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INTERGENERATIONAL CONFLICT IN IVAN TURGENEV'S NOVEL 'FATHERS AND SONS'

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Abstract

Russian society, in the nineteenth century, went through many socioeconomic and political changes which were reflected in the literature of its time. It was a period of transition and conflict whose impact was seen in personal as well as political fields. Generational gap is one such theme which is represented skilfully in the novel 'Fathers and Sons' by Ivan Turgenev. The novel deals with the apparent stark differences as well as deeply ingrained similarities between the members of two generations, belonging to different ideologies. The elders, men of the 1840s, represent the concept of orthodoxy, romanticism and slowly evolving feudalism. They believed in their culture and traditions. The younger generation, men of the 1860s, believe in nihilism, rationalism, and democracy. The novel not only depicts the personal conflict between fathers and sons but also the political conflict between older moderates and younger radicals.

Keywords: nihilism, autocracy, feudal, idealists, individualism

Published in 1862, Ivan Turgenev's novel 'Fathers and Sons' examines the emerging generation gap that reflects the growing changes in 19th-century Russian society. The novel articulates the contentions in Russia that occurred due to its transition from rigid orthodoxy to liberalism. In 1861, Russia took inspiration from progressive European countries and abolished its serfdom. Along with it, extensive socio-economic reforms transformed it from a feudal nation into a modern state. As an outcome of the country's realignment, a division occurred among the Russian intelligentsia. On the one side were the Slavophiles, who believed that Russia's strength lay in its indigenous cultural roots and traditions. They defended Russia's autocracy, orthodoxy in religion, and feudal society while lambasting Western Europe for its rationalism,

materialism, and parliamentary democracy. They condemned parliamentary government as being dominated by the capitalist class working only in favor of elites. On the other side were the Westerners, who posited that Russia was an integral part of European civilization. It must adapt not only to European technological advances but also to Western culture, the progressive forms of government, and the social organization developed by Western political thought.

In this scenario, the Tsar initiated many reforms, especially for the emancipation of the Russian serfs. This led to a split among the people between reactionaries and radicals. The reactionaries thought that freedom and land allotment to the peasants were more than necessary, whereas the radicals complained that the

reforms were not sufficient. This division came with a larger generational conflict, the conflict between the older moderate Westernizers and the younger militant ones, i.e., the "nihilists." The characters in the novel 'Fathers and Sons' reflect this generational split between the young, superfluous men and feudal landlords of the older generation. It depicts the historical realities of its age and is often considered a fictional representation of the conflict between fathers, men of the 1840s who were also known as liberals for evolution, and the generation of sons, men of the 1860s, who were also known as radicals for revolution. In the novel, there is a juxtaposition between young nihilist Vasilev Bazarov and the Kirsanov brothers, with Arkady shifting allegiances from Bazarov to his father during the course of the novel.

The character of Bazarov represents the nihilistic attitude of his age, whereby he rejects the romantic ideals of the previous generation as well as its art, societal values, and cultural institutions. Bazarov asserts: "Aristocratism, liberalism, progress, principles,...just think, how many foreign...and useless words! A Russian has no need of them whatsoever." As a materialist, he believes in nothing except the laws of nature and natural science. However, to him, nature is "not a temple, but a workshop where man's the laborer". He makes fun of societal conventions, such as marriages and blind obedience for the older generation, and looks unflatteringly at the elderly and their old order. He is in contrast to Arkady's father and uncle, who are both wise but mainly inefficient idealists. Nikolai Kirsanov tries to be a progressive landowner by treating his serfs well, but he is primarily distinguished by his passivity and awkwardness with the younger generation. It is because his idea of being progressive is very different from Bazarov's. According to him, there should be an equal land division among all. Bazarov laughs at Nikolai's "antiquity" and ridicules his romanticism, illustrated by his reading of Pushkin, whom Bazarov calls "rubbish". Instead, Bazarov proposes Nikolai read Ludwig Büchner's 'Stoff und Kraft', which offers a materialist interpretation of the world.

