NOVELS OF ERNEST HEMINGWAY: A STUDY IN NATURALISM

SUMMARY

Ernest Hemingway has been a centre of critical attention in the twentieth century. He has been widely explored by the research scholars. However, he needs much more microscopic evaluation in respect of his adherence to the tenets of naturalism, which played a vital role in the twentieth century American fiction. With this objective in view, the present thesis, “NOVELS OF ERNEST HEMINGWAY: A STUDY OF NATURALISM”, is proposed to be carried out to bring to light, the extent to which, he was the practitioner of naturalism in his fiction. The proposed scheme of chapters in the thesis is classified under the following heads:

I Introduction

II Novelist in Making

III Naturalism: Definition and Evolution

IV Naturalism and Hemingway’s Novels

V Hemingway: The Naturalist in Short Stories

VI Summing-Up

In reference to the objective mentioned at the outset, the opening chapter Introduction stresses the relevance of American novel.
It focuses on the realistic and naturalistic fiction writers of both, the last decade of the 19th and the 20th century. It also discusses the important literary trends which influenced the fiction.

During the last quarter of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century, a strong sense of naturalism in literature became evident throughout the Western world. Many prominent American authors were consciously striving to practice naturalism in theme and style. Most of the novelists from 1890s onwards were greatly influenced by this movement. They tried to establish in their writings that man being essentially an animal, begins to show animalistic gesture in the moments of stress. They also corroborated with Spencer’s ‘Survival of the fittest’ by justifying that man’s life was nothing but a woeful tale of warfare. This is explicitly revealed in the fiction of Stephen Crane, Frank Norris, Theodore Dreiser and Jack London belonging to the last decade of the 19th century.

The history of American fiction is a steady progress towards naturalism. The hazy and mysterious atmosphere in the novels of Hawthorne and Melville was replaced by the stark naturalism of 1890s. The novel of this decade resulted straightway into the naturalist novel of the early decades of 20th century. The origin of naturalism in America lies in last decade of the 19th century. The factors which contributed to naturalism in literature in America, of which Ernest Hemingway is the finest example, began to appear immediately after the civil war.
The last two decades of the 19th century in Europe as well as in America, were decades of large intellectual changes. The American society, in particular, moved in the direction of modernization. It was ideological change because American society had to alter the earlier policies and ideologies so that new America was born.

Chapter II **Novelist in Making** deals pointedly with the biographical details of Hemingway’s life. It also brings out the direct and indirect influence of the writers on his fiction. Ernest Hemingway, a multifaceted personality was born on July 21, 1899 at Oak Park, a suburb of Chicago, Illinois. He lived a legendary life and produced profound literature. In fact, he turned his life experiences into a literature, which proved to be of great interest to readers. His writing made him a literary giant of twentieth century America, and won him Pulitzer Prize for fiction in 1953 and the Nobel Prize for literature in 1954. Oak Park was considered as the capital of the middle class people of the world. It was dominated by the Puritan values of the Victorian age. His father Dr. Clarence Edmund was a man devoted to outdoor activities like hunting, fishing etc. besides practicing medicine. His mother Grace was a woman with great interest in opera and piano. The Hemingway family believed in traditional values of the Puritan age. She was devoutly religious and tried to impose their convictions and conventions upon their six children, two sons and four daughters. Ernest was the second child in the family.

It was against this background, that Ernest Hemingway was brought up and educated. He declined to go for higher education. Instead
he craved for actions and adventures and wanted to enroll himself in the American Army. But his damaged eye came in the way of his ambition. He was rejected by the Army. He, therefore, developed interest and skill in adventurous sports. Mysteriously accident prone, as if secretly he wanted to expose himself to danger, Ernest Hemingway put to test his ability to absorb infliction.

