Fantasizing the Body in Sones' What My Mother Doesn't Know

Hukum Thapa, PhD

Assistant Professor of English Ratnarajyalaxmi (R.R) Campus, Kathmandu. Email: hukumthapa1@gmail.com

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Abstract

The present paper explores fantasizing the body in Sones' What My Mother Doesn't Know. It contends that fantasy stands as an emerging activity in the lives of the teenagers or adolescents or young adults during the grown up stage. They are in particular enthusiastic to fantasize their bodies. The young adult protagonist Sophie Stein in What My Mother Doesn't Know fantasizes her and others'body in many conditions. So, it attempts to unearth how and why Sophie Stein fantasizes own and others' body. It argues that fantasizing about the body functions as an agency to explore the events of happiness and to reduce the distress, frustration and anxiety. It further claims that fantasizing about the body supports the young adults to acquire their freedom, identity and maturity. For this purpose, it employs the critical insights of R. Craig Roney, Jerome L. Singer, Loyola McLean et al., Karen Coats and Pamela S. Gates et al. This study expects to open an avenue for further research about fantasy and young adults comprising the milieu of different continents and societies.

Keywords: fantasizing the body, freedom, identity, maturity and young adults

Introduction

The images of fantasized body in American media, popular culture and music have been prevailing for a long time. Especially, in the mid-1950s and early 1960s, fantasizing about the body and taboo-breaking issues have surfaced in the American culture and media as Daniel Biltereyst explicates American law-breaking young adult movies and their impacts in the society. Biltereyst argues, "In the mid- 1950s, the gradual relaxation of the Hollywood production code and the growth of independent filmmaking brought to the forefront a whole series of American movies which openly explored taboo- breaking subjects around sexuality, crime and the use of drugs"(9). Hollywood film industry relaxes in the production code and explores multiple subjects in the movies. Films, often called juvenile delinquency movies, like *The Wild One* (1953), *Black Board Jungle* (1955) and *Rebel Without a Cause* (1955) directly confronted the issues of post war youngers' crime and gang life irritating cycles of teen pic exploitation. Victor Malo-Juvera and Crag Hill explore the importance of the Young Adults texts in movies in "The Young Adult Canon: A Literary Solar- system". The young adult texts refer to the texts written by or for the teenagers or the adolescents. Malo-Juvera and Hill acknowledge, "Young Adult texts have an impressive presence over the past decades as cinematic series such as *Harry Potter, The Hunger Games , Twilight, Percy Jackson,* and *The Chronicles of Narnia* have dominated the box office"(1). These narratives have become as cultural phenomena and the movies based on the Young Adult literature pave the way for the fantasized body and its impact in the life of teenagers.

The notion of the fantasy opens the door of argumentation as Joan W. Scott defines the fantasy expressively relating with the imagination. Scott posits, "Fantasy is more or less synonymous with imagination and it is taken to be subject to rational, intentional control; one directs one's imagination purposively to achieve a coherent aim" (287). The fantasy resembles to imagination. The coherent aim of the fantasy is to articulate both individual and collective identity. In the same way, American media, popular culture and music take the fantasized body as a means of entertainment, attraction, publicity and expansion of social horizon. Simon Porzak claims, "Fantasy forms new identity" (212). Simon believes that fantasy supports to build new identity. Primarily in music, fantasized body plays a vital role to form an identity of music, singer and other concerned people of the music. Fantasized body remains as a marker of representation in American media, popular culture and music. The American media, popular culture and music have immense influence in the life style of young adults. The American young adults or teenagers have shown their massive interest in the fantasized body images. They take these images as the sources of their happiness, identity, expression and recognition. Gradually, Young Adult narratives incorporate fantasized body images to meet the interest of readers.

In this circumstance, the body takes a center stage of argument and attraction in Young Adult narratives during 1940s. Harmonizing with this idea, Michael Cart in *Young Adult Literature: From Romance to Realism* provides evidences on how *Seventeenth Summer* brings new dimension in the Young Adult narratives. Cart claims, *"Seventeenth Summer* has remained tremendously popular; it's sold well more than a million and a half copies" (6). The wild success of *Seventeenth Summer* was an early indicator to publishers of an emerging market for a literature that spoke with immediacy and relevance to teenagers. However, the use of fantasy in the books of children and young adults extensively as well as specifically begins in the 1960s.