Bazarov's philosophy of nihilism has affected his friend Arkady, whose feelings are divided

between a rejection of his father's morally "antiquated" ideas and his altruistic love for him. Thus, upon his return from the university, Arkady reacts with resentment toward his father's sentimentality and repeated apologies about his relations with the serf Fenichka: "What's there to apologise for?" he thought; a feeling of indulgent tenderness toward his gentle father, combined with a sensation of secret superiority, fills his soul. "Stop it, please", he repeated, involuntarily enjoying an awareness of his own maturity and freedom". The relationship between them is shown to be uneasy during this visit. This awkwardness results from Arkady's attitude of superiority towards his father, which is depicted in his contempt for his father's hesitancy to disclose the actual position of Fenichka in their household and the existence of a half-brother to Arkady. Nikolai, afraid of widening the gap that he observes between his beliefs and those of his son, retreats into a state of passivity. As a father, he worries that the close relationship between his son and himself has become impossible because of the differences between their generations. This fear is expressed in a conversation with Pavel: "So it seems you and I are behind the times, our days over. Well, well. Perhaps Bazarov is right, but one thing hurts, I confess; I did hope, precisely now, to get on close, intimate terms with Arkady, and it turns out I'm left behind, and he has gone forward, and we can't understand one another."

Nevertheless, **ambiguity** is present in this relationship between father and son—the members of two different generations. In the novel, the first meeting between Nikolai and Arkady is a moment of natural affection. They experience similar sentiments in some cases, which suggests a unifying bond still exists under the superficial uneasiness of their relation.

There are two such moments, one in the carriage while they were travelling from the station to the manorhouse, and the second in the manor house itself. Consequentially, each of these scenes comes to an embarrassing conclusion. In the first instance, Arkady's vivid description to his father about the air and scenery of his native place is interrupted by "a stealthy look behind him." It is

from Bazarov who is following them in a separate vehicle. Later, we notice in the text that Nikolai Petrovich tried to articulate something and get up and open his arms. Arkady at once flung himself on his neck. "What's this, embracing again?" said Pavel Petrovich behind them. The cause of the discomfort in the relations between Nikolai and Arkady results from their consciousness of their membership in different generations, which interferes with their genuine affection for each other.

Interestingly, Bazarov belongs to a generation of intellectuals who believe in democracy, a scientific outlook, and equality among all classes (serfs and landowners). He is in complete opposition to the romantic generations before him. He belittles the older generation's romantic dreams, especially Pavel's eccentricities: "Yes, and am I supposed to pander to them, these provincial aristocrats? Why, it's all vanity, society habits, and foppishness. Well, he should've carried on with his career in Petersburg... But, to hell with him! I've found a rather rare example of a water bug. *Dytiscus marginatus*, do you know it?" Furthermore, Bazarov's fierce individualism is shown when he states, "I don't share anyone's opinion. I have my own. This generational gap is most clearly visible in Bazarov's relationship with Pavel Petrovich. When they meet for the first time: "Nikolai Petrovich introduced (Pavel) to Bazarov: Pavel Petrovich bowed his elegant figure slightly and smiled slightly, but didn't extend his hand and even put it back into his pocket". Their very personalities and lifestyle reflect their distance. Where elderly Pavel has "almond-like eyes", manicured nails, and shaved face, Bazarov is always seen as careless in his dressing manners. He, in fact, mocks Pavel's dandy lifestyle. Bazarov tells Arkady that he thinks Pavel is an "eccentric" and mocks his "dandyism," whereas Pavel calls Bazarov a "hairy creature" and objects to his "free-and-easy manner."

Further, belonging to different generations, their beliefs and opinions differ on almost every subject. Their discussion always ends up in quarrels. Their repeated heated exchanges exemplify the differences in attitude between the two generations. For example, after Bazarov explains his nihilistic stance and rejection of all authorities, Pavel

asks him "on what basis" he would act: "We act on the basis of what we recognize as useful," Bazarov replied. "Nowadays, the most useful thing of all is rejection—we reject."

