

# Sweating The Brow Against Civilization – An Etching Moral By Leo Tolstoy

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Modern civilization and postmodern civilization have brought tremendous change in man-health and humanitarianism leading to degeneration. The changes are positive with respect to time factors whereas it is completely negative in case of health and humanitarianism. The story “**A Grain as Big as a Hen’s Egg**” by Leo Tolstoy was written in 1886. But even at that time, he started creating an awareness among the people regarding diminishing health issues. Such awareness is to be taken into consideration by the youngsters now-a-days. This short story which represents the values of human beings as well as the food culture available in them is a remarkable representation of ‘Humanitarianism vs. Materialism’ and ‘Civilization vs Hard Labour’. Schwartz says about values as, “A self-direction value was derived from organismic needs for mastery and from the interaction requirements of autonomy and independence”. (1)

The autonomous thinking has made all the people not only to reason but also to take poor decisions at time. The style life has led to a lot of health issues demanding life at an early stage. This is represented by Leo Tolstoy in “**A Grain as Big as a Hen’s Egg**”. The story represents how a maize grain which is quiet big in size, like an egg, is dwindled to a little size. Further, the health of a person whose needs two sticks to walk, his father who needs one stick to walk, and grandfather who does not need a stick to walk is represented here. As the civilization grows, it spoils the people in the name of fast food, crooked mindedness and luxury living after money. Owing to this it is stated by Rokeach as, “The value concept... [is] able to unify the apparently diverse interests of all the sciences concerned with human behaviour.” [Rokeach, 1973]

While exploring the story it is identified that, the society and the devastating effect on the society needs to be given primary focus for the upliftment of the future generations. This article “**Sweating the Brow against Civilization – An Etching Moral by Leo Tolstoy**” further explores the moralistic aspects and human values focussed in the story. In the story children who were playing in the ravine identified a corn in the size of a hen’s egg. They were unaware of what it was. A traveller brought it from them for a penny and sold it to the King. What happened was after a long trail it was identified by a wise man as a grain of Corn.

The King ordered for the old persons in the peasant community to infer where they got the grain. Such a peasant identified by the members was “Old and Bent, ashy pale and toothless, he just managed with the help of two crutches and totter into the King’s presence.”

When the king inferred him about the grain, “The old man was so deal that he could hardly hear what the king said, and only understood with great difficulty.” But he finally confessed that he had not seen any grain like the same in his life time. But he said, “But you might ask my father. He may have ever heard where such grain grew.”

## **His father:**

The father of the old peasant came but he was really better in health than his son. “He came walking with one crutch. [...] He was still able to see, took a good look at it.” When the King inferred, he too answered that he was unaware of the same. He informed the King to infer the same from his father.

## **His grandfather:**

The King sent word for him. He got in. This is given in the story as,

He entered walking easily and without crutches: His eye was clear, his hearing good, and he spoke distinctly. (2)

When the King asked him regarding the grain he stated that “It is long since I saw such a fine grain,” (2)

The King asked him whether they bought it from someone else or they grew it by themselves. The old man replied:

Corn like this used to grow everywhere in my time. I lived on corn like this in my young days, and fed others on it. It was grain like this that we used to sow and reap and thrash. (2)

Further the King was given a reply that, “no one ever thought of such a sin as buying or selling bread; and we knew nothing of money. Each man had corn enough of his own [...] Land was free. It was a thing no man called his own.”(2)

This clearly replicates how people were without demarcation of lands in the previous world. They did not have money or anything as personal or in possessive case. This itself represented the broad-minded nature of the people which is completely lost in the present scenario. Further, when the king asked why land did not yield crops of that kind now-a-days, and the reason for the sight difference, physical unfitnes and hearing difficulty among the peasants and their generation for which the old man answered:

These things are so, because men have ceased to live by their own labour, and have taken to depending on the labour of others. In the old time, men lived according to God's law. They had what was their own, and coveted not what others had produced. (2)

The moral of the story describes not only the morality but also discusses human evaluation from generation to generation. The life style of our fore-fathers was entirely different from the present and this had been represented with the size of the grain in the story. The crutches and totters symbolize the weakness of work, culture and ethics. The symbolization of the character King represents the custom of life, remains as the King who called the "old man and his father and his grandfather", which projects the progressive way of life.

The final death blow of health and humanitarianism is revelled through the carefully mangled words. Even in the nineteenth century it was remarkable represented in a very careful way as a powerful premonition of where the world had been heading towards. The loss of human values and the gain of self-centred thinking has produced a devastated effect on the human community. This havoc could not be set right instead could be attempted for betterment at the cost of growth of humanitarianism, rise of ethics, moral principles and awareness towards health and care. The more the civilization, the more the dreadful infection of the same leading to degeneration of health.

#### *Works Cited*

- [1] Rokeach, M. (1973). "The nature of human values." New York: Free Press, 1973.
- [2] Schwartz, Shalom H. "An Overview of the Schwartz Theory of Basic Values". Online Readings in Psychology and Culture. 2 (1):2012 <Retrieved from: <http://segr-did2.fmag.unict.it/allegati/convegno%207-8-10-05/schwartzpaper.pdf>