This paper uses Sonya Sones' What My Mother Doesn't Know (2001) as a primary text to continue the notion of fantasy of the 1950s and 1960s; and to explore new dimensions of the fantasy associated to the young adult body. It revolves around the ninth grader Sophie Stein's life. She engages in different boys throughout the novel starting from Lou to Murphy. It receives some reviews after its publication in 2001.One of the famous critics Mark Letcher discusses about poetry and verse novels for young adults. Letcher believes that young adult literature can help teachers expose their students to witty, worldly and wonderful poetry. Letcher uncovers, "An extremely popular and growing subgenre of young adult literature is the novel in verse" (87). According to Letcher, verse novel is to open a window to the emotions and desires of young adult people trapped in tragic circumstances including abusive relationship, prostitution and drug abuse. In the context, Letcher remarks, "Sonya Sones traces the romantic ups and downs of Sophie- ninth grader with a free following poetic voice underscored by her frank desires and insecurities" (ibid.). He means that the young adult poetic novel demonstrates the passionate upheavals. Letcher further adds, "Sones has a fantastic ear for the economy of words, and she uses brief lines and pauses to great effect" (88). Sones has created an effective impulse in the young adult literature to introduce emotions of a female young adult through verse novel. Therefore, the novel in verse remains as an extremely popular and growing sub-genre of young adult narratives.

Margie Brown and Kristina Miskin highlight the importance of poetry for the young adults. These critics believe that the texts written in poetic form interest more to the young adults. Margie Brown and Kristina Miskin claim, "Poetry for young adults is a genre that has gained more interest from publishers, anthologists and the writers" (152). The interest of the students and publishers inspire the writers to write the novel in the poetic form. So *What My Mother Doesn't Know* comes into the market to fulfill the desire of the young adults and the publishers.

However, to the best of my critical reviews, none of the critics of this novel has penetrated into the domain of fantasizing the body precisely. Therefore, the notion of fantasizing the body of young adults remains to be examined. This paper analyzes why and how Stein fantasizes the bodies of different boyfriends. It largely employs the ideas of Meira Likierman, Ellen Samuels, R. Craig Roney, Jerome L. Singer, Loyola McLean et al., Karen Coats and Pamela S. Gates et al. to explore the fantasizing about the body.

Theoretical Framework

Pamela S. Gates et al. elucidate various aspects of fantasizing about the body in *Fantasy Literature for Children and Young Adults*. Gates et al. claim, "Fantasy is an imaginative fiction that allows us to explore major life mysterious without being limited by size, time and space" (2). Fantasy supports to unearth hidden drives of the individuals. They further particularize fantasy as the content of daydreaming or reverie. Gates et al. clarify that fantasy literature begins in the 19th century. They assert, "The literary fantasies for the children and young adults appear in the nineteenth century with the publication of works by Hans Christian Anderson and Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland*"(4). The *Alice in Wonderland* (1865) brings new dimension of fantasy literary genre. They further explore that fantasy "can be an effective agency for change, renewal and liberation" (6). Fantasy drives the individuals for their freedom, identity and modification.

This paper incorporates five major functions of fantasy as suggested by Jerome L. Singer in *The Inner World of Daydream* (1975). Singer elucidates the functions of fantasy as:

Acts as a diverting technique lowering one's level of tension or anger in distressing situations, provides an alternative environment to a real environment which is boring, is a safe means of rehearsing future action without making any real commitment to that action, can motivate the young adults to pursue difficult real life tasks and can enrich the life of young adults as a source of self-entertainment. (117-18)

The fantasizing about the body assists the individuals to decrease their anger and tension. It supports to uproot the boring environment. It makes the mind of any individual light. It motivates the teenagers to track challenging actual life tasks and stands as a source of self- recreation.

It also incorporates the ideas of R. Craig Roney about fantasy. He explicates many ideas of fantasy in "Fantasizing as a Motif in Children's Realistic Literature".

Roney admits, "In the early 1960s, several authors of children's books began to use fantasizing as a major motif in realistic fiction" (447). Roney further claims that the fantasizing trend for younger children starts with the publication of *Where the Wild Things Are, Sarah's Room* and *Tigers in the Cellar* in 1963. These publications about the body of young adults stand as a means of jealousy, power, celebration, fantasizing, abjection and control.

