



HUMAN INFILCTIONS AND MORAL PHILOSOPHY : A COMPARISON ON FYODOR DOSTOEVSKY AND LEO TOLSTOY'S VIEWS ON RELIGION AND ETHICS

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ABSTRACT

There are very few works of literature that proclaim that adherence to humanity is better than dogma, tradition, or a universally celebrated festival. It makes no sense to blindly follow religious and needless traditional doctrines rather than respecting fellow human beings. "A reformer who opposes society is more courageous than a politician who opposes the state" is a famous assertion. Accordingly, those who reflect the regressiveness of the people in their works are also considered to be unfaltering for they never refuse to call a spade a spade. Literature is a reflection of society which makes us clear with the intentions, behaviour and ambiguity of people as well as the delicateness of life. It is firmly believed that by ending a piece of literature so tragically, it can make the readers realize the contribution of human infliction. The universal appeal of the works which portray the sorrow and suffering of the human condition can reach our souls so profoundly. This article attempts to bring out the regressiveness of people as portrayed in Fyodor Dostoevsky's "A beggar boy at Christ's Christmas tree" and intention of human existence in accordance to his short story "what men live by". Dostoevsky tries to emphasize the fact that Christmas is not always a happy and hopeful time for all families. The story deals with a six year old boy of the locality, the protagonist, who tries to explore the town on the Christmas eve. The boy's perspective gives a precise view to the reader's on the people's nature who are either oblivious or indifferent to the condition of the little boy. People's ambivalence towards the ethics of life stands tall in the subjugation towards any crisis. In accordance to the statements mentioned above, this paper aims to examine the miseries of human inflictions to the society.

Keywords: Ambiguity, Social theory, Human inflictions, Moral philosophy, Marginalised, Empathy, Environment.

INTRODUCTION

"Christmas is the season of joy, of gift-giving, and of families united", is a familiar kind of assertion. Not just Christmas or on any other festive day, how often we see a boy, shabby and pathetic, cutting through the lights beaming on the road. How quickly we overlook the fact that though the celebration is for the privileged, Christmas is for all. Dostoevsky tries to present such story exposing the insubstantial nature and indolence of humans and shows us a Christmas without a celebration, also coining the analogues in the Christian culture, the qualities and characteristics of such an image, the way it is shaped through the reproduction of iconic images or through allusions to the Gospels, and its essential role in creating a space for the reader's personal action. The two-fold image in Dostoevsky's writing is described as the teaching of gospel on hand and also questioning our conscience on the other.

DOSTOEVSKY'S WORLD OF METAPHORICAL FAÇADE

The author begins to tell the story of a six-year-old boy who's cold and starving, who's scared and lonely on a Christmas Eve. By the experience of the boy on the Christmas eve, the author draws a comparison between the privileged and underprivileged by juxtaposing the two one after another. The cellar where the boy and his mother are residing are portrayed dark, cold, and colourless while the town is with brightly lit roads and fir trees with gold papers, apples, and dolls. Also the boy's hunger and his wish to have one of those cakes put up for anyone who went there, but still ended up with the shouts of the people in the room and the Kopeck he was handed which cannot even quench his thirst nor could it warm him in the cold. While the boy is amused to see the dolls decorated with expensive outfits, the boy has nothing but a parched set of clothes to wear on that day. He betakes himself to someone's courtyard behind a stack of wood where he has a vision of the Christ's Christmas tree surrounded by dolls. They are the spirits of other children who have died and gone to heaven. They tell him that this is Christ's Christmas tree for the little children who have no tree of their own. These angels were all little boys and girls like him who froze, starved or suffocated to death and they are now joyfully reunited with their respective mothers. In the morning, the porter finds the dead body of the frozen child on the wood stack and they find his mother too who had died before him. The story of the little boy is not unique to him but represents the plight of thousands of children who are starving and freezing during a time of merriment.

