

LITERATURE AND SOCIETY: MAXIM GORKY'S SEARCH FOR AN
ULTIMATE IDEAL FOR RUSSIAN SOCIETY 9

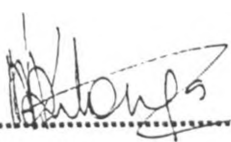
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This thesis is my original work and has not been presented for a degree in any other University.

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TO

My parents.

Who always sent me back
into the intellectual battlefield and girded me
with more protective armour, every time I retreated.
That they never lived to see the victorious end-
Is God's will.

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ABSTRACT

This thesis is a study of the works of Maxim Gorky written between 1892 and 1906. These works represent the writer's literary efforts prior to the successful proletarian revolution of 1917. The study has three main objectives. One, to trace Gorky's chronological growth and source of inspiration and the impact it has on his writing. Second, to analyse his search for an appropriate truth for the downtrodden in Russian; third, attempt to speculate upon Gorky's relevance to present day Russia. To achieve these objectives the study adopts Marxist criticism.

This thesis is inspired by the realisation that although Maxim Gorky is recognised as playing a significant role in changing the course of Russia, his literary prowess is ignored, downplayed and outrightly ridiculed. Available literature especially originating from the west suggests that Gorky is a failed writer. Such critical texts fail to appreciate the unwavering faith Gorky has in his people and the important role he has to play in helping shape their future.

This study is divided into three chapters and focuses on Gorky's autobiographical trilogy, his earliest collection of stories, novels and plays. It stops at his most popular and propagandist novel Mother written just before the October revolution of 1917. Speculation is also made on his significance in present day Russia.

The most significant conclusion drawn from this study is that Gorky's place in the literary history of Russia is firmly entrenched. He writes at a time his people need him most, echoing the wind of change in his country and certainly becoming a foremost contributor to socialist realism. His unwavering faith in people's ability to rise above any situation, makes his writings timeless, appealing to readers of any given period of time. It is finally the contention of this thesis that the study of Gorky advances scholarship on his works.

INTRODUCTION

Russian literature especially that which takes root just before the 1917 revolution is unique because it occupies a central position in the lives of Russians. According to Kropotkin, a contemporary of Maxim Gorky, Russians have no open political life and with the exception of a few years during the abolition of serfdom, they never take an active part in the framing of their country's institutions. This forces the best minds of the country to choose:

The poem, the novel, the satire, or literary criticism as a medium for expressing their aspirations, their conceptions of national life or their ideals. It is not to . . . newspapers but to works of art that one must go in Russia in order to understand the political, economical and social ideals of the country-the aspiration of the history making portions of Russian society (Kropotkin 1905, XI).

It is therefore against this assertion that this thesis looks at Gorky's works. While most critics overlook the significance of Gorky's works to Russian society, Western critics are especially uncomfortable with communism and what it stands for and therefore hesitate to objectively critique works by anyone who ascribes to this ideology. Critics such as Dorchin (Freeborn 1976) assert that the image of Gorky as the founder of socialist-realist literature is based on myth, while Harkins (1957) calls the works of Gorky the final stage in the development of nineteenth century realism.

The theoretical framework adopted in this thesis is Marxism. This is a theory that Maxim Gorky ascribes to and which is said to embrace all aspects of human life. The framework is relevant because it gives an idea of the background of Gorky, who believes wholly in the proletariat revolution as the only means of bringing about a just Russia. It also sheds light on his ultimate vision which he expresses prior to the 1917 revolution.

As a literary theory, Karl Marx, who formulates Marxism, states that "by education and propaganda the workers could be made to see where their true interests lay; once this was achieved, the first proletarian uprising would lead spontaneously to mass risings in all countries of the world" (Thomson, 7). The most common feature in the works of Russian writers who ascribe to the Marxist ideology, is the concern with the proletariat and Gorky is no exception. Leon Trotsky asserts that each class has its own policy in art that is a system of presenting demands on art which change with time. He refutes that the Marxist conception of art desires to dominate art but emphasises that it has an obligation to place the proletariat struggle in the centre of its attention.

According to Trotsky, only Marxism can explain why and how a given tendency in art has originated in a given period of history. He contends that those who, like the formalists, wish to set art free from life and to declare it a craft "self sufficient unto itself", devitalise and kill art (Trotsky 1971). This is because literature is a mirror of life and a medium for registering what he calls "social phenomena" (Trotsky 1971).

Erlich victor (1979), goes a step further and states that according to Marxism, literature is not just a mirror of society but an incitement to social thought and action. The proletariat's need for art that reflects their lives, is termed by Trotsky as a historical demand whose strength lies in the objectivity of historical necessity. The supremacy of "historical materialism" (Trotsky 1971) is later proclaimed as the only legitimate approach to literature and the only doctrine worthy of the revolutionary era.

When Gorky begins his career as a writer, he is obsessed with the issue of man's nature. According to Thomsom (1972), he has an instinctive knowledge of the fact that man has two sides to him, the noble and the cynic, brutal side. His dilemma as a writer therefore is how to encourage the better side of man to triumph. This ability of man to triumph over whatever evil or oppression, is what is known as Gorky's truth. Gorky's illustration of truth in his works varies as he gropes around for the one true ideal for his people. Despite these variations, his belief in the power of the mind to overpower the bad nature of man remains constant.

Whatever ideal he holds up to the people, he makes it clear that it is up to them to use the necessary resources within them to better their own lives. He believes that if the right ideal is given to the workers, their good side will ensure that they attain it. Because of this, and the fact that he believes that Russia is still spiritually young, his works are from the beginning marked with intense realism and hope.

Perhaps the most illustrative piece on the question of truth is the Lower Depths discussed in the second chapter. A Soviet critic Iuri Iuzhorsky suggests that the Lower Depths is a dissertation on the meaning of truth as Gorky sees it. Each and every character is groping for the real meaning of truth. All of them, as Muchnic (1963) notes, are dissatisfied with their condition and desire an opportunity to assert themselves in society. They are vaguely aware that somewhere in the horizon lies some solution to existence and the play urges them to seek these solutions.

Although Gorky has one immutable truth, his vision in this thesis is divided into two parts. Gorky, the writer, seeks an attainable ideal for the workers. Because of his truth, he has no doubt that all he needs to do is to educate and enlighten the downtrodden about the ideal vision and they will go for it. His first vision is that of the suffering masses who become better persons by exploiting their latent good nature. He advocates individual upliftment, and attempts to restore the people's self-worth and esteem. He makes it clear to the people that they are not to blame for their own lot and should not therefore indulge in self-persecution.

His early stories, briefly analysed in chapter two, are wildly romantic with "high flown" language and semi-legendary heroes. These heroes are meant to inspire the readers with the necessary will power to strive for a better life both morally and socially.

Examples of his earliest works include Makar Chudra (1892) and Old Izergil (1894). These stories are however escapist and lead to a big problem. The only people able to understand the stories are cultured and literate people of Russia yet those in need of encouragement are the lowly working class.

Gorky's theme is Russia, but his interest is said by critics to be purely social. As he himself asserts, "it is not about myself I am speaking but about the narrow stifling circle of testifying impressions in which the Russian man used to and indeed still does live even to this day" (Muchnic, 49). The Russian man he is referring to is the downtrodden labourer.

To remedy the problem of readership therefore, he changes his subject matter and uses social derelicts and outcasts as his main characters. This is in order to bring out the vision he has for these people. To influence them into attaining this vision he highly romanticises derelicts making them try rise above their own condition to become more superior to the average intellectual. This kind of idealism is important to Gorky because according to him, "show man what he is and what he can become, teach him and give him a chance to work and he will build a good world" (Muchnic, 43).

Gorky also turns to theatre in a bid to bring his message closer home to the suffering masses and becomes a resounding success as he strikes a chord in the hearts of the poor people especially the youth. The latter are especially idealistic and full of vision of a better life. In his plays, he once again delves into the question of truth which to him means that "man was the axle of the world " (Muchnic, 72). In other words, man can attain anything he wants if he employs his willpower.

By the time of the abortive revolution of 1905, Gorky is a Marxist and member of the Social Democratic Party. He obviously therefore does not watch the historical events such as the Bloody Sunday (January 1905) and the National Strike (October 1905) from the sidelines. Instead, he does all he can to advance the cause of the common people. His political sympathies find expression in his plays and novels. Examples of this plays are Summerfolk, The Children of the Sun, Barbarians and Enemies.

Out of all his novels, the one that is by far the most influential is Mother. This novel, discussed at great length in chapter three, embodies fully the vision that Gorky has for Russia after the abortive revolution. The publishing of Mother marks the formal portrayal of Gorky's second vision. It is in this novel that he abandons his call for individual upliftment and instead opts for revolutionary consciousness. He realises that for any meaningful change to come about, the workers must take collective action. Because of his political stand, Gorky's vision of a better life becomes that of the working class geared towards a Marxist revolution.

It is no wonder then that he is filled with moral outrage against Leo Tolstoy who, according to him, seems to be against the coming new order which he sees as inevitable. In 1913, he castigates the Moscow art theatre for staging Dostoyevsky's The Brothers Karamazov and The Possessed, a man he calls Russia's "evil genius".

To justify his denunciation of Tolstoy and Dostoyevsky he explains,

On the eve of great events when hopefulness and energy were needed it was not such travesties of humanity... that Russia should be treated to. To be sure Dostoyevsky is great and Tolstoy is a genius and all of you gentlemen are gifted and clever; but Russia and her people are more important than Tolstoy, Dostoyevsky and even Pushkin, to say nothing of ourselves. (Muchnic 1963, 90)

The crime that Tolstoy and Dostoyevsky allegedly commit and which he finds unacceptable and intolerable is the passive attitude of their works towards the cause of the working class. He calls all writers with this attitude, his enemies and declares that if he had the necessary authority he would hang them. To this extent he is indeed fanatical in his vision of Russia, which he whole-heartedly believes is destined for a Marxist revolution. To him, a Marxist revolution leading to a new order is the ultimate of all world orders. Why then, one may no doubt wonder, is Gorky dissatisfied with the new order? Gorky believes almost exclusively in the power of the educated mind and is convinced that people's actions stem from ignorance.

Similarly he believes that the revolutionaries can rely to a large extent on man's good nature and sense of righteousness for the success of the revolution. It is this almost naive conviction that forces Gorky to turn his back on the new regime. The number of blood baths increases as the new regime consolidates its hold.

Gorky ever the sensitive man and writer, finds it difficult to accept reality in its true form. Earlier, at the tender age of fifteen years old, Gorky attempts to take his own life because of his inability to reconcile the world of books with real life. Now that he is over forty years and definitely more mature, he probably knows better than to take such a drastic step, but this does not quell the pangs of reality. What he hopes for, victory of the revolutionaries, comes to pass, but what he cannot reconcile with, is the aftermath. This may explain why he is never at ease with the regime and his death, shrouded in mystery.

Even after Gorky's fall-out with the communist regime and his untimely death, it is difficult to ignore the contribution he makes to the Russian literary scene during his time. The next three chapters attempt to explain why this man who hails from very humble background is significant to the literary society inside and out of Russia.

CHAPTER ONE

THE LIFE AND TIMES OF MAXIM GORKY

However thick this layer [of beastly brutalities] may be, bright, healthy and creative things can never-the less break through it; fine, human seeds grow never-the-less, fostering an imperishable hope of our re-birth to a brighter, truly human life

Gorky quoted in Lukacs 1978, 19

Maxim Gorky is bred and shaped by the Russian society, a fact that has direct impact on his career as a writer. How direct the impact, one can only fathom after delving into the history of Russia, specifically the period between the emancipation reform and the Bolshevik revolution of 1917.

The year 1613 marks the beginning of the Tsarist regime. During the sixteenth and seventeenth century, the nobility or the upper class amass wealth and by the eighteenth century, the influence they exert upon the monarchy is tremendous. They are freed from obligatory military service in 1762 by Tsar Peter and the inalienability of their landed property proclaimed by Empress, Catherine III.

The agrarian policies of the incumbent regime determine the lot of the rest of Russia. A system of serfdom develops with the growth of the Russian monarchy and while the nobility enjoy exemption from obligatory services to the state, no such luck befalls the peasants. If anything, the system of bondage intensifies. The defeat of Russia in the Crimean War of 1854-1856 and consequent degrading terms of peace deal a heavy blow to the Russian people but more so to the monarchy.

To the peasants, it demonstrates how economically inadequate the country is for war but to the nobility, it has more resounding implications. The peasant disturbances concurrent with peasant recruitment bring the reality of serfdom to their doorsteps and what they see has them shaking in their aristocratic boots. To the nobility who make up only 0.8% of the country's population, it is a moment of reckoning, the result being the emancipation reform of 1861.

The reform however is covertly designed to preserve and maximise the advantages of the landed nobility. Though liberated from the authority of their masters, the peasants are nevertheless confined in peasant communes or "mir". They lose about 20% of the fertile land that they hitherto cultivate and instead receive swamps and sandy soils, leading to a severe land crisis.