Generally, fantasizing about the body refers to think about body very pleasant way that is unlikely to happen. Young adults have whimsical ideas about the body. The teenagers have daydream or imagine about their body or other's body unrealistically that cannot happen in practical life. Roney defines fantasy as "dreams or daydreams" (447) to cope with some real or imagined problems to satisfy some basic need of the children and young adults. Therefore, their thoughts and body demand to be examined.

Meira Likierman alludes the confrontation between Anna Freud and Melanie Klein regarding fantasy of growing up in "The Debate between Anna Freud and Melanie Klein". Klein proceeds to hypothesize a rudimentary psychical activity that exists from birth in human being. That psychical activity she terms 'phantasy' to generate infantile instinctual life and also to elaborate and represent the infancy of the human body. Therefore, Likierman admits "early phantasy could be used by the infant for defensive purposes" (315). Likierman believes that early fantasy helps the children to build up their strength. Likewise, Karen Coats affirms, "Child dreams to be a young as soon as possible" (7). Coats also consolidates the idea that fantasizing in the early stage of life buttress the children to gain the maturity and adulthood. Both Likierman and Coats agree on the early stage fantasy reinforces for the maturity and adulthood. Children intend to be young and their activities and behaviors inspire them to act like a young people.

Applying these major philosophies of fantasizing about the body, this paper mainly uncovers how and why the young adults fantasize their bodies. Further, it brings the results of fantasizing about the young adult body. These philosophies support to unearth the reasons and circumstances of Sophie Stein's motif toward the fantasizing the body.

Fantasizing the Young Adult Body: An Analysis

Emotions and desires of the individual play a crucial role to fantasize the body. Correspondingly, Sones' *What My Mother Doesn't Know* unplugs emotions and desires of a juvenile girl Sophie Stein by using body as a source to maximize the fantasy as Likierman claims, "External activities force the young adults to fantasize their and others' body" (322). She means that the environment faced by the young adults instigates to fantasize their and others' body. As Sophie explains her feelings after separation from her boyfriend Dylan from Zak's party, she goes to bed where she cannot forget him. The crowded car, body touching, eyes' connection and Dylan's tall and attractive body force her to fantasize his smile and body. Her fantasy supports her to realize the realities of society.

Then Sophie narrates this situation as:

Then I went upstairs to bed And tried to fall asleep, But I felt permanently wide awake. And kept on seeing that smile of his And feeling that almost squeeze. (5)

Here, Sophie details Dylan and her bodily activities that inspire her to fantasize her love to him. She cannot sleep well. She only fantasizes the smile of Dylan. The fantasy of Dylan's smile and body pressurizes her to ponder more about him and she feels happy. The fantasizing about the body reinforces her to lower her distress and to rehearse her future action.

Likewise, the body acts as the screen for the fantasy and the medium of unconfirmed will of the individual as Miri Rubin affirms, "Body remains as the vehicle of tentative will of the beginning of all social exchanges and the screen for fantasy possessed by each and every one" (19). Rubin believes that body stands as a medium of social exchange in the beginning phase. Body carries the will and emotions of the individual. Body unplugs the individual fantasies to bring the satisfaction.

Sones projects her young adult protagonist Stein as a character of being affected by the external environment. Sophie surpluses the activities of fantasizing her body and others. Likierman alludes, "Anna Freud underscores the child's continuous engagement with its changing external environment affects to the phantasy" (322). The changing external environment refers to the context as well as bodily activities. The external activities force the young adults to fantasize their body. Through fantasizing about the body, children and young adults engage to highlight their interests and identity. Here in the novel, the main character Sophie cannot concentrate in the mathematics class. She closes her eyes and fantasizes the body of Dylan as, "and I can feel his lips/the way they felt/that very first time" (6). The feeling of kissing supports for the unrealistic and romantic moment of Sophie. This situation of Sophie indicates the moment of fantasy than reality. Sophie envisages to be a young adult as soon as possible. She fantasizes the body of her friend Dylan and herself to review her future course.