Ernest Hemingway married four subsequent times. In September, 1921, he met a young rich, pianist, Hadley Richardson and married her. Their marriage could not last long. He divorced her. Ernest Hemingway met another lady named Pauline Pleiffer, a fashion designer. He fell in her love and married her in the middle of 1927. His second marriage developed serious strain. He fell in love with Martha Gellhorn, his companion in Spain, newspaperwoman covering battlefront and a fiction writer. Ernest married her in 1940 after divorcing Pauline. This was his third marriage. Martha was an ambitious lady. Once he fell ill and was hospitalized in Paris. He was attended upon Mary Walsh, a beautiful lady. She eventually becomes his fourth and the last wife of Ernest Hemingway, on March 14, 1946 as his marriage with Martha broke up in 1944. His fourth marriage lasted 17 years and ended with Ernest’s death. Unlike the other three marriages this was his longest, happiest and the most harmonious one.

Ernest Hemingway lived his life on his own terms and continued to write till death. He thought that a writer never retires from his writing. He always faced a question- what is he working on now? He
died on July 2, 1961 by shooting himself through head when he could not bear the pain and suffering of illness, high blood pressure and psychological difficulties that became oppressive at his fag end of life. Thus, the colourful life of a great naturalist writer in America came to the end.

Chapter III Naturalism: Definition and Evolution analyses the account of the origin of his literary creed, its definition and its impact on the writings of European as well as American literature. It also expresses all the scientific theories of Darwin and Spencer, which were greatly instrumental in shaping this literary creed.

Literary naturalism derives mainly from a biological model. Its origin owes much to Charles Darwin and his theory of evolution, based on natural selection. It opines that species change through a process of adaptation to their immediate environment. As a theory of evolution, it revealed the physical process of the universe, matter unfolding in time. It contained the idea of devolution and degeneration. Natural selection argues that the best in the species are attracted to and mate with other. This leaves the worst in species to mate and generate their own offspring. Literary naturalism gave far more attention to such evolutionary throwbacks than to its forwards progress. The above facts of traits obviously became the inseparable tenets of naturalism.

As a Naturalistic practitioner, Hemingway dramatized determinism through a plot that made every action consequential. Determinism evoked Hemingway’s famous comparison of human beings
to insects and animals. They are all subject to indictable drives that characters experience as desire. Desire is the natural force in Hemingway’s blood. Objects of desire are socially constructed artifacts imbued with impossible dreams of happiness. Insatiability is thus, an innate human condition and the origin of social conditioning. Naturalistic works exposed the dark harshness of life, including poverty, racism, prejudice, disease, prostitution, filth etc.

Chapter IV Naturalism and Hemingway’s Novels stresses the relevance of Hemingway’s novels strictly in accordance to naturalistic ways. It deals with the aspects of naturalism treated by Hemingway especially in the novels The Old Man and the Sea, A Farewell to Arms, The Sun Also Rises and For Whom the Bell Tolls, to bring out in particular that man is not free and independent creature and the master of his own will.

The Old Man and the Sea narrates the adventure of a Cuban fisherman. It expresses Hemingway’s philosophy of fortitude and endurance not to yield to defeat in spite of heavy losses. Embedded with seeds of naturalism, it seems to carry out his theory of nada.

A Farewell to Arms is a classic among naturalistic novels. It depicts the paradox of war. There is no hope and no future for Frederic Henry and Catherine Barkley becomes the victim of a cruel and hostile age.

The Sun Also Rises concentrates on artificiality and desperation of the life bred by the First World War. For Whom the Bell
Tolls narrates the story of three days in the life of a young American who had aligned himself with the Loyalist cause in Spain. It is a story of courage, of loyalty, of self-sacrifice, of love, of the human-will to endure. Display of naturalistic tenets can easily be observed anywhere in his works.

Chapter V Hemingway: The Naturalist in Short Stories is fully devoted to a microscopic survey of short stories by Hemingway. It traces out the treatment of naturalism in them. His stories, The Killers, An Alpine Idyll, A Clean Well-Lighted Place forms the basis of this study.