To make matters worse, the peasants are forced to pay a number of taxes and fulfil various obligations. Apart from direct taxes, the peasants are forced to pay in kind for rental of land, watering places and grazing strips, all provided by the landlords. Payment of these is usually by the system of "corvee" labour. All this lead to the ruin of the peasantry. An agricultural crisis hits the country and an overwhelming majority of the peasants are unable to cope with the situation. To meet all their taxes and obligations the peasants often go hungry, a situation that touches even the hearts of some members of the other classes. One bourgeois writer, Shingaev, describes this situation in his book, The Dying Countryside:

They pour water over goose-foot and the end product is a muddy substance used to bake bread. Dogs and cats turn their noses up at it. Children whine and go to bed hungry. (Gusev 1976, 9)

What inevitably follows is mass exodus from the countryside to the towns in search of better means of earning a livelihood. This migration helps to change the course of Russian history. Those who remain behind wage frequent wars with landowners for more land and freedom, but they are brutally suppressed by Cossacks and punitive detachments. By the time of the Bolshevik Revolution, over 150 peasant rebellions are registered, with 30 directed specifically against the Tsarist regime.

Although there are about four million land-less peasants already in the ranks of the proletariat at the time of 1861 reform the number increases steadily becoming almost overwhelming after the abortive revolution of 1905. This revolution is facilitated by the highly unfavourable Russo-Japanese war which gives opponents of the Tsarist regime a chance to attempt to overthrow the Tsar. It is ignited by political strikes staged by workers in the towns and spreads to the countryside. Unsuccessful though the revolt is, it forces the government to make palliative reforms and this time, there is an almost feverish bid to satisfy the peasants and workers.

Despite the feverish pace of reforms, the tsarist government is in its last throes. Although the proletariat make up the larger part of the country's population, they have no substantial political, social and economic rights. As the wheels of change start to turn, the workers become more politically educated and realise that their condition is not immutable.

With help from the intelligentsia they become exposed to different political ideologies, especially Marxism, and also learn about successful revolutions staged by oppressed peoples like themselves. It takes several decades to fully conscientise workers and peasants mainly because of low literacy levels and various repressive measures taken by the Tsar. However, once they realise that they have a historical mission to fulfil, that of emancipating all the oppressed people of Russia, nothing can stop them. Their continual struggle culminates in the February Revolution of 1917 and ends with the Bolshevik Revolution which champions the interests of the working class.

Maxim Gorky is born into this downtrodden class seven years after the emancipation. The historical situation of the working man cements his obsession with the suffering masses, greatly influencing what he writes. Gorky's life and that of people around him, as narrated in his autobiographical trilogy, is one that is almost too brutal to be true, so much so, that the reader has to consciously remember that it is not a fantastic tale. Gorky, probably depressed by these memories, writes in his Autobiography that, "Often recording such atrocious memories of our bestial Russian life, I wonder whether there is any point in recalling them" (Gorky 1966, 159).

Recall them he must. Born Alexey Peshkov on 16 March 1868, Gorky's earliest recollections are of his mother mourning the death of a father he never really gets to know.

As it is, his death opens the floodgates of Gorky's sufferings which play a big part in shaping his outlook towards life and more fundamentally in helping him understand the true nature of man, an issue that occupies a central part in his life as man and writer.

In 1872, Gorky and his widowed mother, who suffers a miscarriage, move into his grandfather's household, an embittered residence, which becomes his home until 1878. His mother re-marries, suffers heavy beatings and finally gives up the ghost of life a few years later, leaving Gorky with no one to shield him from the harsh realities of life. The various acts of brutality he witnesses during his stay are enough to last most a lifetime. Worse still, he too becomes a victim of the violence in the Kashirin household. Other victims include old Gregory, young children and women in that household. One of his uncles even manages to torture his spouse to death.

Most moving of all acts of brutality however, is the beating of his gentle and loving grandmother by her husband which necessitates the pulling out of hairpins that go right into her scalp. At such times Gorky remembers that:

I was overcome with an inconsolable melancholy. I seemed to be all eaten up by it. The house seemed to be a deep pit from which light and sound and feeling were absent, in which I lived a blind and almost lifeless existence (78).

Even as he sinks into what he believes to be an everlasting depression his grandmother, the voice of sanity, helps him push through.

This religious lady who punctuates her words with "God bless them" and "Mother of God" restores his hope in humanity:

Her words were like music and like flowers. They blossom in my memory like ever lasting blossoms ... I felt I had been asleep and in darkness until she came and that was when I woke and was led into the light ... nourished by her wise love for every living thing I gained strength to face a hard life. (9)

Gorky's grandfather gives him reading and writing lessons and once in a while narrates stories to him but it is his grandmother's stories that fill him with love and hope for all humanity. They give him the mission he endeavours to carry out in his adult life, that of helping mankind overcome their evil nature and become better persons. She narrates heroic stories, whose heroes are "chilvarious bandits, saints, forest animals and demons" (9). It is no wonder then that Gorky's first collection of stories portrays characters similar to those in his grandmother's tales.

The atrocities in the Kashirin household are significant as they are representative of all other such households in Russia. Such acts of violence and brutality, in the words of Gorky, continue to be "The actual loathsome fact to this very day, that this fact must be traced back to its source and uprooted from our memories, from the souls of our people, from our confined and squalid lives" (159). How representative the household is, he soon discovers when his unfeeling and bankrupt grandfather throws him out of his household.

It is out in the cold, that he really discovers the joys of reading and the role of education in his life. He gets his first job in a shoe store where he works as a door-boy, beginning his period of vagabondage.

Out in the world, what Gorky witnesses is to his dismay a life fit for beasts. His inhibited growth leads him to believe that such misery and brutality exists only in the Kashirin household but the world quickly sets the record straight. He now witnesses evil on a magnified scale. His grandmother, sensing his vulnerability, quickly cautions him, "One must be compassionate towards people. We're all miserable. Life is hard for us all" (248).

What moves Gorky most is that people interact almost mechanically, never really questioning why life is the way it is. Some, like the passengers on a steamer, agree that their sufferings are ordained by God so that their part is to "bear it patiently. There's nothing more we can do. It is fate" (248). Those who realise that their suffering is not justified can only view their plight with bitterness, as they think they cannot alleviate the situation. One such person is Sitanov who summarises the life of the peasant laments: "We're no better than blind puppies, living for a purpose we don't know. Neither God nor the devil needs us, what sort of slaves of the Lord are we?" (351). Faced with a hopeless future, it is little wonder that the workers lose all capacity for genuine interaction with fellow human beings. In their lives, family values are thrown to the dogs, as more and more workers, irrespective of their gender, take to the bottle and indulge in cheap sex.

Sitanov explains to Gorky that everybody cheats in their love affairs because it is just a game "there's no love; its just a diversion and everybody's ashamed of it" (346). Illicit affairs induce forgetfulness just like the vodka served in taverns and any sort of happiness the workers get from such pastimes is superficial and self-destructive, to say the least. What pains Gorky most is the fact that in itself, joy seems to have no place in their lives and is therefore of little value to them. This inevitably leads to an alarming number of suicides.

Those who seek a better life turn to robbery mainly because manual work to them becomes a symbol of their oppression and even death. One particular worker, Peter, moans that "for others I build houses of stone, for myself I build a wooden coffin" (396). Gorky himself comes to understand why most people participate in criminal activities observing that, "So far as I could see, life was held together by the thread of robbery, like a worn coat stitched together with gray thread" (400). Thus, while robbery becomes a way of life, manual labour is scorned and made fun of. Most of the thieves actually brag about their occupation saying that honest labour provides no "stone mansions". Even Gorky's boss gloats over "picking" a piece of unguarded property (415).

Reckless living has to have a price in the end, and for people Gorky interacts with, it leads to the loss of their humanity. People around him die in large numbers, from tuberculosis and street fights. These deaths receive scant attention and people even seem to get a perverted sense of joy watching or talking of the dead or dying. For

instance, the sight of Gorky bathing Davidov, a fellow worker on the verge of death, draws a lot of laughter from the other workers who then offer their shirts for delousing, as if to show Gorky the futility of his action. Gorky himself begins to harden to his environment and even manages to laugh when given an account of a drunken worker's death. The story teller himself makes it as hilarious as possible.

Goloviev made a meal for the wolves ... after they ate him they got tipsy too. They got up on their hind legs, like trick dogs and waltzed through the woods. But then they took to quarrelling and before the end of the day, they'd finished each other off. (403)

What is even more shocking is the people's indifference in the face of injustice perpetrated upon the weak people in society. At one time, Gorky watches unbelievably as a young girl receives a beating from the doorman of a brothel. To his horror, a cabman nearby comments with a lot of disgust "aah that sort you kill off sooner or later" (419). Later Gorky watches the same doorman ruthlessly kill a cat. This almost drives him insane.

Gorky views all that happens around him differently because his education puts him on a higher plane than his fellow workers. Right from the beginning, he is encouraged by various people to get some form of education. The little he gets from his mother and grandmother is enriched by the cutter's wife, the lady in the lower apartment and, later his revolutionary friends. As a mess-boy, he makes friends with Smoury the chef, who upon realising Gorky's potential, advises him to get an education.

He warns Gorky that "an uneducated man is an ox, only good under the yoke, or for meat, the best that he can do for himself is wag his tail" (241). He also explains that the difference between people is their wit:

There's one who's clever, another who's less clever, and a third who's a plain fool. To get among the clever ones, you have to read the proper books - black magic and so on. Read all kinds of books and you'll come upon the proper ones. (238)

Smoury's words are further reinforced by the druggist who tries to explain the meaning of words. He tells Gorky that one has to know books to understand words, because man is like a flourishing garden where every plant can be both pleasing and useful. All this advice does not go unheeded and with time Gorky grows to love books, even when what he reads seems tiresome or meaningless. As he writes, "A book was magic to me too. It held the writer's soul, which spoke to me personally, when I opened the book and set it free" (323).

Unfortunately, whatever he sets free when he opens these books turns out to be a time bomb for one so young, inexperienced and thus vulnerable. As a young man, his grandmother's religion helps him to understand what other workers are unable to fathom

Nothing evil threatened me, that I deserved no punishment when I was not at fault; that life knew no law requiring the innocent to suffer, that the sins of others could not be laid to my account. (229)

Equipped with an education, his only weapon, he seeks to bring this truth to his fellow workers and free them from bondage by reading to them relevant works. He soon discovers however that his mission is not as easy as he envisions. To the workers, the written word is anathema and any literate person is treated with suspicion and thought to be no better than a sorcerer. Any attempt to enlighten them is therefore met with a lot of noise and disapproval. Ironically the only stories they respond to, are those that have heroic characters. In fact the more fantastic the stories, the better for them, probably because they provide a means of escape from reality.

Even the older men preferred fantasy to reality. The more unreal and incredible the story, the more absorbed they became. They sought an escape from reality into a dream future, a refuge from the squalor and privation of their daily life. (349)

This startling fact begins the count-down for detonation of the time bomb. What it brings to the fore is the extent to which real life contradicts the one portrayed in the books. The contrast between the cruel world he lives in and the beautiful, meaningful world of the novels is so great that he cannot reconcile the two.

What worries him most is that in books, there are no people like his friends and fellow workers, Smoury, Jake the stoker, Aleksasha the wanderer, Zhiklavev or the laundress Natalie. Another disparity is the common and negative masculine attitude towards women contradicting that which he encounters in his books. He has, through his reading, come to regard women as "all that gave life beauty and meaning" (349).

His grandmother's accounts of the Madonna and the wise saint Vasillissa reinforce this. Reading therefore makes the empty, useless life around him more unbearable.

By the time he is fifteen, he experiences moments when he feels elderly and useless. What makes the situation worse, however, is Gorky's dual personality. One part of him wants to get away from the world he lives in and the other part sets him in opposition to the stifling life and makes him feel like a knight poised for action (417-418). Gorky's upper-most concern is the true nature of man. Quite often he wonders at the nature of the people he encounters because, at times, he notices flashes of humanity in people like Osip and Jake the stoker. There is an almost desperate need in him to expose the good nature of people so as to triumph over evil:

I was overcome with the wish to liberate the whole world and myself, by some magical act, so that I and everyone else would whirl with joy in a mass carnival dance ... people would give their love to each other here on earth ... for each other and their lives be courageous, exalted and beautiful. (425)

By the age of fifteen, believing he has reached the end of his tether, Gorky decides to do something tangible to improve his life before he ruins himself. He leaves for Kazan with the hope of joining the university there. This is also at the instigation of a student, Nicholas Yevreinov, who convinces him that he has exceptional scholarly potentialities "you're made to serve knowledge" (429).

Unfortunately for him, he is unable to fulfil his dream of receiving a university degree and goes back to earning a living as a manual labourer. Ironically, this is where he significantly adds to his previous wealth of experience.

Among the dock workers, hoboes and drifters, there I felt like a scrap of iron tossed into a furnace. A thousand fiery impressions filled my day. Before me rough lives, fulfilling primitive instincts, swirled like a cyclone. (432)

Most fundamental of these experiences is his encounter with subversive behaviour which awakens the political animal in him. At first, his recruitment into the secret "mysterious" movement both fascinates and confuses him. What he does not understand is the reason they study prohibited books like The Wealth of Nations by Adam Smith, a British economist, and the commentaries of Chernyshevsky, a Russian radical and critic. To him, they seem too intricate to have anything to do with "simple Russian life" (441).

