

The Immature Sense of Maturity in Tolstoy's *Little Girls are Wiser than Men*: A critical Analysis of Mental Age and Physical Age

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ABSTRACT

This study challenges the taken for granted notion of the mental maturity, which is wrongly believed to be in synchrony with the physical maturity. The study gives a close assessment and scrutiny of the selected story and unravels the delicate layers of the nature of maturity, which seems to get contaminated by the passage of time. Indeed, the study makes an attempt to display the innocent maturity in immaturity and satanic immaturity in maturity. Ultimately, it shows the contamination of the essence of maturity through the hazardous journey of tick tocks of the alarming clock of life, which mistakenly taken as the legitimized maturity.

Key Words: maturity, immaturity, metanarrative, fossilized

1. INTRODUCTION

Maturity may have various interpretations by different individuals of divergent mental concepts. Some people may believe that mental and physical maturities are interrelated, which means that we should prefer the age-based maturity to any other possible ones. As the content elements of maturity are knowledge, understanding, ethics and better judgments, consequently, we may have high expectations from the people of high maturity. Therefore, based on age-related maturity theory, an elder member of a family is expected to have more logical and realistic concept of life; his judgments and decisions should be respected without any opposition and objection.

Indeed, there is a difference between growth and maturity; growth is linked with the quantitative physical changes like weight, height and etc., which undergo size measurements, while maturity is a qualitative change, which deals with the structural and functional organism of the individuals. Actually, the personality structure of an individual, which is the birth of his /her maturity, takes place in the early stages of childhood. Freud has given a clear picture of personality structure:

In Freud's theory, three parts of the personality—id, ego, and superego—become integrated during five stages. The id, the largest portion of the mind, is the source of basic biological needs and desires. The ego—the conscious, rational part of personality— emerges in early infancy to redirect the id's impulses so they are discharged on appropriate objects at acceptable times and places. For example, aided by the ego, the hungry baby stops crying when he sees his mother preparing to feed him. And the more competent preschooler gets a snack from the kitchen on her own.

Between 3 and 6 years of age, the superego, or conscience, develops through interactions with parents, who insist that children conform to the values of society. Now the ego faces the increasingly complex task of reconciling the demands of the id, the external world, and conscience (Freud, 1923/1974). For example, when the ego is tempted to gratify an id impulse by hitting a playmate to get an attractive toy, the superego may warn that such behavior is wrong. The ego must decide which of the two forces (id or superego) will win this inner struggle, or it must work out a compromise, such as asking for a turn with the toy. According to Freud, the relations established among the id, ego, and superego during the preschool years determine the individual's basic personality. (qtd. in Berk, 2007: 15)

Therefore, each individual at any age walks on the path of maturity, but the question is how much vulnerability and susceptibility he shows towards the contaminated calculative tricks, which are mostly the gifts of the modern world of development and high sophistication. This tantalizing world has given birth to high greed-honeyed expectations, which manipulate the natural process of healthy maturity growth. This contamination leads to unwanted grudges against all the people around us, even against those, whom we have not met yet. Indeed, we all seem to be pregnant with fury and revenge; this sense of revenge is embedded in such vigorous hostility and resentment that sparks the flames of any unexpected appalling battle with disastrous repercussions. It seems that our physical growth carries a viper-like twinned mate and as we grow older the viper gets more and more poisonous and revengeful. It gives the impression that revenge is the most omnipresent and dominant emotion in human beings. Indeed, human beings as rational beings are expected not

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to give in to such irrational and dehumanizing emotions of destruction and inhumanity. Penzler, (2000) avers that:

Is there a more human emotion than revenge? In fact, does any other lifeform known to us engage in revenge, or even consider it? Animals kill other animals for food, or self-defence, or for power, for rank within the community. But for revenge? No.