"Everything?"

"Everything," Bazarov repeated with indescribable composure.

When Nikolai and Pavel object that one cannot only destroy but "one must also build," Bazarov simply responds: "That's not for us to do . . . First, the ground must be cleared." After saying this, he immediately felt annoyed with himself for talking to Pavel so generously. Immediately after this Pavel asks whether 'Nihilism' constitutes merely cursing everything in reply of which Bazarov affirms with rudeness.

Pavel and Bazarov are separated by their lifestyles, social behaviors, and even their manners of speech. Yet, these apparent dissimilarities are themselves ambiguous. Pavel wrongly perceives the intellectual debate between them as a contest between an insistence upon a group of principles and an insistence upon a lack of principle (the nihilism of Bazarov). The reason behind their dispute is the contention between two conflicting groups of principles, each supported by a character fully devoted the principles he holds. In manners, too, they are opposites: Pavel's reserved formality and cold politeness are contrasted with Bazarov's coarse casualness; Pavel's exquisiteness at the table contrasts with Bazarov's robust appetite. Yet, they are alike in the sense that they both uphold their respective values absolutely. Both are marked by a pride that reveals itself in their hesitation to shake hands. For instance, at their arrival, Arkady and Bazarov are greeted by Nikolai Petrovich: "Nikolai ... warmly pressed the bare red hand [of Bazarov], which the latter did not at once hold out to him". Similarly, Pavel Petrovich greeted Bazarov with a slight smile, but he did not offer him his hand and in fact put it back into his pocket.

Hence, they are identical in the way they uphold their values. The differences between them are merely conventional, and underlying them is an essential similarity. This is shown in Arkady and

Bazarov's first visit to Nikolskoe and Bazarov's second visit to Marino. At Nikolskoe, Bazarov, to his own surprise, falls in love with Mme. Odintsova. Ironically, he had earlier mocked Pavel for "staking everything on a single card" when "there were so many other fish in the sea" after hearing about Pavel's unhappy love story with Princess R. Though, in the materialism of Bazarov and the social brilliance of Pavel, there is little room for genuine emotional attachment, yet both of them fall victim to love. Both came across a woman of high reputation, fell in love and are ultimately rejected by them. After the relationship ended, both tried to return to what they had been before, and both fail. Pavel retires to the country, and Bazarov returns to his father's home, where he dies. In their inability to succeed in love and the effect this has upon them, the underlying identity between them begins for the first time to supersede their superficial dissimilarities.

Another significant event that defines their relationship is Bazarov's duel with Pavel. Critics have indicated that the duel is symbolic of the triumph of the younger generation over the older, which is undoubtedly true. However, Bazarov's participation in the duel is in itself very odd. He initially rejected it, as he equates it with "romanticism." So, it is surprising that he agreed to submit himself to that epitome of the romantic, the code of the duel. His very participation suggests a weakening of his principles and means that he has come to regard himself as something other than the self-assured materialist to whom we were introduced at the beginning of the novel. Pavel's challenge is also surprising because the main purpose of the duel was to provide a means of settling disputes between equals. Therefore, Pavel, by challenging him, implicitly recognises Bazarov as his equal, and Bazarov, in accepting, recognises Pavel as his. The equality between them is achieved at the expense of the principles both have previously adhered to so firmly. It can be concluded that the dissimilarities between them have to be regarded as accidental and the similarity between them as essential. This is again affirmed at the end of the novel, where both Pavel and Bazarov have departed, each in their own way, from the sphere of the novel. This clearly

reveals that though there are differences between people of two generations, there are similarities too. The existence of these parallels implies the possibility of resolving generational bonds.