Gorky is also introduced to Andrew Derenkov, who owns the fullest collection of banned books in town and holds illegal meetings in his apartment. This encounter changes his life completely as he finally gets some direction in life. Finally, he understands what Derenkov and the university students are trying to do:

But I realised that these people sought to transform life, that their sincerity might be muffled in the verbal but not drowned in it. The problems they wrestled were real by me, and I knew their successful solution would affect me personally ... and I regarded them with the exaltation of a prisoner promised his freedom. (448)

The unique position that Gorky finds himself in proves to be his undoing. On one side of the coin are idealistic students who naively believe that the downtrodden are "Wisdom, spirituality and loving kindness incarnate, a quiet god-like entity containing everything ... upright stately and beautiful" (450). On the other side, are workers who, fed up with manual labour, may be convinced to endure the agonies of revolution as long as it frees them from labour, "a minimum of labor [sic] and a maximum of pleasure, alluring temptation, like everything visionary like all utopias" (459).

Gorky empathises with both sides but believes that what the students aspire for, a revolution by workers, is for the good of all especially the workers themselves. He therefore cannot help but despair when workers and peasants turn against the students and begin to plot riots. Eventually, he attempts to commit suicide but only ends up permanently puncturing his lungs.

Antonovich Romass, a revolutionary and former political prisoner, saves Gorky from further depression by putting several things into perspective. Two major areas that give Gorky endless nightmares are, one his education and second, his political involvement. Romass restores Gorky's self-esteem by clearing some of the misinterpretations he makes of life and the people around him.

You should be learning but not in such a way that books shut you off from people. All knowledge comes from man. The teaching done by people is harsher and more painful than the teaching in books, but such teaching sinks in. (493)

Earlier on, Gorky's grandmother and old Peter advise him on the same issue but in their own vague way. The former cautions him that "on earth darling, you have to learn from your own experiences. If you can't learn from yourself you can't learn from anybody" (201). Old Peter on his part warns him saying, "Yes. keep on reading, but bear in mind, books are only books, you have your own wits to use" (335). Romass also resolves Gorky's conflicting loyalties concerning the students and, workers:

So full of love for the people, your student chaps. What I'd say to them is, you can't love the people ... To love is to acquiesce to everything, to indulge the beloved to resent nothing ... with people, can one overlook ignorance, condone their mistakes, indulge all their pettiness, absolve them of all their cruelties. (494)

Romass in reaction to Gorky's anger and confusion at the worker's ignorance, cautions him against the impatience of youth, explaining that the slower the pace of change, the longer lasting it will be. He reiterates that what the peasant needs most is education, re-education and a reinstatement of self-pride as a people. This can only be done if he (the peasant) understands that "everything comes out of you, out of the simple peasant, the aristocracy, the bishops, the professors, the Tsars, peasants once, all of them ... learn how to live so that no one can put anything over you" (494). To steer Gorky in the right direction, Romass gives him books like Hobbes' Leviathan and Machiavelli's Prince which discuss various political theories.

Gorky also reads literature by Pushkin, Goncharov and Nekrasov to broaden his mind. The interlude with Romass is short but sweet. Unfortunately for the two, they are forced to part after a shop owned by Romass is razed to the ground by rich peasants who resent his revolutionary activities.

Later in life, when he seems to be slipping into another bout of depression, he is given a series of warnings by a psychiatrist who warns him that "the reading you've done, the things you've seen, have all stimulated your imagination, which can't reconcile them with reality, reality is fantasy too, but a special sort" (578). His advice to him is to put away the books and try to lead his life like any other person. The psychiatrist also attributes Gorky's problem to his sexual abstinence and lack of exercise. As if by fate, a short while later in the Nizhny Tolstoyan colony at Simbirsk, he falls in love for the first time in his life and ties the knots of matrimony.

Throughout his life, Gorky struggles with the issue of man's nature and is especially curious about man's dark nature. Later on, he also becomes concerned about the place of the intellectual in society. Vladimir Korolenko, a political exile and writer, famous for his novel Makar's Dream envisages the role of the intellectual as thus:

He is the yeast, in every popular ferment, the foundation stone in every new structure. Socrates ... Zheliabov, along with everyone now starving in exile and those still at their text books yet making preparations for their struggle for justice, a struggle that begins with a prison term, this is the vital force of life, its most sensitive and powerful organ. (569-70)

What bothers Gorky most, is the spiritual and financial poverty inherent in the lot of intellectuals and the fact that they behave like aliens in their own land. It is therefore small wonder that other people in society look upon them with suspicion and scorn. These intellectuals become the butt of Gorky's pen in his early works.

By the end of 1889, Gorky decides to put down what he feels on paper and he calls his first piece of literature "The Song of the Ancient Oak". He thinks of this work as a philosophic poem in prose. However after heavy criticism from Korolenko, who calls his work coarse, he gives up all attempts of writing for almost two years. In 1891, he leaves Nizhni to roam all over Russia. After two years of un-productivity, feeling himself a rich man because of the knowledge and experience gained, he meets another political exile, Alexander Mefoodeevich Kaliuzhni who appreciates his natural talent and encourages him to write again.

Gorky's second writing attempt leads to the publication of Makar Chudra in the local newspaper Caucasus and a collection of short stories in the Volga Herald, all under the pet name, Maxim Gorky. This time round, Korolenko recognises Gorky's talent and praises him saying; "Best of all, you feel for a man as he is. I told you you're a realist" (609). His writing career launched, he becomes a second-rate columnist for the Samara Gazette, under the pet name, Yehudi Khlamida. Gorky's success as a writer is immediate mainly because of the "novelty of his themes, his tone and matter" (Janko 1973, 189). The books shock many people who recognise that Gorky's works are a new literary force that cannot be overlooked.

His works are potent enough to stir up a new will and a new hope even among "those who had hardly ever dared either to will or to hope" (Janko 1973, 189).

The first period of Gorky's literary activity (roughly between 1892-1905), is said to bear the imprint of defiance against existing conditions and seeks to will people to higher ideals. His characters include the dregs of society who have nothing to live for in the existing society but still wish to rise high above their own conditions to become better persons.

His most popular short story, Twenty six men and a girl, probably embodies this will to have a better life, best of all. The girl symbolises all that is pure and beautiful for twenty six men working in a bakery until she finally succumbs to the charms of a man no better than them. Foma Gordeyev (1899), a work of critical realism, is said to be a result of the realisation that to become a better spokesman of the people, he has to enlarge his themes.

It is after Foma Gordeyev, that he uses theatre to his advantage. The major advantage with theatre is that the impact is more immediate and resounding when compared to the written word. He writes his first play The Smug Citizens in 1901 and it is performed in the same year. This is followed by his most famous play, Lower Depths, which is discussed in the next chapter. Other plays include Summer Folk (1903), Children of the Sun (1905), Enemies (1906) and Barbarians (1906), which he writes at a time marked with the political tension that grips Russia prior to the abortive revolution.

By the time of this revolution, Gorky is a member of the Russian Social Democratic Party which he joins in 1905, probably explaining the subject matter of the plays he writes during this time. He refuses to watch events from the sidelines and becomes the first writer, proletariat or otherwise, to write for the cause of the down-trodden.

Gorky's influence is so great that many times he is thrown into prison, an act which only serves to strengthen his conviction. The authorities begin to get perturbed, so much so that, earlier in 1902, the Imperial Academy of Sciences elects Gorky to be a member, only to have an indignant Tsar Nicholas II order them to revoke his election. Both Chekhov and Korolenko threaten to take action in protest and even resign from the Academy itself. This incident merely increases Gorky's popularity causing the government even more concern.

The military defeat of Russia in the hands of the Japanese (1904-1905) is said to bring to light the corrupt practices of the ruling clique. It also exposes the incompetence of the Russian military leadership. This war and the ruthless killing of over one hundred workers (later known as the Bloody Sunday) convince Gorky to call for the deposition of the Tsar. Even the mutiny of the Black Sea navy exposes the increase of revolutionary ideas among the groups that the Tsar relies on for military assistance. All these happen in 1905 and the end result is the National strike of October 1905 which later becomes known as the abortive revolution.

Gorky is arrested for his involvement in the failed revolution and is thrown into prison. only to be released due to world-wide pressure. Undeterred by events, he establishes a socialist paper Norava Zhizn (New Life), edited by Lenin, which lasts for about five weeks before it is censored. In order to be more useful to the Party, he leaves for Europe and America where he helps to raise funds for the revolutionary movement. It is during his exile that he finishes his so-called propagandist novel Mother (1907-08) which is discussed in this thesis. The novel marks the second period of Gorky's literary activities and gives birth to socialist realism. While still in exile he writes, A Confession (1908), The Town of Okurov (1909) and The Life of Matvev Kozhemvakin (1910-11).

Gorky becomes more critical of Russia and advocates radical change, explaining why he is opposed to intellectuals who in 1909 in the miscellany Milestones call for a return to religious values. He never receives thorough grounding on religion and is therefore in favour of concrete humane improvement which he believes should take place in all aspects of life. Gorky is filled with a great sense of responsibility for the destiny of people in Russia and this he conveys clearly in an "open letter" to Tolstoy who undergoes spiritual transformation and refuses to take sides with either the liberals, conservatives or revolutionaries. Gorky counters an argument he puts forward in an article written in 1905 for the London Times.

Tolstoy writes that the events in Russia are retarding progress and the only means of countering evil is through moral perfectibility of individuals. To these allegations

Gorky retorts:

Count Leo Nikolavich, great is the charm of your name, the literate people of the world harken to your words...you no longer know what the plain people of your country live by: you do not know their spiritual world. You cannot speak of their desires, that right you relinquished the moment you stopped listening to the voice of the people. (Muchnic 1963, 11)

In 1913, due to an amnesty given on the occasion of the tri-centenary of the monarch, Gorky is able to go back home. In 1915, he starts a monthly, The Annals, which criticises the monarch, capitalism and the war. Gorky's support for the 1917 October Revolution is therefore undeniable as it seems to embody all that he holds sacred.

Now the entire Russian people is taking part in history- this is an event of cardinal importance, and it is from this angle that we ought to judge all the bad and the good things, all our joys and sorrows. (Lukac 1978, 195)

Gorky, however, soon turns his back on the Bolshevik regime, accusing it of perpetrating class hatred which to him, appeals to the same snobbish attitudes that communism is supposed to eradicate.

These must be serious contentions to elicit criticism from one who contributes to the cause by means of funds and literary material. He even starts a journal called The Chronicle in 1914 to publish writings of the Bolsheviks.

What shock him most are mass executions which seem to multiply during the communist regime contrary to his expectations. He openly opposes the Bolsheviks in his newspaper New Life and, as a result, the paper is banned. After this, he seemingly co-operates with the new regime. In a private letter to a friend, he writes:

Do I side with the Bolsheviks who deny freedom? Yes I do, because I stand for freedom of all people who work honestly, but I am against the freedom of parasites and harmful babblers. I used to argue with the Bolsheviks and oppose them in 1917, when it seemed to me that they were unlikely to win over the peasants driven by war into anarchy and that conflict with them threatened to ruin the workers' party itself. Then I came to the conclusion that I was wrong and now I am fully convinced that the Russian people, however much it be hated by governments of Europe and whatever economic difficulties as a result of that hatred, has entered upon a phase of regeneration. (Lukac 1978, 195)

Gorky probably realising that he is indulging in self deception and unable to stomach any more of this, leaves Russia but continues his cultural activities as best as he can. He subscribes to all Soviet literary periodicals, reads manuscripts sent by hopeful Russians, gives advice and even encourages many Soviet writers to visit him.

The application of censorship to new literature, and even classics like Plato, Kant and Tolstoy, enrages him so much that he threatens to denounce his Russian citizenship in protest. His influence is so great that his books are no longer published although they are in great demand. This changes when he writes a literary tribute to Lenin. Critics also begin to praise his role in uplifting the proletariat.

In 1928, he finally returns to Russia after publishing various articles that imply that he finally accepts the Bolshevik regime. He leaves for Italy in October of the same year but visits Russia almost every year until 1933 when he finally re-settles. Between 1917 and 1933, Gorky's works are abundant, although not as successful as those of the period before, with the exception of his autobiographical trilogy. His works during this period however reflect a greater degree of maturity and this include Dostigaev and Others (1933), his play Yegor Bulichov and others (1932) and The Life of Klimsamgin (1925-36) which he never finishes.

It is believed that, as much as possible, Gorky intervenes on behalf of many writers facing censorship during this period. He is never at ease with the regime and this may explain his death under mysterious circumstances in 1936. Some sources claim that he is given poisoned candy following orders from Stalin.

The death of Gorky does nothing to diminish his importance or impair his stature in Russia because according to the Literary Gazette of June 15 1946, his works appear in sixty-six languages between 1917 and 1946 and 42,000,000 copies are sold.