Further, Sones projects Sophie fantasizing about the body in the very early stage of life. According to Likierman, Klein proceeds to hypothesize a rudimentary psychical activity that exists from birth and that she terms 'phantasy'. It is early phantasy she felt that both give forms to infantile instinctual life and also elaborates and represents worldly events internally, gradually enabling in the infant. Therefore, "early phantasy could be used by the infant for defensive purposes" (315). Likierman believes that early fantasy helps the children to build up their strength. Likewise, Karen Coats affirms, "Child dreams to be a young as soon as possible" (7). Coats also consolidates the idea that fantasizing in the early stage of life buttress the children to gain the maturity and adulthood. Both Likierman and Coats agree on the early stage fantasy reinforces for the maturity and adulthood. Children intend to be young and their activities and behaviors inspire them to act like a young people. Sophie fantasizes in the early stage of her life. She behaves as if she becomes a young. She engages in love with Lou in the very early stage when she is in the eighth grade. She fantasizes about her break up with him. Sophie scrutinizes Lou as:

I knew he was going to say He wanted to break up with me And I knew my heart Would shatter When he did. (2)

Sophie fantasizes her love and break up with Lou in the early stage of life. Such type of fantasy helps her to think over as if she becomes young and it can motivate her to pursue difficult real-life tasks.

Following her fantasy with Lou, she falls in relationship with Dylan. She is attracted with the body of Dylan than others. Then she develops her relationship with Murphy and Chaz as well. One more, a typical example of fantasizing about body in the context of the relationship with Dylan after the Zak party, Sophie scans as:

After that we did not say anything else But our bodies seemed to Carrying on a conversation of their own, Leaning together Into every curve of the road, Sharing skin secrets. (4)

Sophie fantasizes as if their bodies are having communication about their romance. She romanticizes that their bodies are leaning together and making conversation. These activities seem more unrealistic than the fact. However, Sophie Stein seems to be happy. These events of idealization of body support to know how the young adults dream to be young soon despite their early age. Such kind of fantasizing about the body also enriches the life as a source of self-entertainment.

Additionally, Sones brings her protagonist who seeks an alternative environment to a real environment by fantasizing. Sophie idealizes the body of Murphy whom she encounters during art class. In the same way, Coats remarks, "A child idealizes his or her body looking into the mirror" (5) by taking a reference of Lacanian concept of mirror stage. Looking into the mirror, a child dreams to be a young person. That child imagines as if he or she is like an adult.

Physically, Murphy's nose is crooked, his ears are huge, his hair is messy and his lips are tight and scared. However, she fantasizes his body and she feels him deeply. Sophie states, "Right through his lips/into me/and it would feel great/ and I'd close my eyes to feel it better" (17). After fantasizing her feelings towards Murphy, Sophie instantly clarifies, "Whoa, I can't believe/I am having this fantasy about Murphy/when I am so totally in love with Dylan" (ibid.). Sophie can't trust herself why she is fantasizing about Murphy. The fantasizing about the body of Murphy by Sophie provides an unconventional atmosphere to a tangible milieu which is boring. The new atmosphere of Sophie stands as a touchstone to modify her life.

Fantasizing about the body acts as the source of fulfillment of concerned person's ambitions. Sones presents her protagonist Sophie fantasizing about her own

and other's body to reveal her desires and wishes. According to Adrienne M. Martin, fantasizing is "a way of imagining some of one's desires satisfied or wish-fulfillment" (159) in the article "Hopes and Dreams". Fantasizing stays as a medium of wish fulfillment. Even Sophie feels distraction during history class. She starts fantasizing about her body. She claims, "My blood is pumping so loud" (18). Here, blood inflation is not possible in real life. Further she claims, "Dylan's note is burning in my pocket" (ibid.). Sophie's less concentration during history class happens because of Dylan's note burning in her pocket that seems to be more fantasizing than reality. In reality, when Sophie unfolds the note, Dylan fantasizes the body of Sophie. He illuminates, "You are the coolest girl in the whole world-probably even on Mars, too" (19). The written expression in the note clearly fantasizes the body of Sophie. Similarly, Sophie confesses that she does unrealistic and unmatchable activities in the absence of Dylan. She even considers or fantasizes her knee as the body of Dylan in the following lines, "When you aren't here/I kiss my knee/and pretend it's you" (56). Through this fantasy, Sophie intends to invoke her intentions and desire. She aims to fulfill her erotic desire.

