

Maxim Gorky's *Mother*: A document of social struggle in Russia

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ABSTRACT

In 20th century novel writing become a creed for the writers of the world and Russia could not keep herself untouched and resultantly novelists like Maxim Gorky tried to materialize the dreams of Russian readers. The story of novel grows from the imaginative mind of the authors. They express what was happening around them from natural phenomena to the lives of the people in their community. The portrayal of the social realities have been writing in many literary works all around the world. One of the those literary works is Maxim Gorky's novel Mother. Mother is a Russia novel. The main issue in this novel is proletariat. It's a kind of Russia history novel that depict about proletariat life. Such as proletariat survive for their live and struggle of to get their freedom.

1. Introduction

"Gorky's *Mother* portrays the picture of the pre-revolution proletariat of Russia and focuses on the role women played in the struggle of the Russian working class on the eve of the revolution of 1905. Maxim Gorky, who was persecuted by the tsarist government and forced to live abroad for his ties with the Bolshevik Party, was moved by the brutal social and economic disparity that existed in Russian society during the tsarist government."¹

The May Day demonstration of workers in Sormovo in 1902 and the subsequent trial of its members are the two important and actual events that formed the background of novel *Mother*. The protagonist, Pelagea Nilovna, is the mother of Pavel Mikhailovich, the novel's hero. She gives the book the name of *Mother*. At the outset of the novel, Pelagea is no different from the rest of the working women of Russia who toil in factories throughout the day and put up with wife beating men at night. For 20 years, she lived a miserable life with her husband Mikhail Vlassov, a bad-tempered misogynist, whose passing away didn't sadden anyone.

Pavel appears to be only a teenaged boy when his father passes away. Later he joins the factory and there he learns the collective power of the proletariat. "Pavel learns that the working class is the real agent of change in society. That leads to a series of study circles and book-reading sessions in the house of Vlassovs in which like-minded, socialist workers actively take part."² The studious, caring and politically aware person of Pavel and his comrades bemuses the protagonist, i.e. the mother, as unlike the rest of the youth of the settlement, none of them is a drunkard or has bad habits of squabbling and bickering.

There is a burning question into the mind of the readers why has Gorky centered his novel on *Mother* whereas Pavel also deserves to be the hero as he is a well read young factory worker who besides being an intellectual, is also a man of action. Wouldn't it be more exciting had Pavel been the protagonist of this working-class novel? Idea for making mother the protagonist might have originated from the fact that Gorky wanted to address the working class of the world. The views and emotions the mother, who is barely literate and immensely oppressed, certainly have a better appeal to the collective working class of the world which is generally kept out

of the bourgeois educational system and is, by rule, poverty-ridden, oppressed and politically helpless everywhere.

Pavel starts participating in social revolution and begins to read and bring forbidden literature of that time. The mother is initially worried and suspicious of her son's comrades whose talk she is increasingly unable to grasp because of unfamiliar words and hitherto unheard expressions. But later she starts feeling that she is no less part of the socialist circle of which her son has gradually become a key figure.

2. Document of social struggle in Russia-

The novel *Mother* exhibits many courageous and brave female characters in the novel like Natasha, Sasha, Ludmilla and Sophiya. Natasha and Sasha leave their relatively peaceful lives to join the revolutionary struggle for the establishment of a socialist society. The character of Natasha is particularly appealing as she is the daughter of a rich businessman who owns a lot of property. Yet she disowns her father, bids adieu to a comfortable lifestyle and opts to become a teacher-cum-activist. The writer's depiction of this character is strong enough to get the fall in love with her.

Pavel is in love with Sasha who has been in jail for active participation in anti-tsarist politics. Once the prison warden tries to insult her in jail and she announces a hunger strike until he apologises. She doesn't eat anything for eight days and this compels the warden to tender as apology. "You can't let people take advantage of you,"³ she says to the mother. Sasha's father is a landlord and rural administrator who, in her own words, "robs the peasants."