By 1973, statistics show that 99,000,000 copies of his works are purchased in Soviet Union alone. Coming from the lowest class in the Soviet Union, Gorky is considered by the proletariat to be one of them because he is concerned about their plight. He is the first to ever write about the working class and peasantry, something that endears him to his people. Gorky, often, in jest, refers to himself as the pope of Russian literature and in the face of his dedication and sincerity one cannot help but echo Alexander Blok's words:

Gorky is bigger than he wants to be and than he always wanted to be, because his intuition is deeper than his intellect: Inscrutably, by the force of his talent, his blood, the nobility of his strivings, the infinity of his ideal, and the scope of his spiritual suffering. Gorky is a Russian writer. If there exists in reality what is called "Russia", or better still "Russ", beyond territory, state authority, state church, social hierarchy ... then we have to recognise Gorky as the man who expresses all this to a very high degree. (Lower Depths 1945, XX)

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CHAPTER TWO

GORKY'S FIRST PERIOD OF LITERARY CREATIVITY, 1892-1905

The purpose of literature is to help people to understand themselves, to inspire them with a yearning for truth and to give them greater confidence in themselves ... to waken in their souls anger and courage, so that they become noble and strong.

Gorky, On Literature, n.d

Gorky's early works right from his first published work, Makar Chudra (1892), catapult him to the limelight of Russian society and the response is one of un-paralld enthusiasm by a society that is just emerging from a period of "impotent disillusionment" (Freeborn 1976). This is because, until the discovery of Gorky, the Russian society experiences a literary crisis and is in desperate need for something new and refreshing.

The subject matter Gorky adopts marks his point of departure from the type of literature doing its rounds in the Russian society. His characters are drawn from a people ignored, socially, economically and politically by the rest of society. These are peasants and workers from the lowest ranks of society. The men and women he describes are not heroes the literate in society are used to reading about, but the most ordinary people, thieves, prostitutes, tramps and slum dwellers. This makes Gorky, the first writer not only to come from this class but also to write about it. He shocks his fellow Russians and they scramble for his works to find out what he has to say about these extremely horrible "ex-humans" regarded as being less than human.

What Gorky sets out to do is indeed a Herculean task as he tries to break the myth about the immutability of the class system, convince the fatalistic low class of their own worth and institute change for the better. Modern bourgeois literature regards class systems as a given, something one has to live with, but along comes Gorky with his revolutionary ideas. He seeks to free his people from what Lukacs calls "class brands" evoking in one's mind the ancient system of branding convicts with a hot iron. On the conception of class Gorky writes,

It cannot be disputed that "class characteristics" are the chief, the decisive factor in the development of the 'psyche' that they always determine, to a greater or lesser degree, the words and deeds of men. In the harsh tyranny of the capitalist state, men were forced to be abjectly obedient ants of their anthill; doomed to play this part by the consistent pressure of the family, the school ... and the employers, their instinct of self-preservation urging them to submit to the existing laws and customs, all this is true, but competition inside the anthill is so strong, the social chaos in the bourgeois society is growing so palpably that the same instinct of self-preservation which makes man the obedient slaves of capitalists, comes into dramatic conflict with the class characteristics. (Lukacs 1968, 139)

The peasants and workers in Russia at the time Gorky writes are brain-washed into accepting their fate because for almost three hundred years, they have been under the yoke of the Tsarist regime. With the emerging capitalist system they simply lose all hope of redemption. Gorky having taken on the role of spokesman has to help them realise their full potential and dignity and convince them of their important role in society as workers. He therefore takes his role as a writer very seriously because he sees it as an educational influence and, moral force.

This didactic nature of Gorky's works has unfortunately come under a lot of fire from Western critics who under-estimate the crucial role that Gorky plays in awakening workers and peasants. It is significant to note that these lot later become heroes of the October revolution changing the course of Russian history.

Gorky's early works explore all aspects of life that bog down the Russian peasant and worker. His early stories are said to be "wildly " romantic with "high flown" language and semi-legendary heroes. His earliest works, Makar Chudra (1892) and Old Izergil (1894), explore the concept of freedom. Gorky realises that in order for the low class to become a force to reckon with, there must be unity. In Makar Chudra, he tries to illustrate the futility of the type of freedom hankered after by various characters because it is escapist in nature and only postpones a person's fate in society, ultimately crushing the individual instead of redeeming him.

Makar Chudra which Okanga (1983, 63) compares to Pushkin's poem, "The Gypsies", revolves around the concept of freedom in isolation and it is about the life of the wandering gypsies whose world view is very myopic. It is through the narrator-author's contact with Makar Chudra and his daughter Nonka that we are afforded a peek into it. According to Makar, the wandering life of gypsies allows them to go around the world seeing different things without any restrictions and then lying down to die when they have had their fill.

This seemingly simple and romantic way of life sounds very tempting and even Gorky himself at one time thinks of living like a gypsy. Makar, when asked about the importance of teaching and uniting with others for a better future, retorts:

Why should you worry about that? Are you not life itself? And as for your fellow men, they will always get on famously without you. Do you really think that anybody needs you? You are neither bread nor a stick, and so nobody wants you ... learn and teach others you say. Can you learn how to make people happy? No, you cannot. Wait until your hair is grey before you learn to teach others. And what will you teach them? Every man knows what he needs. The wise ones take what life has to offer, the stupid ones get nothing but each man learns for himself. (Gorky 1981, 30)

Such a distorted way of thinking can be blamed on ignorance bred by the wandering life. This life misleads Makar and others like him into believing that all that they need is within each of them as individuals. Such thinking and living has its consequences and although Gorky has a certain admiration for this particular way of life, he is realistic enough to acknowledge that it is self-defeatist.

To begin with, what they view as unmitigated freedom is in fact prison in disguise. These are people who are slaves to nature and at the mercy of the forces of nature for shelter and food. They actually cannot determine anything in their lives as theirs is a non-productive way of life. It is therefore very ironic that they scoff at workers who have a purpose in life and who contribute a great deal to the wealth of Russia providing labour for various farms, factories and industries. Makar on his illusionary high horse wonders aloud about these workers:

'A curious lot of people', he says...."And all of them work. What for? Nobody knows. Whenever I see a man ploughing the field, I think to myself: There he is pouring his strength and sweat into the earth drop by drop, only to lie down in that very earth at last and rot away ... Is that what he was born for-to dig in the soil and die without having time to even dig himself a grave? Has he ever tasted freedom? ... He is a slave, a slave from the day of birth to the day of his death. What can he do about it? Nothing but hang himself, if he has the sense to do that". (30-31)

A second consequence of Makar's kind of freedom is that there can be no permanent social relationships as people prefer to be left alone to roam throughout the country. When it comes to love affairs, they prefer to have flitting relationships. The story about Loiko Zobar and Radda narrated by Makar aptly illustrates the price of freedom in isolation. At first both Loiko and Radda love their freedom almost to the exclusion of all else. Unfortunately for couple, Cupid's arrow strikes and they are for the first time, in their lives, faced with the possibility of settling down to raise a family. Loiko Zobar is realistic enough to realise that he cannot have both his freedom and Radda and therefore opts for the latter:

This is how things are comrades. I searched my heart this night and found no room in it for the freedom-loving life I have always lived. Radda has taken up every corner of it. There she is, the beautiful Radda smiling her queenly smile. She loves freedom more than she does me, but I love her more than I love freedom, and-so I have decided to bow before her as she ordered me to ... who until he met her played with women as a cat plays with mice. For this she will become my wife and will kiss and caress me, and I shall lose all desire to sing songs for you, and I shall not pine for the loss of my freedom. (48)

Once Loiko makes such a difficult decision, he is unable to reconcile himself to Radda's rejection and kills her. She dies without apparent mis-givings as she still, mistakenly as it is, values her freedom more than her love for Loiko. When Radda's father doubles the tragedy by killing Loiko, the latter dies happy maybe hoping to reunite with Radda in the thereafter. Furthermore, now that he has opted to surrender his freedom for Radda and been spurned, he has nothing left to live for. He now realises that his former life is but an empty shell.

Gorky goes on to explore the theme of Makar's kind of freedom together with the issue of responsible individual freedom and collective freedom in Old Izergil. This is a collection of three stories told by an old lady to the narrator-author. The first story, The Legend of Larra, continues the argument against isolation vis-a-vis the unity of the people especially the workers. Larra, an off-spring of an eagle and man longs for the kind of freedom his father, the eagle, has and which is denied him because of his human half. Rejected by a maiden, he kills her and treats everyone with disdain, forcing the elders to exile him by setting him free to roam in isolation:

Wait. A punishment has been found, and a dreadful one it is. In a thousand years you could not think of anything to equal it. His punishment lies in himself. Unbind him and let him go free. That will be his punishment. (Gorky 1981, 115)

Larra is initially thrilled at being set free but little does he know that unlike his father, he cannot endure such a life for long.

The implications of his punishment sink in after a while when he seeks companionship and is spurned. He also discovers to his dismay that his punishment is so potent that it even defies death. He experiences untold misery which is contrasted with the picture of workers singing by the beach full of joy and happiness. As old Izergil puts it, it is not that these workers do not have a hard life but it is the unity inherent in their lot that helps them push on through rough times:

Think you those people who are singing are not weary through the day's labour? They laboured from sunrise to sunset, but now that the moon has risen, they are singing. People with no interest in life would have gone to bed; but those who find life sweet are singing. (118)

The message in The Legend of Larra is very clear. It is unfortunate that Larra cannot get a second chance to live in unity and harmony with the rest of society once he realises the futility of freedom in isolation.

Old Izergil's second story is about her own life and it deals with responsible freedom. During her youth, she skips from one lover to another, enjoying the freedom of not being tied down to one man. All the kind and gentle words Gorky uses to depict Old Izergil cannot mask the loneliness she has to endure in her old age having run through all the men who might have wanted her hand in marriage like a forest fire. The spirit of adventure and love for freedom in Old Izergil is her ultimate undoing as all she has to see her through old age, are memories fond or otherwise.

The final story in Old Izergil veers to the positive aspect of freedom, collective freedom, freedom for all oppressed persons. In this legend, Danko, the hero, is not content to just sit down and wish for his freedom. He therefore takes the bull by the horns and volunteers to lead his people to the land of freedom whose path is strewn with hardship and obstacles. This legend is similar to the story of Moses in the Bible and his almost impossible mission to free his people from the Pharaoh's clutches and lead them to Canaan, the promised land. Moses only makes it by divine intervention just like Danko who resorts to the supernatural. His rallying call is this:

Stones are not removed by thinking. He who does naught, will come to naught. Why should we exhaust our energies thinking and brooding? Arise and let us go through the forest until we come out at the other end; after all it must have an end; everything has an end. Come, let us set forth. (139)

The people Danko leads are utterly weak in mind and spirit and ready to give up at every turn. Worse still like the people Moses leads, they turn against Danko who manages to still his anger as he understands his people only too well. As a final sacrifice he tears out his heart in order to illuminate the way through the forest for his people. They finally make it to the other end and though Danko dies at the end of the journey he does not regret one inch of it.

And suddenly the forest in front of them parted ... and then closed behind them, a mute and solid wall and Danko and his followers plunged into a sea of sunlight and rainwashed air ... the sun shone, the steppe throbbed with life, the grass was hung with diamond raindrops and the river streaked with gold ... The brave Danko cast his eyes over the endless steppe, cast a joyful eye over this land of freedom and gave a proud laugh. Then he fell down and died. (144)

This legend is an experiment with Gorky's political and revolutionary aspirations which he exercises fully during the second period of his literary activities.

This type of freedom, political freedom, proves to be costly but worth the while for the people concerned. Gorky therefore implies that for any meaningful change to take place, there have to be willing martyrs sacrificed at the altar of freedom. As for the rest of the people, they must fully believe in their cause if they are to make a go at freedom, however hard it may prove to be.

Gorky initially uses myths and legends of his people because he believes that there is a fundamental meaning that has to be understood.

I have in view the striving working men of ancient times to ease their labour, raise productivity, arm themselves against enemies, both quadruped and biped, and also to exert an influence on the hostile natural elements by means of the spoken word, by "spells" and 'invocations'. (Gorky, On Literature, n.d, 230)

These stories create a big problem as most of the people who understand the high flown language are the cultured and literate who have the ability to understand the messages behind these stories. Unfortunately, those who need to have their morale boosted are the down-trodden workers and peasants. To be of more use to his people, Gorky therefore writes about more realistic characters, people like themselves, ordinary, harassed people possessing no heroic qualities.

The premise that Gorky seeks to operate from in these stories is that all people belonging to the lowest ranks of society are equal under the capitalist system of exploitation. The depths of misery and suffering they have sunk are not due to any fault on their part because it is the surrounding social, economic and political forces that are to blame. The characters he portrays in stories like My Travelling Companion (1894), In the Steppes (n.d), Cheklash (1894), Konovalev (1896) and Twenty Six Men and a Girl (1899) are ordinary slum dwellers the workers and, peasants can identify with.

Self-esteem is one thing that Gorky seeks to restore in the workers and peasants. He therefore portrays characters who, despite their negative traits, show encouraging signs of humanity. He wishes to give people a chance to go deep into their minds to search for similar flashes of humanity, exploit them fully and finally emerge as better human beings. This is a fundamental pre-requisite if the same said people are to awaken to the fact that they can control their own destiny.

In the Steppe is a story told to the narrator-author by a fellow patient in an unnamed hospital. It involves three characters, Lakatin, an ex-soldier in a railway battalion and former workman in one of the railways on the Vistula in Poland, who also possesses a very detailed knowledge of prison life; a second character claims to be a student in the Moscow University and the story teller who describes himself as being considerably better than others.