Humans, on the other hand, have engaged in this activity through all of recorded history. (5)

Childhood innocence and simplicity, though regarded naïve in the sophisticated world of industrialization and technology is hardly infected with malice and revenge. A child lives in a delicate and fragile world of torrential shower of love and affection. The sense of love and attachment in a child is so real and virgin that even *Resentment* and *Hatred* feel embarrassed and ashamed to step in its world. Tagore (2004: 5) draws a divine picture of a baby's world of innocence in his poem called *Baby's World*:

I wish I could take a quiet corner in the heart of my baby's very own world.

I know it has stars that talk to him, and a sky that stoops down to his face to amuse him with its silly clouds and rainbows.

Those who make believe to be dumb, and look as if they never could move, come creeping to his window with their stories and with trays crowded with bright toys.

I wish I could travel by the road that crosses baby's mind, and out beyond all bounds;

Where messengers run errands for no cause between the kingdoms of kings of no history;

Where messengers run errands for no cause between the kingdoms of kings of no history;

Where Reason makes kites of her laws and flies them, the Truth sets Fact free from its fetters.

2. GREED AND REVENGE

Greed is a poisonous infection, which may contaminate our thinking reservoir. It leads life track into a destructive mode and mood of deception and sedition. It creates a never-quenching desire to swallow and devour all the available human-desired possessions. This sense of non-saturation makes our maturity flow hemiplegic. It loses its normal pace of growth. It affects the mental concept of all those who show strong inclination towards power and affluence. According to Hooks (2000):

Greed has become the common bond shared by many of the poor and well-to-do. When honest caring citizens, especially our political leaders, are corrupted by longings for fame, wealth, and power, it demoralizes everyone who wants justice for all. Hopelessness generates inactivity. It is not easy to ward off the seductive temptations calling to everyone daily in a culture of excess. Constant vigilance is required to sustain integrity. None of us are exempt. The possibility of greed taking hold in all our psyches is ever present. It can be and often is the oppressor within. Confronting this reality without fear or shame is the only way we garner the moral strength to confront and overcome temptation and corruption. (69)

Revenge is another desire, which intrudes in the world of maturity and as the tick tock of the clock of life alarms the passage of time, it gets more settled. The unified journey of greed and revenge distances us from the innocent world of childhood. It slowly creates a sense of paranoia, which adds pessimism to the world of maturity.

Little Girls are Wiser than Men

Tolstoy in this short story displays the two different worlds of two diverse generations with their own domain of maturity. It beautifully shows the grudgeless world of innocent children, which is free from any hard feelings. On the other hand, he highlights the tricky, moody and revengeful features of the so-called mature features of the adults, who enjoy their empirical investment of life. Tolstoy shows how a trivial scuffle between two children is deemed an apt opportunity by the adults to bring to picture their own noxious and rancorous nature. They make a m  le out of a quite childish clash.

The focal characters of the story are two children, namely Malasha and Akoulka. The story comes to life on an early Easter that these two girls after returning from church start playing. They are beautifully dressed in new frocks. The controversial dramatic flaming row pops up, when Malasha and Akoulka step in a puddle and start splashing water on each other. The following abstract from the story gives a clear picture of the whole scenario:

‘Don’t go in so, Malasha’, said she, ‘your mother will scold you. I will take off my shoes and stockings, and you take off yours.’ They did so, and then, picking up their skirts, began walking towards each other through the puddle. The water came up to Malasha’s ankles, and she said: ‘It is deep, Akoulya, I’m afraid!’ ‘Come on,’ replied the other. ‘Don’t be frightened. It won’t get any deeper.’ When they got near one another, Akoulyasaid: ‘Mind, Malasha, don’t splash. Walk carefully!’ She had hardly said this, when Malasha plumped down her foot so that the water splashed right on to Akoulya’s frock. The frock was splashed, and so were Akoulya’s eyes and nose. When she saw the stains on her frock, she was angry and ran after Malasha to strike her. Malasha was frightened,

and seeing that she had got herself into trouble, she scrambled out of the puddle, and prepared to run home. Just then Akoulya's mother happened to be passing, and seeing that her daughter's skirt was splashed, and her sleeves dirty, she said :

'You naughty, dirty girl, what have you been doing?'

