, decisiveness and others. May it be Hemingway or Swarup, what a true artist endeavours to adduce is the fact that if someone is spiritually astute and balanced inside-- handles outside challenges bravely. It is Sapna's spiritual strength that she accepts struggle in life, does not compromise and fights with perseverance in all add situations. Both Santiago's and Sapna's rise to the transcendence owes to their spiritual strength in their characters.

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