The three meet in a public house in Kherson and what binds them together even more than mis-fortune which the narrator calls "the best cement for making the most opposite of characters stick together" (248) is their inherent "equality". They are all starving peasants, enjoying the "special" attention of the police and looked upon suspiciously by peasants. Above all they hate all this with "the impotent hatred of a hunted, hungry animal and dreamt of vengeance against everyone" (249). The trio believe that roaming the steppes offers a better life, as Lakatin declares:

I do like this wandering life, friend ... it may be a cold and hungry life, but it's free ... no one to lord it over you ... you are on your own ... if you want to bite your own head off, no one can say nay ... the stars are winking at me ... "never mind Lakatin, go over the earth. learn, but don't give in to anyone".
(262)

This seemingly wonderful and carefree life has its dire consequences. Apart from hunger brought on by the fact that neither of them holds a source of income, their so-called freedom turns them into fugitives almost overnight when the "student" robs and murders a sick man whom they encounter on the steppes. This leaves his companions mortified. The point that Gorky makes is that, even in the lowest of classes, there are those who are better than others. Those who can still afford to feel compassion towards their fellow human beings. Gorky gives his readers hope to rise above their own pathetic situation in order to become better persons.

For sure, the kind of compassion he advocates is not too heroic a feat to accomplish. He also dismisses, once again, the gypsy kind of life as the solution to his people's problems.

Cheklash (1894) also seeks to restore people's faith in themselves and this time Gorky uses characters who even the working class fear. The hero, Cheklash, is a thief and an outcast who fears nothing and respects no one. His companion in crime is ironically a pious man. When push comes to shove, however, it is Cheklash who turns out to be a better human being as his companion turns out to be a traitor ready to murder him in order to gain more wealth. Gorky in his almost "superstitious" reverence believes in the omnipotence of the mind therefore what he hopes to achieve is nothing short of a metamorphic change in the low class. He wants his readers to dig deep into their reserves and come up with more refined personalities.

The last two stories discussed in this chapter are Konovlov (1896) and Twentv Six Men and a Girl (1899). These two have been selected because although they also try to reform the working class and peasantry the tune that Gorky plays is slightly different. This time, he offers an ideal for his characters in a bid to inspire them even more and to waken them to the real source of their misery. In Konovlov, Gorky like the realist he is, informs us at the beginning of the story that whoever he is writing about does not live happily ever after but commits suicide in jail.

This acts as a double edged sword because it puts the plight of those in Konovalov's situation into perspective and second, it is a stylistic device that compels one to read up to the last page in a bid to understand why Konovalov takes his life.

As I read this brief notice, I felt I could throw more light on the reasons which had induced this "quite and contemplative" man to put an end to his life. I knew him. Perhaps it was my duty to speak; he was a splendid person and one does not meet such people often in this world. (Gorky, Selected Stories, 1981, 226)

Gorky first lays eyes on Konovalov at the age of eighteen when the latter replaces Gorky's boss, a drunken ex-soldier, as Chief Baker. One characteristic that endears Konovalov to Gorky is his sincerity when telling stories. This includes stories about women which other men tell with a lot of false bravado.

Konovalov also earns Gorky's respect by showing a lot of interest in the written word and even encouraging the latter to read to him, a duty he is only too pleased to carry out. Among the books he reads aloud are Podlipovtsky and Gogol's Taras Bulba and right from the beginning it is clear that Konovalov is a cut above the rest as he even believes that something must be done to better the lives of the down-trodden in society. He, for instance, sympathises with some characters in the books and concludes that

Nobody could help feeling sorry for them, living in such darkness. A dog's life. And so ... there ought to be some measures taken. They're human beings. Somebody ought to help them. (248)

Konovalov has the insight to recognise that his life is no better than that of the characters in novels Gorky reads to him. More importantly, he realises that something concrete must be done to better his life and strongly believes that writers may hold the key to this concrete thing.

There's nothing inside me to point the way. How shall I put it? No spark in my soul- no strength perhaps. Whatever you call it, it is just not there, and that's that. So I go on living and searching for that something, and longing for it, but I think if one of those writer fellows came along and he had a look at me, he might be able to explain my life, might'nt [sic] he? (251)

As the story develops, however, aspects of Konovalov's character that may later contribute to his suicide emerge. One glaring aspect is the refusal to pin the blame of his failure wholly on external circumstances. He differs from other tramps Gorky comes across:

Always blaming others, always lodging complaints, stubbornly closing their eyes to the undeniable evidence contradicting their claims to impeccability. They invariably attributed their failures to the cruelty of fate or wickedness of others. (254)

Konovalov's self persecution nevertheless has a positive angle to it, because he believes that he is partly to blame for the mess his life has become.

He also understands that even if he is shown the right path to follow, only sheer will and determination will bail him out. His reaction towards Kostomanov's Stenka Razin's Uprising proves this point. As Gorky reads the book to him, Konovalov becomes a new man. Gone is the bored man in a state of despair to be replaced with a rejuvenated man full of life and hope for the future. The admiration he has for Stenka Razin, a revolutionary, is immeasurable, probably because his struggles hold promise of a totally new life.

The discussions Gorky holds with Konovalov strengthen the latter's belief that only people who suffer can change their own lives through sheer determination. In answer to a complaint that life ought to be made over so that there would be plenty of room for everybody and nobody could get in anybody's way, he retorts it is the people themselves who should "make it over".

The tragic flaw in Konovalov's character becomes apparent with the appearance of Capitolina, a prostitute. So far, Konovalov realises that only man through sheer willpower can change situations for the better. When it comes to actual action, however, Konovalov chickens out. He proves to be no better than other tramps who blame others for their plight and therefore do nothing about it.

When the opportunity to "make over" and start a new life with Capitolina arises, Konovalov refuses to take his cue. He helps her get an early release from prison but when she proposes to keep house for him as his wife, he declines the offer making every excuse in the book with irreparable damage.

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Capitolina misbehaves and is re-arrested and Konovalov, her confused hero, is filled with guilt which plunges him into the gutter, where he mixes with the most undesirable elements, people he once sympathises with. He somehow pulls through and journeys across the country in search of a better life. This journey unfortunately proves to be the last straw. Wherever he goes, he is welcomed with the same amount of misery by workers and no amount of wandering can erase this from his mind.

His powerful body, unfortunately born with too sensitive a heart in it, was still being destroyed by the corrosion of bewilderment, the poison of pondering life (308).

His sensitivity, coupled with fear of taking a concrete step forward proves to be his undoing. In the end, Konovalov with all good intentions takes the coward's way out and commits suicide. Gorky in Konovalov underscores the importance of struggling for a better life which is the ideal situation he holds up to the workers. He also tries to impress upon them the need for unmitigated devotion to this cause by showing, as in the case of Konovalov, what lack of this may lead to.

Twenty Six Men and a Girl also holds up an ideal for the workers. In this short story, Gorky writes about twenty six men who work in a filthy suburban bakery. They are exploited to the maximum by their employer and despised to no end by people who earn a bit more than they do. They lead a miserable life which is made slightly bearable by a pretty, innocent girl who comes to the bakery every day to buy some pretzel buns.

All twenty six men fall hopelessly in love with her as she embodies "that element of decency and beauty of life which still secretly smoulders at the bottom of their hearts in-spite of their misery" (Lavrin Janko 1973, 190). Their last ray of light is unfortunately taken away from them when word gets to them that the girl has been seduced by a man no better than them.

What Gorky does in this short story is give the twenty six men something to look forward to in life then snatch it from them when they least expect. In essence, he tells his fellow workers not to look elsewhere for hope in life but to look within themselves. The flaw in the twenty six men is that they do not appreciate the girl's personal freedom which allows her to do what she wants with her life. They feel like they own her, hence the disappointment when she seemingly demeans herself. Gorky intimates that they are only supposed to borrow from the ideal personified by the young girl and transform themselves for the better and not simply admire her in the hope that this will somehow improve their lives.

By the time Gorky writes this story he has become critical of people like Konovalov, who know that something is very wrong with the whole system but cannot bring themselves to do anything about it. Instead they look towards others to take up the role of messiah. Gorky describes the likes of Konovalov as capable only of hero-worship and rarely knights in shining armour themselves (Lukacs, 1968).

One must not, however, overlook the fact that even Gorky himself is not clear on how to influence his people. This explains why he keeps groping around for an ideal that may bring some kind of perfection in their lives. His ideal only takes definite shape after 1905. Having captured the attention of Russian society, Gorky turns to theatre for more immediate impact enabling him to directly address the mostly illiterate workers and peasants.

THE THEATRE OF MAXIM GORKY

Theatre in Tsarist times is not very distinguished and before the October Revolution only a few outstanding theatres such as the Konstantin Stanislavsky's Theatre exist. Even this group, according to theatre critics, runs the course of innovation by 1917. Before the successful revolution, the theatre of Russia is concentrated mainly in Moscow and St. Petersburg with some well-attended theatres in cities like Odessa and Kiev. Gorky, realising the propagandist value of drama, is not put off by the low profile kept by various art groups and uses them fully to bring to the low class everything he has been saying in his novels and more. He is among the first to bring to the theatre a subject matter (the working class) that is hitherto ignored. This class is able to identify with his characters, hastening the growth of consciousness in the people who later make history.

Gorky's first play, The Smug Citizens, is written in 1901 by which time Gorky has a keen following from among the working class. The play is a sell-out and according to Alexey Bakshy (*Lower Depths* 1972, VI), on the opening night, the Tsar's government fearing a popular uprising, have the theatre and the area around it cordoned, by police and mounted gendarmes. This becomes the trend whenever any of Gorky's plays is staged. These plays become public events, encouraging demonstrations against the Tsarist government. The Smug Citizens is said to be an indictment of the intelligentsia, which seems to have lost its larger vision of life. As already noted in the previous chapter, Gorky's attitude towards the intelligentsia is on the whole negative. He attacks what Alexander Bakshy puts simply as "the Philistine concern with comfortable living and on [sic] lack of a clear purpose in life even among those who longed for something better than creature comforts" (*Lower Depths* 1972, VII).

In the play, the intelligentsia is aptly represented by Peter, a student who indulges in self-pity and constant rationalisation which renders him incapable of taking a step in the right direction. Juxtaposed against the intelligentsia are the workers who are already romanticised in Gorky's earlier works. This "new" hero is portrayed as being superior to the likes of Peter and the "progenitor of all proletarian heroes in Russian literature" who as it is "possessed practical idealism, knew what he wanted and had the willpower to realise his aims" (VII).

Unlike Peter, Nil a railway worker in the play, is shown to be made of superior fibre. ready and willing to fight for what he wants.

Gorky's next play is Lower Depths (1902). This play is a success even outside Russia, a feat most critics attribute to its subject matter the inmates of a lodging house. This play is followed by Summer folk (1903), which also hits at the intelligentsia. The Children of the Sun (1905), deals with the mutual distrust between the intelligentsia and the low class with emphasis on the latter who despise these educated class to the point of mob violence. Barbarians (1906) also treats the issue of the intelligentsia with a lot of sarcasm. During the same year, Gorky writes Enemies, which exposes the hostility the wealthier intelligentsia display toward the workers. These last two plays Gorky writes in exile after he flees Russia after his involvement in the abortive revolution of 1905.

Critics during Gorky's time declare him a failed writer after his play Enemies, claiming that he has lost the ability to write works of artistic value. One liberal writer even writes an article claiming that Gorky's days as a writer are over while another brands him not just a materialist but also a nihilist and atheist. As far as performances go, Enemies never sees the light of day on stage because of Tsarist censorship. From 1933, when the feudal regime is long gone, Enemies becomes known as a classic Soviet repertoire.

THE LOWER DEPTHS: A PEEK INTO THE GUTTER

Lower Depths is a work of art that Alexey Bakshy declares could only have been written by Gorky:

A remarkable work of art, surging with a life of its own, presenting characters that are unique on the Russian stage and distinguished by an epigrammatic brilliance that is matched in Russian drama only by Griboyedov's Wit Works Woe and Gogol's The Inspector General. (Lower Depths 1972, IX).

The play is first staged by the Moscow Art Theatre under the name At the Bottom and it is a resounding success so much so that even Gorky's critics give it grudging respect and approval. Lower Depths is set in a lodging house in a Volga town at the turn of the twentieth century. This lodging house is home to representatives of the under-dogs in society otherwise referred to as "bosyak" (a barefoot). This term is said to be a blanket description for the downtrodden, who go about their business of surviving as best as they can in an oppressive system.

The first manifestation of deprivation is the description of the lodging house. It is "a cave-like basement. A vaulted ceiling blackened with smoke, with patches where the plaster has fallen off ... everywhere along the walls are plank beds screened off by a dirty cotton-print curtain" (5). Each and every character in the play is living testimony to the oppressive capitalist system.

As the play begins, one becomes aware that something is very wrong with Anna, one of the inhabitants of the lodging house. At the age of only thirty years, she is facing imminent death caused by poor living conditions and tuberculosis. For this poor woman, life has never been pleasant as she laments,

Beatings-harsh words, that's all I've ever known in my life. Nothing but- I don't remember a time I didn't feel hungry. I counted every piece of bread. All my life I've trembled and worried that I might eat more than my share. All my life I've been wearing rags-all my miserable life. What have I done to deserve this (26).