'Malasha did it on purpose', replied the girl. At this Akoulya's mother seized Malasha, and struck her on the back of her neck. Malasha began to howl so that she could be heard all down the street. Her mother came out.

'What are you beating my girl for?' said she; and began scolding her neighbour. One word led to another and they had an angry quarrel. The men came out and a crowd collected in the street, every one shouting and no one listening. They all went on quarrelling, till one gave another a push, and the affair had very nearly come to blows, when Akoulya's old grandmother, stepping in among them, tried to calm them.

'What are you thinking of, friends ? Is it right to behave so ? On a day like this, too! It is a time for rejoicing, and not for such folly as this.'

They would not listen to the old woman and nearly knocked her off her feet. And she would not have been able to quiet the crowd, if it had not been for Akoulya and Malasha themselves. While the women were abusing each other, Akoulya had wiped the mud off her frock, and gone back to the puddle. She took a stone and began scraping away the earth in front of the puddle to make a channel through which the water could run out into the street. Presently Malasha joined her, and with a chip of wood helped her dig the channel. Just as the men were beginning to fight, the water from the little girls' channel ran streaming into the street towards the very place where the old woman was trying to pacify the men.

The girls followed it; one running each side of the little stream. (Tolstoy, 1909: 3-4)

This extract displays the dark and pessimistic world of the so-called mature adults, who seem to be physically grown up but mentally immature, of course if we try to give a humane and constructive connotation to the term '*maturity*'. It also gives a brilliant display of the world of the innocent children, whose conflicts moves to instant oblivion. The old woman in the story very aptly reminds the conflicting family members of the two little girls of their immature and grudging exchange of rhetoric. She reminds them that maturity is more than chronological age and empirical investment of knowledge:

'Are you not ashamed of yourselves? To go fighting on account of these lassies, when they themselves have forgotten all about it, and are playing happily together. Dear little souls! They are wiser than you!'

The men looked at the little girls, and were ashamed, and, laughing at themselves, went back each to his own home. *Except ye turn, and become as little children, ye shall in no wise enter into the kingdom of heaven.* (4)

3. CONCLUSION

The study tried to show the fossilized metanarrative that we seem to be bound to follow in order to base our judgments on the essence of maturity and immaturity. It tried to unpick the wobbly and ineligible justifications linked to the age-based maturity construal. The study focused on the hasty and wrong judgments that people show over their fellow-beings, irrespective of having enough convincing and justifiable reasons and documentation against them. Apart from that, it showed how we try to sacrifice the unborn future simply by being conditioned and carried away by the dominant forces and stimulus of the very *Present* and its flow of events. As Tolsty (2003) avers:

Besides, apologies for violence used against one's neighbor in defense of another neighbor from greater violence are always untrustworthy, because when force is used against one who has not yet carried out his evil intent, I can never know which would be greater—the evil of my act of violence or of the act I want to prevent. We kill the criminal that society may be rid of him, and we never know whether the criminal of to-day would not have been a changed man tomorrow, and whether our punishment of him is not useless cruelty. We shut up the dangerous—as we think—member of society, but the next day this man might cease to be dangerous and his imprisonment might be for nothing. I see that a man I know to be a ruffian is pursuing a young girl. I have a gun in my hand I kill the ruffian and save the girl. But the death or the wounding of the ruffian has positively taken place, while what would have happened if this had not been I cannot know. And what an immense mass of evil must result, and indeed does result, from allowing men to assume the right of anticipating what may happen. (57-58)

In *Little Girls are Wiser than Men*, the hasty and illogical judgments shown by Malasha's and Akoulka's family affirmed the *immaturity* of the taken for granted *maturity*, which was about to lead to a destructive ending if the grudge-free little girls would not teach them the essence of maturity through their humane and uncontaminated deeds. Hence, the study came to its closing stand by claiming that it seems humanist maturity does not seem to grow by the passage of time or the chronological movement of the tick tocks of clock of life, but on the contrary it gradually gets drowned in the oozy swamp of immaturity accompanied mostly by unjustifiable jealousy, greed, hostility and revenge.

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