Likewise, we notice a generational gap between Bazarov and his parents. They have a complete emotional attachment to their son. His parents, especially his mother, characters with no sort of pretensions to intellect and seem to be endlessly capable of emotional attachment. She worships her son, finding her entire identity and fulfilment in this maternal role. They are humble and kind. However, we see that Bazarov does not enjoy their company despite their unconditional love towards him. He maintains a certain amount of gap towards them, so much so that sometimes his mother becomes afraid of losing him. He rarely comes home to meet them and does not reveal his affections to them. Only on his deathbed does Bazarov admit that theorists like himself are not "needed by Russia"; instead, he affirms the value of his simple but good-hearted parents.

Despite all the given differences between the two generations, Turgenev shows us the possibility of reconciliation between them. It happens at the cost of intergenerational relations. The bond between Arkady and Bazarov grows weaker as they disagree on the proper attitude to adopt in the story of Pavel's love affair with Princess R. It deteriorates further when they visit Nikolsk. Arkady abandons himself to his love for Katya and, in so doing, implicitly also abandons the teachings of his master. Katya's love brings out his emotional and affectionate side, after which he stops imitating his former mentor, who always tries to become scientific and materialistic.

Also, at the end, Bazarov is made to "recognize the romantic in himself." He develops feelings for Mme. Odintsova experiences feelings whose existence he denies throughout the whole narrative. But in the end, the author makes him admit his love. Thus, in some ways, he is conforming to the ideals of the older generation. The fact that Bazarov eventually has to concede the reality of love reflects Turgenev's own repudiation of the harsh nihilistic stance. Arkady and his father celebrate a

double wedding, after which they settle to live and work together at Marino. Their uneasiness has disappeared, and they have been united in their mutually shared capabilities. In fact, "affairs have begun to improve" at Marino, Kirsanov's estate, and everybody seems to be doing rather well after Bazarov's death. The narrator informs us about the fate of the characters six months after Bazarov's death: "Our friends had changed of late; they all seemed to have grown stronger and better looking". In the happy ending, then, Turgenev expresses his optimistic belief in the reconciliation between the generations, as evident in the simultaneous marriages of father and son. The last passage of the text depicts Bazarov's grieving parents on their son's grave. This suggests a picture of harmony and reconciliation between the generations: "However passionate, sinful, rebellious the heart buried in this grave, the flowers growing on it look out at us serenely with their innocent eyes: they tell us not only of that eternal peace, that great peace of 'indifferent' nature; It tells us also of eternal reconciliation and life everlasting.

CONCLUSION

The classic fiction exposes the debate between the older, moderate Westernizers and the younger militants. Kirsanov and his brother Pavel are "men of the old school," whereas Bazarov and, to a lesser degree, Arkady represents the new wave of thought—Nihilism. The evaluation of the relations among Arkady, Bazarov, Pavel, and Nikolai suggests that these relations are the medium through which the theme represented by the title is developed; the reader's perception of the title's significance is guided through two phases. The reader is first offered "fathers and sons" as "fathers against sons." This initial impression is made ambiguous as the novel develops, and the narrative concludes after guiding the reader to the opposite, probably unpredictable, perception of the meaning of the title: "fathers and sons" in the sense of "fathers united with sons." The I begins with the assumption that generations are in conflict and ends with the conclusion that generations are essentially the same.(R.Jahn). The idea that generations are the same is not only illustrated by Bazarov and Pavel's relationship, which, as we have seen, is

characterised by an underlying similarity between the two characters. Nikolai and Arkady are also revealed to be similar in their preference for love over intellectual matters. Both have repressed their sentimental side and thus their affection for each other in their blind obedience to a member of their own generation. Therefore, once their unnatural bonds with Pavel and Bazarov are severed, their father-son relationship is no longer impaired. The initial disharmony and later reconciliation in the father-son relationship illustrates the artificial strain that can be put on a relationship due to prioritising solidarity within a generation over solidarity between generations. It is also useful to remember that the novel's Russian title, 'Ottsy i deti', is more accurately translated as "fathers and children" rather than "fathers and sons." The Russian title invites a generational rather than a mere father-son comparison and thus emphasises a more "generic sense of relationships within and between generations" (R. Jahn).

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