Another important depiction where the narrator repeatedly refers to the presence of the Christmas tree and star in houses, streets and shops. The common interpretation given for the Christmas stars and trees are the tradition that symbolizes the representation of the star that lead the magi – the wise men who offered precious gifts to the Infant Jesus and the miniatures and other objects hanged in the pine tree will return in real within the next Christmas. The author contrasts the thoughts of people though the gifts and the boy. It shows the inconsistency of the people's understanding of the festival for the ultimate aim of Christmas, (in accordance with the gospel of john), is compassion for others like Christ was given to save the mankind. Dostoevsky cleverly states the fact of universality by using nameless characters throughout the story, also the city where the plot is set is unnamed. This certain method of interpretation is used to attain one or more of the following goals. The intention is to prevent the readers to connect the characters or the plot of the story with the ethnic background or a particular area or any other certain social background which paves way for any kind of stereotypes because the author, indeed, means to remind the readers that by using nameless characters, to emphasize the city dwellers' viewpoint that the impoverished are not so important and so the affluent people's indifference towards the poor can take place anywhere.

TOLSTOY'S SPIRITUAL INTERPRETATION OF HUMANITY

Leo Tolstoy (1828-1910) a contemporary writer of Dostoevsky's period, was born in the south of Moscow to a well-known family of Old Russian nobility, considered one of the world's greatest writers for the 19th-century classics. From the 1880s until his death, he devoted himself to more spiritual and philosophical matters, writing several stories and essays on ethics and morals when coming to terms with his Christian conversion and also an important writer of the modern Christian anarchist movement. His famous short story "what men live by" is regarded as one of the greatest story of all time of for its portrayal juxtaposing ethics and love.

Regarding the story "What Men Live By" the logic in Tolstoy's story seems a bit convoluted at times but gets sorted out of the subtle shades of meaning are attended to. Focusing on the core part apart from the logics, the plot deals with the Archangel Michael, given the task to take the life of a bedridden sick woman so that she can pass on to the next life. Seeing the plight of the woman and her two children, Michael refuses to obey God's commands and is cursed by God and stipulates that Michael must answer three questions if he wants to regain his former status. The three truths that the displaced angel learns answer the questions: What dwells in man, what is not given to man, and what men live by. The answers were revealed through daily living experiences in the shoemaker's cottage. While he finds the answers for the first two questions, he waits until he understands the answer for the third. One day notices a woman in the cottage with two girls one of which is crippled, to order a pair of leather shoes for each of the girls. The woman explains that she has no relation to them and that the actual mother on her deathbed accidentally crushed the leg of the crippled girl. She expresses that she could not find it in her heart to leave them in a safe home or orphanage and adopted them as her own. Lastly, he comprehended the answer to the final question when he saw the woman with the two girls from the mother, whose soul he previously did not take, thus smiling and realizing that regardless of being a stranger or a relation to each other, all men live not by care for themselves but by love.

According to the gospel, the first major way for Christ to be born in us is when one has a generous disposition. In accordance to the conception of judgement day, life in earth is a trial run to attain the life in paradise. If a person is able to save the oppressed and marginalised it means Christmas for him. In this story, Tolstoy tries to convey that the god's way of interpretation is to place the oppressed and the poor in the world just to recognize those who are merciful to them for they will obtain mercy [Matt 5:7].

CONCLUSION

The purpose of this paper was to discover the consciousness of the society and its approach towards religion and ethics. Dostoevsky ends the story saying that what took place in the cellar and on the wood stack might have happened but he's not sure about Christ's Christmas tree. This statement is indeed to expose the existence of wretchedness of the society towards the suppressed people. While Tolstoy's aim in this story is to bring up reader's attention to realize the importance of faith and its significance in the process of moralizing the members of the society and to build up a correct notion about a materialistic aspect of their life. Men live not by care for themselves but by love, in truth it is love alone by which they live. He who has love, is in God, and God is in him, for God is love. Tolstoy explicates the meaning that selfless love is the goal attained by following the verdicts of Christ. In accordance to the "Christmas tree" by Dostoevsky, the statements given by Tolstoy is ironic to the state of the environment and it shows the ignorance and ambivalence of the people. On one hand Tolstoy interprets the way of being selfless is the virtue essential for the survival of humanity and on the other hand Dostoevsky exposes the way people are. The principle and the base of every religion is Humanity. The motive of each and every religion is to gain esteem and care for one another & abolishing all the bars of discrimination. Thus, until the moment people perceive that ethics is indeed the right thing to do instead of the right to do, the world will suffer by its social hierarchies and the ambiguity of the citizen will pave its way.

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