Indeed what has she done to deserve such an existence? What she fails to understand is that the oppressive Tsarist regime coupled with bourgeois capitalism has sapped up all of her energy reserves by effectively exploiting her lot. All she has to look forward to now is an early and undeserved death. What is even more saddening is the apathy shown by other tenants, including Kletsch her own husband, towards her frail condition. For instance, when she asks for some peace and quiet the other tenants almost bite her head off.

Kletsch	Now she's whining again.
Anna	Everyday its the same thing. Wont you let me die in peace?
Bubnov	Noise never stopped anybody from dying. (6)

Anna's ill-fate even gives tenants like Kvashnya an opportunity to make cruel jokes.

When Luka inquires as to why an invalid like Anna has been left in the cold Kvashnya retorts, "It was careless of us, sir, please forgive us. And her chambermaid must have gone out for a stroll" (18).

Klestch, Anna's husband is a forty year old locksmith who is under the misconception that because he does some honest work he is better than most lodgers. What he does not understand is that under the prevailing economic system they are on the same rung in life. When asked why he keeps grating away at his tools, he retorts that there is nothing else he can do, at least until his wife dies.

Klestch How am I supposed to eat?

Peppel Other people manage.

Klestch You mean the ones here? They're not people. Scum, hoodlums-that's all they are. I'm a worker-I feel ashamed to set eyes on them-I've been working since I was a kid. You think I won't get out of here? I'll wriggle out of this hole even if it tears my skin off. Just wait till my wife dies. (14)

Klestch mistakenly believes that it is his wife's fault that he is so badly off. He is being escapist in expecting things to change once she is dead. He also does not fathom that the same people he calls scum were once very decent and honest.

Bubnov's answer to Luka's greeting "Good health to you, honest people" is "we were honest you bet-so far back we forgot" (15). Bubnov is a fur-dresser by profession and previously a shop owner. His wife becomes sexually involved with an employee and rather than give in to the temptation of killing the man, he runs away. This is a noble action which unfortunately does not do much for him because, stripped off his life-line, he only sinks into misery and frustration. He is aware of his sorry state but feels that there is nothing he can do about it. He hates manual work and therefore takes to the bottle.

Actor is another victim of circumstances. His stage name is Sverchkov Zavolzhsky but he is known to the others simply as Actor. This loss of identity plagues him and he laments that he is worse than a dog because even dogs have names. Having failed on stage he takes to the bottle and claims with pride that his "organism" is poisoned with alcohol and even puts himself in Anna's category. Once, he takes her out of the lodging house shouting, "make way-you see invalids are going out, don't you?" (11).

Satin, trained as a telegraph boy in a certain post office is imprisoned for killing a man in a fit of anger. After almost four and a half years in jail and a future in shambles, he becomes a loafer, gambler and heavy drinker. He laments that "after jail a man can go nowhere" (56). The most interesting thing to note is that not only people with humble beginnings are rotting in the lodging house. Baron is from an aristocratic family and his is a "riches to rags" story.

He squanders his inheritance, gets employed in the civil service, embezzles funds and ends up in jail. He does not work and preys on Nastya and any other gullible person. The only person who seems to be doing well among the tenants is Peppel, who earns his money through dishonest means. In this warped situation, other tenants look up to him and even treat him with a degree of reverence. Even his own landlord fears him and although he suspects that Peppel is having an affair with his wife, he treads very cautiously and cowers before him whenever he has to talk to him. Tenants, such as Satin and Actor, like Peppel because he is very generous with his ill-gotten money.

Peppel is however not the only corrupt person around. The landlord Kostilyov handles stolen goods from Peppel and is so greedy that his every waking hour is spent wondering how to make more money. He constantly thinks about raising the rent rather than improve the living conditions in the lodging house. He reasons that with increased income he can buy more oil for his icon lamp to burn his sacrifice as an atonement for his sins. Ironically, when Actor asks him to waive his rent arrears, he laughs and calls it a little joke telling him, "You are sharp. For myself, I like all of you-I understand you, my wretched, worthless, ruined brethren" (12). All that can be said for him is that he has a funny way of showing his understanding.

Medvedev, the policeman, is representative of the authorities but instead of maintaining law and order, he actually breaks it. He knows about Peppel's dealings and accomplices in crime but does nothing about it. This is because the Kostilyovs, who handle the stolen goods, are his relatives.

He therefore holds his peace for the sake of the "good" name of the family. He does not arrest Peppel for fear that he might implicate the Kostylyovs. In the meantime therefore criminal activities go on unabated.

Human relations in this lodging house are undesirable. Marriage, for one, is viewed as a tool of oppression. No one is genuinely happy. Kletsch feels tied up by his ailing wife and cannot wait for her to die. He is so self-centred that he can afford to feel more pity for himself than for his dying wife. He is not capable of understanding that dying is a very terrifying thing for most. Rather than resent and ignore his wife he should therefore be giving her his unlimited support.

During one particularly touching incident, Anna asks Klestch to open the door because she is suffocating. He rudely replies "thank you. You sit there on a plank bed and I'm on the floor. Let me have your place and you can open the door all you want. I have a cold as it is." (10). When calmly reminded by Bubnov that he should be the one to open the door as the request comes from his wife, he sullenly replies that "people will ask for anything" (10).

Kvashnya on her part is very bitter about her first marriage and is unwilling to get married to Medvedev, the policeman. As she says, "When a woman gets married, its like jumping into a hole in the ice in the middle of winter. You do it once and you remember it the rest of your days" (24). She believes that men are cruel, and tells Medvedev that when her darling husband "God blast his soul" (24) dies, she locks herself indoors, hardly believing her good luck.

She later marries Medvedev and physically abuses him, driving him to alcoholism. This proves that there is no chance of happiness in this particular society as whoever has the upper hand oppresses the other.

The situation is almost the same, if not worse, for those slightly better off than the rest. The Kostilyovs who own the lodging house can be said to have a marriage of convenience. Vassillissa, the wife, does not think twice about having an extra-marital affair as Bubnov crudely notes, "Vassillissa? Y-Yes, that one doesn't make anybody a present of what's hers" (16). She pretends to be in love with Peppel but only wants him to kill Kostilyov so that she can inherit his money and regain her freedom.

It may be the harsh reality of marriage that makes Nastya, Vassillisa's sister, an addict of romance novels and flights of fantasy. She dreams of a young man killing himself because his parents do not accept her as daughter-in-law. This day dream occupies her mind totally, making her unable to draw the line between reality and fantasy. This is the story of her life and the only change in it is the name of her fallen hero as Baron points out, "But listen Nastya-last time it was Gaston" (43). These attempts at make-belief are self-destructive and drive her to taverns where she gets "gloriously" drunk.

Gorky in Literature and Life states that a writer is "the emotional mouthpiece of his country and of his class. He is the ear, their eye and their heart. He is the voice of his time" (53).

To make his message clear, he pits two characters, Luka and Satin, against each other, giving more exposure to Luka but only to show him up for the fraud he is.

The point to note about Luka is this, although he does not carry the day at the end of it all, he is pretty convincing and displays a great kindness which acts like a blast of fresh air to the otherwise depressed lot. His persistence in acting so benevolently towards everyone has most of the lodgers fooled or lulled into a false sense of well-being. "Good health to you, honest people" is his opening line and even Bubnov's depressing reply, does not deter him. True to form, he assures the lodgers that this does not make them less human; "Its all the same to me. I have just as much respect for crooks. To my thinking, every flea is a good flea-they're all dark and all good jumpers" (15).

Luka revives the spirit of the lodgers. On his first day for example, he tries to sing only to be shouted down. His reaction is one totally new to the lodgers and elicits laughter from Peppel who claims to be bored "up to here" (17).

Luka Don't you like it?

Peppel I do when the singing's good.

Luka Then mine is bad?

Peppel It seems so.

Luka Imagine! And I thought I sang well. It's always like that. A man thinks to himself: I'm doing a good job. Then bang-everybody is displeased. (18)

His sense of humour nevertheless does not stop him from criticising the likes of Kvashnya who make wise-cracks at poor Anna's expense. He admonishes them thus. "You're making a joke of it-but how can anybody cast off a human being? Whatever condition he's in, a human being is always worth something" (24). One is tempted to believe in this old man who claims to be soft because he has been through the "wringer". Sanity however prevails as consequences of his kind of philosophy begin to be felt. The first victim Luka preys upon is the fast-fading Anna. He assures her that after death, there will be no more suffering. Instead, what will happen is that the God will look at her gently and caressingly say, "I know this Anna. Well, he'll say, conduct Anna to heaven. Let her rest-I know she had a very hard life and is very tired-Give Anna rest" (31).

Luka dupes Anna into believing that she should endure her suffering because she will enjoy good health in the thereafter. She even begins to wonder if it is possible for her to get better so that she can live longer. Luka confuses her by asking her if living longer will help her in any way, "What for? For more suffering" (31). This Biblical philosophy of "laying one's treasures in heaven" and "eternal peace in the thereafter" can be very negative, to say the least. Instead of making people more militant, it makes them fatalistic and lulls them into believing that they can endure all that life hands out to them because all will be well once they die and cross over to the land of plenty.

One other debilitating aspect of Luka's philosophy is the idea of seeking change outside one's physical dwelling. What he advocates is a change of scene for everybody under the pretext that things are better in other parts of the country and world. He urges Peppel to take himself to the dreaded Siberia so as to start a new and honest life. When asked by Peppel why he insists on lying to him, he answers,

Well, take my word for it and go and look it over yourself. You'll thank me for it. What's the good of sticking around here? Anyway, what do you want the truth for? The truth might come down on you like an ax [sic]. (33)

Luka finds Peppel queer for preferring the axe, that is the truth and asks in puzzlement "why be your own killer" (33). Ironically, it is the soothing lies that act like an axe on Actor who is not strong enough to resist them. Depressed by his lifestyle, Actor confesses to Luka, "I've drunk up my soul, old man. I'm lost. And why am I lost? Because I had no faith in myself. I'm finished" (29). Not to be defeated, Luka offers Actor the "ultimate" solution and advises him to go to a rehabilitation centre in a certain town but pretends to have forgotten the name of this imaginary town. Actor, close to self destruction, unfortunately clutches at the straw offered to him, not realising that it is all illusory, utter delusion. Believing himself to be on the road to recovery, he reveals a humane side of him that has been blunted by alcohol, leaving himself vulnerable to pain and disillusionment. With the hope of checking into the rehabilitation centre, he gets employment and saves up all the money he gets for the "trip".

He even recovers long enough to mourn the loss of his true identity. Luka suddenly departs from the lodging house and with his disappearance, Actor begins to despair and even asks Assan, a muslim to pray for him. The gravity of the situation escapes Assan and he rudely asks Actor to pray for himself. When Actor runs out of the hallway after drinking some vodka, which sadly remind him that is his back on the road to ruin, he cries out, "I'm gone (69). Satin, unaware of the real meaning of these words, shouts, "Hey you, sycamore! where are you going? (69). Actor goes out and hangs himself, a clear waste of human potential. Luka, therefore, rather than have the "Midas" touch, turns out to be a prophet of doom.

The last people he preys upon are Peppel and Nastya, encouraging them to get married.

My advice too-marry him. He's all right-he's a good fellow. Only you have to remind him as often as you can that he's a good fellow ... he's substantial, there's something to him. (51)

Life however is not so simple. Nastya is initially after ideals that are way above Peppel in his capacity as local thief but is lulled by Luka into believing in a fairy tale ending. She accepts Peppel's proposal only to have her feet scalded by her sister Vassillissa (Peppel's lover) and husband Kostylyov, who are not pleased with this. This incident brings to the fore all her earlier mis-givings and she denounces Peppel and her sister as the killers of Kostylyov in a peculiar turn of events.

Once again, Luka's elaborate ideas on preparation for change get shot to bits because he puts the cart before the horse. What he does not realise is that for people to have any meaningful relationships there has to be a complete overhaul of the political, social and economic system.

As it turns out, it is some of the lodgers who seem to have a grasp of the situation and who understand that real change is necessary if they are to have better lives. Peppel and Bubnov for instance acknowledge that in their efforts to survive, honour and conscience cannot play any part in their lives.

As Peppel tells Klestch:

What good are honor [sic] and conscience? You can't put them on your feet instead of boots. Honor and conscience are only important to those who have power-force. (14-15)

To which Bubnov adds "What do I want a conscience for? I'm no moneybags" (15).

What they are saying is that although they engage in unlawful activities to stay alive, it is not entirely their fault. If they however allow their sense of honour and conscience to prey upon them then they will die of starvation. As Satin sums it up, "everyone wants to have a conscience, but it turns out nobody can afford one" (15).

Klestch thinks that he is better than everyone else but is given a dose of reality by Peppel and Bubnov who assure him that he is in the same boat as everyone else by the mere fact that they belong to the same class. Although he is the only person who does not reject the idea of working for a living, his pride is misguided as he thinks that

his work puts him on a pedestal. What he does not understand is that, it is the poor working conditions that discourage people from earning an honest living. Work is considered anathema by the lodgers mainly because of the low pay and poor working conditions. Satin seems to understand the fate of the workers:

As for work, just you make it pleasant for me and I'll probably work-
Yes, I probably will. When work is a pleasure, life is a joy! When
work is a duty, life is slavery. (14)

Satin later utters words that can be construed to be an incitement for the workers to strike. He does not elaborate his point, but ends his sentence abruptly, probably to make the workers start thinking seriously about ways of alleviating their suffering:

Think this over-You stop working-hundreds and thousands of others-
everybody-understand? Everybody stops working. Nobody wants to
do any work-What'll happen then? (57)

Klestch who does not understand the full implication of Satin's statement is so basic that his only worry is that everyone will die of hunger while Luka who does not like any sort of confrontation tells Satin that he ought to join the wanderers. This is a Russian religious sect dating back from the time of Peter the Great. This sect urges its followers to run away from places where government instituted reforms are enforced, hence the name.