In the novel the mother Pelagea Nilovna is the mother of all comrades. She especially takes a liking to a close friend of Pavel, Andrei, Nakhodka. She calls her Khokhol, a Russian nickname for a Ukrainian, while the Khokhol starts calling her nenko, an affectionate term for 'mother' in Ukrainian. She insists that the Khokhol live permanently with the Vlassovs as it will help both Pavel and the Khokhol continue revolutionary activities. Isn't it strange that the people with the harshest life are often the kindest from inside?

Nilovna comes to know about trade-unionism for first time when the factory authorities decide to deduct one kopek from each rouble paid to workers for clearing a large swamp overgrown with firs and birches on the factory premises for the

sake of improving conditions for the workers. Her son bravely puts up a strong resistance and leads the workers' agitation against the factory management. He gets arrested and the mother, being overly naive, wonders why.

Mother begins a new phase of her life as she is entrusted by the comrades to take the forbidden leaflets and prohibited revolutionary literature inside the factory. She disguises herself as a peddler and begins a life of an active socialist worker. When the leaflets and handbills keep appearing in the factory despite the arrest of Pavel, the authorities release him. In the meanwhile, the mother is pursued by the Khokhol to learn to read anew. At first she shies away, but later in the silence of the night she takes hold of a book from the attractive bookshelf of his son and tries herself to read. Her house becomes a center of revolutionary activities and comrades frequent it from far and wide. After the conclusion of one such meeting, a woman says to her Goodbye, comrade. The word comrade touches her heart and for once she feels proud of being part of the workers' fraternity.

On crucial May Day demonstration Pavel describes to carry the banner at the head of the column. Here, Gorky's in-depth analysis of human nature appears to be at its best. Both the mother and Sasha are worried about Pavel's safety and fear that he may be arrested. He remains adamant, although in a way that showed love and affection. The mother too wanted her son to stay back. Although she doesn't say this to Pavel, her eyes quail. "There is a sort of love which keeps a man from doing what he wants,"⁴ Pavel says to mother firmly. The Khokhol then points out to Pavel that his response to Sasha was gentle and loving. "But you had to be the big hero to your mother,"⁵ he says to Pavel. Here the writer beautifully highlights the difference of attitude that is characteristic of young men towards women in different relationships, no matter how well-read and scholarly they may be.

References

1. M. Gorky, *Mother* (Moscow: Progress, 1980), p.64
2. Kaushal Goyal *Mother :The great Revolutionary Novel*,(Pigion Books India 2012), p.43
3. *Ibid*, p. 253
4. Gorky, Maxim. *Selected stories*.(Moscow: Progress, 1981), p.138
5. *Ibid*, p.183
6. Gorky, Maxim. *Mother*. (Mumbai: Jaico Publishing House, 2002), p.296
7. Sardar Jafri, Ali. *Modern writers about Gorky; Gorkovskoye Chteniye 1959-60*(Moscow: Nauka, 1962), p.104.

An unusual event takes place when Pavel and Andrei get arrested at the May Day demonstration. The mother goes to the town with comrade Nikolai Ivanovich and his sister, Sophia, to continue her revolutionary work. She undertakes visits to the muzhiks in villages and carries out all the responsibilities assigned to her dutifully and with full commitment while Pavel awaits a trial in jail. "If our children, the dearest parts of our hearts, can give their lives and their freedom, dying without a thought for themselves, what ought I to do, a mother,"⁶ she cries.

3. Conclusion:

On the day of trial Pavel delivers an impressive speech in the courtroom, remanding the 'judges' of the greatness of the workers' cause and warning them about the impending proletarian revolution. Which has become inevitable? "We are against the society whose interests you judges have been ordered to defend; we are its uncompromising enemies, and yours too, and no reconciliation between us is possible until we have won our fight ...all of you, our masters, are more like slaves than we are. You are enslaved spiritually; we – only physically."⁷

When the court sentences Pavel to go for exile then outside the courtroom, the mother is surrounded by workers and greeted for the resounding speech of her brave son. The comrades decide to mimeograph the speech of Pavel and the mother, undeterred by the court's order of sending her son to Siberia, reiterates her commitment to the revolutionary cause. She secretly visits the house of the printer, Ludmilla, and after getting the speech cyclostyled, leaves.