Young adults who face abjection fantasize their bodies for identity. They believe that fantasizing about the body assists to achieve their lost identity. Ellen Samuels attempts to argue how body is fantasized for identification in "Fantasies of Identification: Disability, Gender and Race". Samuels illuminates, "Identity could be read on the body" (717). The body can be a means of reading for identity. It can be a text for identity. Almost toning with Samuels, Roney analyzes the motif of realistic fictions. Roney claims, "Children's realistic fiction with a fantasizing motif serves both as a reminder that fantasizing is normal behavior to be encouraged and refined and as a source of model situations to be emulated by children in learning to live in society" (454). Children and young adults should be encouraged to adjust in society by means of fantasizing as well. Toning with these ideas, Stein fantasizes the bodies of the different boyfriends and lastly realizes that everyone should adjust with the prevalent circumstances as she admits, "My body is getting ready to fly apart" (259). She intends to cease the flirting with more boys and fantasizing about the bodies of more boys. She aspires to be different from others.

Further, Sones employs her protagonists fantasizing their body to bring symmetry in action and thought. Sones uses Sophie as a character who fantasizes the body to restore equilibrium in the thought and action. Sophie fantasizes Dylan's body in details to release her from 'left out' condition. Ellen Samuels considers, "body as a reading text" (717). Readers analyze the text differently. In the same way, Sophie browses Dylan's body in the following ways:

I wish he hadn't gone and cut his hair. He looks about eight years old. His ears have tripled in size. Everyone's started calling him Dumbo. Which wouldn't be so bad, Except they've started calling me Mrs. Dumbo. (60)

Here Sophie scans Dylan from the aspect of fantasy. She visualizes his body to acknowledge her association with him closely. She analyzes why everyone has started calling Dylan 'Dumbo' and why she does not like to be called 'Mrs. Dumbo'. This expression reveals that Sophie's intentions to preserve her identity. Obliquely she wishes to establish her identity by means of fantasy.

Young adults consider their body as a project. They carry this project to accomplish their wish and desire. They often fantasize their project. Chris Shiling remarks in *The Body and Social Theory: Theory, Culture &Society* 'body as a project' and adds how people emphasize their body. Shilling clarifies, "The projects of health, plastic surgery and body building are just three examples of how modern individuals are placing increasing emphasis on their bodies" (7). People especially young adults modify or fantasize their or others body to look or to be different in society. Fantasizing about the body moves ahead for a long time. Both Sophie and Dylan fantasize their body. They even compare their body with the house and sky. Sophie narrates Dylan's wishes like this way, "He wishes he could fill up my entire house with roses" (64). The entire house refers to the body of Sophie.

The fantasizing about the body continues in the Sophie's activities. Dylan expresses sorry to Sophie and wants to make tattoo into his chest then Sophie replies, "I am going to hire a thousand airplanes to write it all over the sky" (ibid.). Here Sophie fantasizes body as the sky. These comparisons cannot turn into reality but they can provide a means to express speaker's emotions and feelings. Moreover, they help to flourish the identity of speakers by means of happiness and frustration. Before pleasure- seeking between Sophie and Dylan, Sophie used to fantasize Dylan's activities. Sophie juxtaposes as:

In my fantasy I'd just throw back my head With a triumphant sexy laugh And then He'd rake his fingers through my hair And kiss me hard on the mouth. (99)

However, in reality she didn't laugh and he didn't kiss her. He just peered at her with worried look and she suddenly felt like crying. These all activities belong to young adult girl. Young adults often fantasize to disclose the desire to relieve themselves from tensions and uneasiness they face in their lives.

While Sophie fantasizes the body of Dylan to lessen her tensions and to augment her desire to be a person of Dylan. Further, fantasy cultivates the wish to be different and independent person. Browsing her chat friend Chaz, Sophie fantasizes his laugh, lips and their effects to express her emotions and intentions. Sophie scans the body of Chaz as:

I burst out laughing And suddenly find myself imagining What his laugh sounds like, And what his lips look like, And how they would feel Covering mine. (101)

Sophie further fantasizes Chaz's presence with her in the mist. She wishes to feel everything from Chaz and visualizes his green eyes, curly haired redhead and perfect nose. She reads him as a text in different meanings and contexts. Sophie further highlights the communication of bodies between herself and masked man whom she meets while dancing. She evaluates, "Our bodies are acting like old friends as though they know something we don't know" (138). She emphasizes that body understands more than others. The body of Sophie and masked man communicates effectively, however, they don't know reveal the presence of fantasy or it garners the meaning of fantasizing the body.