Satin is probably the only one who understands why Luka insists on telling lies. Unlike the other lodgers who simply love to listen to him yet denounce him as a fake when he disappears, Satin puts him in his proper perspective. Klestch complains that unlike Satin, Luka had pity for other people to which Satin asks, "What good will it do you if I pity you?" (63). In a long speech, Satin aptly summarises Luka for the lodgers

The old man is not a faker. What's truth? Man-that's truth. He understood this-certainly he lied-but it was out of pity for you ... there are lots of people who lie out of pity for others ... they lie beautifully, excitingly, with a kind of inspiration. There are lies that soothe, that reconcile one to his lot. There are lies that justify the load that crushed a worker's [Assan's] arm-and hold a man responsible for dying of starvation. (64)

Satin also describes the kind of people who need the kind of lies Luka dishes out. The difference between Luka and Satin is that the former is always urging people to move from place to place in search of greener pastures. Those who cannot move, he asks to bear with the status quo. Satin, the more practical of the two, realises that only man can change his own life through sheer will power. A person able to bring about change in his life does not need Luka's lies.

People weak in spirit-and those who live on the sweat of others-those need lies-the weak find support in them, the exploiters use it as a screen. But a man who is his own master, who is independent and doesn't batten on others-he can get along without lies. Lies are the religions of slaves and bosses. Truth is the god of the free man. (64)

Satin no doubt carries the day as he echoes Gorky who believes that however painful the process of change may be, man must exert his will-power fully if he is to move a step higher in life. To emphasize this, Gorky ends the play on a sad note but does not expect anyone to feel sorry for Actor who hangs himself.

When Satin who is singing is told about Actor's death, he curses at the interruption saying, "Aah, spoilt the song-the fool" (73). This last line in the play expresses the lack of sympathy Gorky feels for those weak in spirit, who do not have the courage to use their own initiative to change for the better. What he implies is that in the struggle for a better life, the weak will fall by the wayside and only the strong like Satin will emerge victorious. He may also be indicating that the weak, who may prove to be liabilities, are dispensable in the quest for a better life.

Lower Depths brings out the role of Gorky as the educator as opposed to his role as entertainer. He brings into the scene a group of people who do not seem to have much to live for and begins to shatter all their previous misgivings and delusions. The first thing he tries to get rid of is the fatalistic attitude especially evident in songs used as a source of entertainment. One song tells the story of a prisoner who craves his freedom but cannot break his chains probably symbolising the lot of the lodgers which seems immutable. A second song seems to imply that only death can free the lodgers from bondage. No wonder then their slogan "Drink till death comes" (73). To institute change, he highlights first one philosophy, the soothing lie and then the other, truth and lets these speak for themselves.

By a series of elimination, he points out the right path to follow, truth according to the gospel of Satan. As Peppel notes, it is fine to listen to Luka's lies which present a pleasurable pastime. "You tell lies and pleasant tales mighty well. That's alright with me ... There's damn little in this world that's pleasant (31). However, one needs the strength of character to see through these lies.

The lies prove to be fatal for those weak in spirit like in the case of Actor. He listens to Luka narrate the story about a man who commits suicide because he cannot find the land of truth and justice and, makes the same mistake himself. Luka's philosophy, whatever one believes exists, does not work for Actor because what he is in search of is something concrete to hold on to, not just illusions.

Characteristic of Gorky, it is the scum who deliver his message to the people and this is a very important point. At the time that this play is performed the workers seriously need to have their self-esteem boosted. What better way therefore than to be helped out of a crisis by their own lot, someone they can identify with. It is crucial that the workers realise their own worth and become fully conscientized as they later play a big role in re-shaping Russian history. For the first time, they will lead a revolution and set up a government.

Lower Depths prepares workers for the 1917 revolution. Gorky lays stress on the fact that everyone in the lodge is equal, despite Klestch's contention that he is of better quality. This is a step towards uniting the low class for a common cause and Gorky, aware of this, makes Klestch reconsider his stand; "It's the same human beings

everywhere. At first you don't see it. Then, you get a good look at them and it turns out they're human beings. They're alright" (68). Gorky tries to get the likes of Klestch off their high horses while at the same time re-assuring the likes of Satin, Peppel and the Tartar that they are no less human than the rest.

In this chapter therefore one sees Gorky groping for suitable ideal that he can hold up to his people. This enormous task he places upon himself, moves him from the realm of the written word to theatre. One must bear in mind that Gorky is clear that what he wants for his people is individual upliftment. However, what he is not sure about is which way to best advocate this to his beloved people. This therefore explains why his subject matter changes from super-human beings to the most ordinary people with few or non-existent heroic qualities. Even when his subject matter becomes the suffering masses, his portrayal of the ideal that he holds up to his people changes from time to time.

It is during this period of groping that Gorky's revolutionary consciousness begins to blossom and this is especially evident in his plays. The literary pieces he produces during this period therefore merely pave the way for Marxist ideologies which steadily seep into his later works. An example of such works is Mother, which is discussed in great detail in the next chapter.

CHAPTER THREE

MOTHER

All the power for the people;
 all means of production for the people;
 work obligatory on all.
 Down with private property!

Gorky, Mother

The foregoing epigraph expresses the loftiest ideal that Gorky ever aspires for. Mother is about workers and their struggle for freedom and better standards of living based on the Marxist ideology. Written in 1905 in the United States, the novel is based on actual events that take place in the Krasnoye Sormovo shipyards, the birthplace of Gorky, Nizhni Novgorod, later renamed Gorky in his honour.

Gorky goes a step further and uses these historical events to write a masterpiece that, probably for the first time in literary history, captures the undivided attention of its target audience, the workers. It arouses such fear in the authorities that it is confiscated, destroyed and orders given to prosecute the author who is already in exile. Mother, as noted by various critics, may be the story of any revolutionary. Its effectiveness as a tool of propaganda for the revolutionary movement is unquestionable. It not only dilutes the fear and apathy of the working class, but also educates them on the prerequisites of a good revolutionary, the risks involved and expected achievements. If there is a book that gives the poor and exploited masses the impetus to rise above their own sorry situation, it is Mother. This work of art, is a culmination of all of Gorky's aspirations for his people.

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According to Gorky, capitalism has reduced the factory workers to little more than zombies whose lives are controlled by the monotonous shrill of a factory whistle which demands instant obedience. The factory has usurped all the workers' energy and potential by forcing them to work under extremely unfavourable conditions. A case in point is Savely who destroys his life making a golden wash basin and toilet articles for his employer's mistress. As he bitterly puts it "A man killed me with work in order to comfort his mistress with my blood. He bought her a gold wash basin with my blood" (235).

This seems incredible but as Sofya, a revolutionary, confirms, there are newspaper accounts of such gifts. Several other workers have also been disabled or crushed to death by accidents that occur on a regular basis in the factories. It is no wonder then that Pavel notes that it is ironical that the very people who provide the necessary labour for everything from gigantic machines to children's toys, are bereft of the right to their human dignity. Worse still "everyone strives to utilize us, and may utilize us, as tools for attainment of his ends" (364).

Capitalism, it seems, is also to blame for dehumanising man. Man gets a perverted sense of satisfaction fighting, maiming and even killing his fellow human being. This is especially common when the workers attempt to drown their misery, if only temporarily, in alcohol. Marriage and family life too have lost meaning and their dignified position in society. The workers do not seem to have the capacity to genuinely care for their spouses and offsprings.

Life for women and children becomes almost unbearable in this otherwise sacred institution. In Pavel's case, for instance, it becomes a battle for survival and when he is sixteen he stands up to his father, Mikhail Vlasov, and threatens to beat him up if he lays another finger on him. From that moment up to the time of his death, Mikhail ceases to acknowledge the existence of his son. It is especially saddening to note that when he dies, no one truly mourns him except his faithful dog.

Equally heinous is the divide-and-rule system used by the capitalists. Probably the most tragic example is the exploitation of Isay, a factory record clerk, turned spy. Isay believes that revolutionaries should be hanged and quartered for even contemplating treason against the Tsar. It is therefore not surprising that when he is found dead, no one feels sorry for him. Instead, people feel that he should have been knocked off a long time ago.

Even more distressing is the fact that an inquest into his death is called off after a short while without any arrests made. The revolutionaries note with pity, "how the system has no regard for its spies" (169). Now that Isay is not there to offer his Judas-like services, the State washes its hands off him and probably recruits a replacement for him. What is tragic about the likes of Isay is that all their hatred directed towards the revolutionaries stems from ignorance. This might explain why they fight the very people who truly care about them and seek a better life for them. Revolutionaries like Pavel understand this:

The police, the soldiers, the spies-they are all our enemies, and yet they are all such people as we are. Their blood is sucked out of them just as ours is, and they are no more regarded as human beings than we are ... But they [capitalist rulers] have set one part of the people against the other, blinded them with fear, bound them all hand and foot, squeezed them, and drained their blood, and used some as clubs against the other. They've turned men into weapons, into sticks and stones, and called it civilisation, government! (153)

Gorky clearly has no option but to take a drastic stand regarding capitalism.

After analysing his people's problems and assuring them that their enslavement is only physical, he offers them the long awaited solution. This is something he grapples with from the moment he takes it upon himself to write for the worker about the worker. Gorky believes that the only feasible way out of the quagmire is through the victory and ascension to power of the Socialist Democrats otherwise known as the revolutionaries. Who, one may ask, are the Socialist Democrats?

We are socialists! That means we are enemies to private property, which separates people, arms them against one another, and brings forth an irreconcilable hostility of interests; brings forth lies that endeavour to cover up, or to justify, this conflicts of interests, and corrupt all with falsehood, hypocrisy and malice. (364)

The revolutionaries seek to destroy the very foundation of capitalism, individualism, cut-throat competition and exploitation of suffering masses by the rich and powerful. Gorky believes in their cause and sees them as unstoppable, as Pavel declares "We are revolutionaries, and will be ... as long as private property exists, as long as some merely command and as long as others merely work" (365).

They have a sacred duty, that of destroying existing class distinctions and attitudes and reconciling the rich and poor to one way of thinking:

Our work frees the world from the delusions and monsters which are produced by your malice and greed, and which intimidate the people. You have torn man away from life and disintegrated him. Socialism will unite the world, rent assunder by you, into one huge whole. And this will be! (366).

Gorky believes that his ideal, which gives people purpose in life and the will to live and fight for their rights, is applicable to all Russians without exception. It is for the town factory worker, the rural peasant, the military and even the powers that be.

While workers are the key characters in the novel, the peasants are represented by Rybin, an enlightened man who has worked in various factories and hence, able to give an informed comparison. The involvement of the peasants in the struggle is very important because at the time Gorky writes, they are the majority population in rural Russia and therefore a force to reckon with. Their support is necessary if the revolution is to succeed and even claim to represent the downtrodden in their entirety.

The liaison between peasants and workers is historically an uneasy one. Rybin explains why this is so and what the stake of the peasant is in the victory of revolutionaries over the capitalist regime. The major difference between the peasants and the factory workers is the former's attachment to land:

The peasant stands more firmly on his feet ... he feels the ground under him although he does not possess it. Yet he feels the earth. But the factory working-man is something like a bird. He has no home ... even his wife cannot attach him to the same spot. (162-163)

The peasants are against the capitalist regime stems because all arable land has been grabbed by the nobility and wealthy landowners. The land that the peasant possesses is "all sand-good for polishing brass, but poor for making bread (161). For the peasant therefore the important thing is

Not ... where the land came from as where it's gone to, how it's been snatched from underneath his feet by the gentry ... you can hang it on a rope ... provided it feeds him: you can nail it to the skies, provided it gives him enough to eat. (161)

The peasants are a threat to the success of the revolution as Andreyev, a factory worker, notes

The masters have poisoned people. When the peasants rise up, they'll overturn absolutely everything! They need bare land and they will lay it bare, tear down everything ... he will burn everything up, as if after a plague, so that all traces of his wrongs will vanish in ashes. (163-4)

There is clearly need for liaison which will ensure that the peasants do not contribute to the failure of the revolution. This is what Andreyev calls, "a bridge across the bog of this rotten life to a future of goodness" (29).

The mistrust that the peasants have for the wealthy and propertied works in favour of the factory workers because they seem to be the only trust-worthy people around. Moreover, the vision held up by the revolutionaries is ideal for the peasants because it seeks to restore their dignity and their most treasured possession, land.