A Clean Well-Lighted Place brings out Hemingway’s philosophy of nada an awareness of the futility of all human endeavour. Nada is a clearly concretized actuality. The concept of meaninglessness has been brilliantly enumerated. To Hemingway it is a fundamental constituent of the universe. In The Killers, Hemingway represents his style and the subjects that would occupy his work throughout his career. These subjects include the meaninglessness of human life and the inevitability of death. Coloured with the strips of naturalism, it deals with the tough world of gangsters in Chicago. The hero Nick has been exposed to greater evil than any he has seen ever before.

As we march forward, his love for animalism is nicely exemplified in his short story, An Alpine Idyll. It is an episode of peasant animalism. It features the character of Nick Adams, a world-war veteran, on a skiing trip, in the Austrian Tyrol with his friend John. Hemingway
extolled the virtues of antique courage, fortitude and stoic endurance in matadors, pugilists and the Old Cuban fisherman.

Chapter VI Summing-Up concludes with the fact that Naturalism constitutes a major theme of the Hemingway fiction. It is a theme of the human tragedy as conceived by Hemingway as a writer. This theme is effectively demonstrated throughout his novels and short stories. Hemingway belongs to an age which is marked by unprecedented violence, unleashed by World War I and other wars across the continent, an age which ushered in an altogether new era. In America, the changes were felt since the late nineteenth century, particularly after the Civil War. These changes were more strongly experienced during the last decade of the 19th century. After the Industrial Revolution the agrarian values disappeared, and the formation of big cities created new problems for the Americans at large. It was a move from rural to urbanization to modernization, which is often considered as equivalent to Americanization.

The modern America was more secular and scientific than before. The general worldwide prevalent towards the end of the 19th century is suggested by the term Naturalism. Naturalism was not only a technical device of fiction writing but also an attitude, necessarily pessimistic. It was associated with ‘Determinism’- a biological theory according to which man is helpless victim of hostile circumstances often beyond his control. The nineteenth century naturalism in America was an outcome of unforeseen changes in society. Charles Darwin’s theory of
evolution, the amazing advances in human anthropology demonstrated particularly by Sir James Frazer and Miss Jessie Weston, the analysis of the human mind by Freud and Jung, and above all the devastation brought about the First World War-all resulted in an attitude often known as ‘nihilism’ which was an important ingredient of naturalism as a literary concept. Naturalism in American literature revealed itself in a variety of manners. In fiction it is represented by a group of writers known as ‘Lost Generation’. These writers had developed a feeling of rootlessness, of being lost from old values and conventions and from the rest of humanity. Ernest Hemingway is a representative of this group of writers in America.

Hemingway is a writer of high naturalism in America. The Hemingway hero is essentially a common man, a bull-fighter, a soldier, an old man fisherman, and a writer of common concern lying sick in hills of Kilimanjaro. This common man is trapped in deterministic elements. This common man reveals remarkable capacity to endure, and willingness to die for what he thinks he must achieve. He loves his objective, and puts all his efforts to gain it. He undergoes tremendous labour and finally dies. This tragedy evokes deep emotional response as intense as the tragedy of King Oedipus or King Lear, or of Prince Hamlet. Hemingway’s inclination towards tragedy is revealed in his statements- all stories if continued for enough, end in death. This becomes the theory of naturalism. The tragedy of the common man has become the hallmark of his theory of naturalism.
Thus, Hemingway fiction depicts individuals as not the masters of their fate. Right always does not triumph, wickedness is not always punished. God is not in his heaven and all is not well with the world. Hemingway has become more relevant today than his own time because of his tremendous love and respect for nature. The Old Man Santiago is the epitome of the world’s poor who have to hunt fish or cut trees because their lives depend on it but who are still immensely respectful to nature, precisely because they know that overexploiting her will lead to all sorts of calamities. Even in midst of his battle with the first the fish and then the sharks he is constantly questioning the rightness of killing them and pondering over the inconsequential status of human beings faced with the immense power of nature.

Taken as a whole, Hemingway’s naturalism is a kind of wisdom that is going to help mankind to survive confronted as it is a severe ecological crisis that threatens future survival.