Sophie intends to release herself from strains and glitches through fantasizing the body in the different levels. In the same line, Pamela S. Gates et al claim, "Fantasizing helps to relieve and pass the time" (2). Agreeing with them, Craig Roney takes the ideas of Singer. Singer claims, "Fantasizing acts as a diverting technique lowering one's level of tension or anger in distressing situations" (449). In the novel, *What My Mother Doesn't Know*, Sophie always disputes with her mother regarding TV watching all day, not talking with her, not listening to her and not becoming like her friend Rachel's mother. Sophie hates her mother for not providing freedom as she desires. Then she illuminates her fantasy as:

And try to imagine What it would be like To be lying naked underneath a sheet While a strange man rubbed oil All over my body. (175)

Through such fantasy, Sophie relishes her independence. She aspires to emancipate from constraint and confinement. She fancies to get more liberty from adults.

Fantasy revolves more in the female body. The female body brings multiple wishes and images. Mariela Pandolfi considers, "The female body has been the locus of many images" (17) in "Body". The female's body can be a center of attraction. Sophie further wishes to entertain more when she visits to the museum of fine arts. She longs to be as:

I want to that woman In the long white dress, Waltzing in the arms Of that redheaded man. (177)

Sophie desires to transform herself into adult and fancies to use her body more to get liberty and recreation. She does not restrain her fantasy with that unmasked man. She continues to employ her body in her imagination. Even she envisages as:

I want to feel that thrill Of his arms around my waist, His eyes on my face, His legs between me. (178). Sophie aims to exploit her body in maximum way and to obtain bliss in her life. The body remains a medium for her to feel ecstasy and harsh. Her erotic feelings for the masked man spread in places of the novel. She fantasizes him and her body to minimize her emotions. Sophie underscores her dreams as:

I am dreaming of his lips Sizzling all the cells in my body, Of wishing he would remove Every stich of my clothes. I am dreaming of him Slowly unbuttoning my blouse, The hundreds and hundreds and hundreds Of buttons on my blouse. (208)

Here, Sophie noticeably fantasizes masked man's lips, their effect to her body and her buttons of her blouse. These all seem to be idealistic and more passionate.

Conclusion

Summing up, fantasizing about the body by young adult unfolds the emotions, wishes, sentiments and feelings of this demography. It inspires the young adults to garner their freedom and enjoyment. Fantasizing about the body opens the door of the young adults to enter into the adulthood through normal ways. Fantasy fosters the confidence and socialization of the young adults. The fantasy develops the matter of realization in the young adults. The novel *What My Mother Doesn't Know* advocates the significance of young adults. Moreover, this novel imparts the clarification of fantasizing the young adult body through 14 years young girl Sophie Stein. Her activities in the novel from the beginning to end solidify reasons for the fantasizing body. She fantasizes her body and the body of Dylan, Murphy and Chaz vividly. Through this fantasizing, Sophie expresses her moods, excitements, adulthood, love, carelessness and frustration. In addition, fantasizing about the body coagulates the identity of young adult Sophie Stein.

Overall, fantasizing about the body reinforces the young adults to lower their tension or anger, to get an alternative environment to a real environment, to rehearse future actions, to pursue difficult real-life tasks and to enrich their lives as a source of

self- entertainment. Fantasy emboldens the young adults to lessen their frustration and alienation. Fantasizing about the body exposes the hidden young adults' intent. Furthermore, fantasizing about the body bolsters sense of maturity, freedom and identity of young adults.

Above all, the analysis of fantasizing about the body of young adults opens the door for further research. Academicians, politicians, lawmakers, activists and policymakers can use this research to understand the conditions of fantasy in young adults and their implications in real life. The academicians can employ this research as a tool to explore more about adolescents. The politicians can use this study to intervene activities of the lawmakers, policymakers and activists. The politicians can force the concerned people to make rules and regulations to monitor frustration and alienation of the young adults. This research about fantasizing about the body can be a milestone for the policy makers to draft new policies about young adults. The knowledge of fantasizing about the body also supports the senior family members to guide their children into the right direction properly. The motivation and positivity of the children and adolescents toward life activities reinforce for the overall development of the humanity.

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