The authorities who uphold the status quo in Mother are aptly represented by the judges presiding over the trial of the revolutionaries. They should therefore be the sworn enemies of the latter, but characteristic of Gorky, he never portrays them as being beyond redemption. As it is, Pavel believes that they should be pitied for their spiritual enslavement:

You are human beings after all; and it is saddening to see human beings, even our enemies, so shamefully debased in the service of violence, debased to such a degree that they lose consciousness of their human dignity. (366)

Their spiritual enslavement comes as a result of the great lengths they are willing to go, to preserve the status quo even to the extent of perpetuating injustice. They are portrayed by Pelagueya, Pavel's mother as being morally sick and full of

The sinister, impotent envy felt by wasted and sick people for the strength of the healthy. Their mouths watered regretfully for these bodies [the revolutionaries], capable of working and enriching, of rejoicing and creating. (371)

The young revolutionaries seem to remind them of their wasted youth. Indeed, only the morally corrupt can go through the charade of a court trial when it is an open secret that sentence has already passed by higher authorities.

Gorky, ever the strong believer in the indestructible good nature of man, offers them a chance to attain his ideal. He believes that once they gain consciousness of the great role of the working man, their evident cynicism and cruelty which "exasperates" will be no more and instead "the hands with which you stifle us to-day will press our hands in comradeship to-morrow" (365). It is not surprising that after Pavel's fiery speech in court, Sizov one of his sympathisers smugly remarks; "There, now the trial has begun!" (367).

The military are also not spared by the revolutionaries and in Mother, they begin to infiltrate the army. Examples include Yefim and Yakob, who are determined to join the army and woo their fellow soldiers to the side of revolution. This is a very fundamental strategy because the nobility and the wealthy capitalists depend almost entirely on the armed forces for the protection of their properties. A shift in loyalty will therefore almost certainly guarantee victory for the suffering masses.

The last significant lot of people who need to be convinced to throw in their lot with the working men are the intelligentsia. In the novel, these include characters like Nikolay Ivanovich and his widowed sister Anna Ivanovna also known as Sofya. Ivanovich is employed in the Zemstov Board (local authority) and is therefore aware of the extent of the exploitation of the working class.

He joins the revolution and uses his education to raise the consciousness of these suffering masses to their plight by holding illegal group discussions and writing prohibited literature.

Sofya, on the other hand, uses her intelligence to resettle escaped convicts and enlighten the working class on the international perspective of the movement. For instance, while on a mission to deliver leaflets to Rybin, she takes the opportunity to talk about "the conflicts of the German peasants in the olden times, about the hardships of the Irish, about the great exploits of the workers in France in their frequent battling for freedom" (237). The suffering masses have extremely low literacy rates and therefore the intelligentsia with a broadened horizon are no doubt desperately needed. Gorky is aware of the strained relationship between the masses and the intelligentsia and he voices it through Ignaty, a peasant who does not fully understand the role of Sofya in the struggle:

"In this business there are no masters; they're all comrades!"
(Nikolay Vyesovschchikov)

"It's strange to me," said Ignaty with a sceptical but embarrassed smile.

"What's strange?"

"This: at one end they beat you in the face; at the other they wash your feet". (328)

The act of washing feet is reminiscent of what Jesus does prior to his arrest and crucifixion. It is a sign of humility and this is what Ignaty cannot reconcile himself to. He does not understand why the intelligentsia join the revolution when the current regime favours their lot. Rybin, never one to mince his words, tells Sofya: "A peasant and a nobleman are like tar and water. It is hard for them to mix. They jump away from each other" (229). Following lengthy discussions with her, he is however filled with renewed respect because of the sacrifices she continues to make for the movement. In the end, he comments in an unusually mild tone; "You speak well. This great cause will unite people. When you know that millions want the same as you do, your heart becomes better, and in goodness there is great power" (239).

Gorky's vision is more far reaching than any that he previously expresses to his readers. In Mother, he makes it clear that his vision is universal. As they read about workers in other countries, Pavel and his discussion group become very excited and refer to them as fellow comrades. This is despite the fact that they seemingly have no contacts outside Russia.

"What queer people you are!" said Pelagueya to the Ukrainian one day. "All are your comrades-the Armenians and the Jews and the Austrians. You speak about all as your friends; you grieve for all, and you rejoice for all!"

"For all mother dear, for all! the world is ours! The world is for the workers! For us there is no nation, no race. For us there are only comrades and foes ..."(38)

The plight and desired destiny of the working men helps them forge a bond with other workers outside Russia. This greatly boosts the morale of the suffering masses, as Pavel proudly declares: "The consciousness of their great role unites all the workingmen of the world into one soul. Our energy is a living power, founded on the ever-growing consciousness of the solidarity of all workingmen" (365-6).

To crown it all, Gorky through several characters, describes the fruits of the revolutionary struggle in his ideal and this can broadly be divided into three stages. The first is an ideal situation where all the workers unite as a result of their consciousness being sufficiently aroused. This is expressed by Andreyev, a seasoned revolutionary:

Here is a man coming and illuminating life with the light of reason ... The man who shouts is alone ... And at his call the staunch hearts unite into one great, strong heart, deep and sensitive as a silver bell not yet cast. And hark! This bell rings forth the message: "Men of all countries, unite into one family! ... I hear this message sounding through the world!" (143)

This ideal is similar to the Biblical account of John the Baptist calling from the wilderness and preparing people for the coming of Jesus Christ into the world to seek, and save sinners, giving them hope of eternal life. Gorky believes that his people need to be enlightened about their own potential which they can then exploit to positively change their destiny.

Pavel's mother also echoes Andreyev's sentiments. Prior to her arrest for transporting prohibited literature, she exhorts her audience to listen to the revolutionaries who are carrying the truth into the world:

They put their young hearts into free truth, they are making it an invincible power. Along the route of their hearts it will enter into our hard life; it will warm us, enliven us, emancipate us from the oppression of the rich and from all who have sold their souls. (399)

The second phase of Gorky's vision is the take-over of power by the united workingmen who will firmly declare, "Enough! We want no more of this life" (238).

Gorky paints a scenario where the power and entire world of the capitalists will crumble under the awesome force of the workers. The vision for Russia is not complete without mention of the aftermath of the workers victory. A very picturesque description is provided by Andreyev:

There will come a time ... when people will take delight in one another, when each will be a star to the other, and when each will listen to his fellowman as to music. The free men will walk upon the earth, men great in their freedom ... then life will be one great service to man! (149)

Such a vision is enough to give even the lowest and most demoralised in society the energy to push on, in the revolutionary struggle.

It is important at this point to note that while Pavel, like Gorky, believes in the power of man's mind to attain this ideal, there are dissenting voices that believe that power should be taken forcibly by the people. Nikolay Vyesovshchikov is one such person. He is impatient with the pace of change and feels that something drastic should be done:

"When the time is come to fight, its not the time to cure the finger," said Vyesovshchikov obstinately.

'There will be enough breaking of our bones before we get to fighting!' the Ukrainian put in merrily'. (29)

It is not surprising therefore that he takes the first opportunity he gets to escape from prison because inactivity almost drives him mad. Gorky is against the idea proposed by Nikolay as he unreservedly believes that one's mind is more powerful than a double-edged sword. As Pavel states;

Is filling our stomachs the only thing we want? No!... We want to be people. We must show those who sit on our necks, and cover up our eyes, that we see everything, that we are not foolish, we are not animals, and that we do not merely want to eat, but also live like decent human beings. We must show our enemies that our life of servitude, of hard toil which they impose upon us, does not hinder us measuring up to them in intellect, and as to spirit, that we rise far above them. (29)

No matter how idyllic the vision Gorky expounds may sound, it must be emphasized that it requires a lot of sacrifice and dedication.

Through his main character Pelagueya, known simply as, the mother, he lays down steps that the worker must painstakingly take to arrive at this great vision. If there is anyone who can convince the readers beyond a shadow of doubt, it is Pelagueya.

MOTHER: FROM RAGS TO RICHES

Pelagueya Nilovna, is a typically ignorant and battered woman who lives in the shadow of her husband and son, shuffling along life as noiselessly as possible, hopelessly trying to avoid as many beatings as she can. The first impression of Pelagueya is one of a woman who does not know love and never has the chance to express it.

I've thought all my life, Lord Christ in heaven! What did I live for?
Beatings, work! I saw nothing except my husband. I knew nothing but
fear! And how Pasha grew I did not see, and I hardly know whether I
loved him when my husband was alive. (96)

Pelagueya enters into an arranged marriage with Michael Vlasov after an extremely nauseating proposal. The husband, a total stranger, physically harasses her at a party and forcibly asks for her hand in marriage: "Will you marry me ... Don't put on airs now, you fool! I know your kind. You are mightily pleased ... I will send a match maker to you next Sunday" (28). Pelagueya covers her eyes and sighs probably in despair as she can see no way out of this situation. It is therefore small wonder that the husband proceeds to beat and throw her out of the house almost every night. She experiences some sense of freedom when he dies.

One may then wonder, how this battered and seemingly worthless woman becomes the main focus of the novel. Gorky makes an important point and that is, the success of the revolution depends on each and every worker and peasant in Russia regardless of how low they have sunk in life. Like in the Lower Depths, he makes it clear that the social depths people sink are not of their own making.

The success of Mother hinges entirely on the character of Pelagueya. Because of this, Gorky has to make her as credible as possible, someone the masses can identify with. He consequently takes us through a chronological metamorphosis of Pelagueya and we live with her throughout the transformation from an ignorant woman to an active revolutionary.

Right from the moment that Gorky introduces Pelagueya to the revolutionary movement, he works at demystifying the movement and dispelling all unnecessary fear that the masses may have. This is, for Gorky, the first prerequisite for winning people over to the side of the revolution. After her husband's death, Pelagueya anxiously watches the change in her son's behaviour and attitude for two years, before she can gather up enough courage to question him. The hesitation is understandable because prior to this Pelagueya never seems to play any role in her son's life and therefore probably feels that she has no right to question him.

After one false start, she finally asks him what it is that he reads all the time and with trepidation waits for the answer. Pavel explains that he reads prohibited literature, which carries a prison sentence, because he wants to know the truth.

At the mention of truth, mother is filled with more anxiety and pity because

She understood with her heart that her son had consecrated himself forever to something mysterious and awful ... Everything in life had always appeared to her inevitable; she was accustomed to submit without thought, and now too, she only wept softly, finding no words, but in her heart she was oppressed with sorrow and distress. (15)

This is an attitude undoubtedly shared by lots of workers and peasants who have the fear of the Tsar in their hearts, believing that even to think about treason is a sin. For instance, one of the gendarmes who arrests the revolutionaries during a peaceful demonstration, blames Pelagueya for her inability to instill in her son a proper respect for God and the Tsar. Worse still, the workers are accustomed to their lot and any change to them probably means, change for the worse. It is therefore imperative that Gorky makes it clear what the movement stands for before he can even begin the work of conquering "souls". This he does gently and patiently.

First, he introduces Pelagueya to other revolutionaries besides her own son.

The announcement that revolutionaries will be meeting in their house draws heart-rending sobs from her. Pavel, her son, explains impatiently that;

The fear is what is the ruin of us all. And some dominate us; they take advantage of our fear and frighten us still more. Mark this: as long as people are afraid, they will rot like the birches in the marsh. We must grow bold; it is time. (20)

Fortunately, she soon discovers that her fears are unfounded as the "monsters" she dreads so much, are nothing more than youth of Pavel's age. She even knows some of them like, Yakob and Nikolay Vyesovshchikov. They are courteous and like her son do not drink alcohol. She is extremely surprised that among them is even a young woman, Natasha. After observing all the visitors, she lightly brushes her fear of "illegal people" thinking to herself that they are "mere children" (26).

It must be noted at this point that Gorky simply sets the stage for future progress. Despite the change in attitude, Pelagueya cannot as yet grasp what the youth argue so passionately about. At one point she is tempted to ask what is so "illegal" about savage people who live in caves and kill beasts with stones. After a while, however, she loses interest and begins instead to build on her earlier impressions. She, for instance, mistakenly thinks that the men restrain themselves from using abusive language only because there is a woman present. By the end of the meeting, she is so relaxed that she offers to knit Natasha a pair of stockings.

Mother is introduced to two issues that go hand in hand with the movement. She learns that Natasha has given up the comfort of home and riches of her father for the sake of the movement. This aspect of sacrifice is one that she sees a lot of as she matures in the movement. Even worse is the fact that anyone in the movement, including her own son, faces the possibility of a prison sentence. This, she is sadly unable to come to terms with:

"I cannot understand, Pasha, what there is dangerous in all this, or illegal ..."

"There is nothing bad in what we're doing, and there's not going to be. And yet the prison is awaiting us all. You may as well know it".

Her hands trembled. "Maybe God will grant you escape somehow ..." she said with sunken voice.

"No", said the son kindly but decidedly. "I cannot lie to you. We will not escape". (31)

The realisation that the life of a revolutionary is a very risky one puts Pelagueya at her wits-end. She stands to lose all that she holds dear, her only child. Fear of the unknown now takes on a more definite shape as she faces up to the reality of the revolution. One can only sympathise with her as she weeps and prays fervently in the hope that things will change for the better. The last words on her mouth that night are "Lord in Heaven, have mercy!" (32).

Gorky, through Pelagueya, anticipates and counters some of the reactions of his readers to the idea of joining the movement. "I am too old for that-Ignorant and old" (34). Initially, she attends the meetings in her house out of motherly love and concern but these turn out to be very important learning sessions. Gorky reveres education and the role that it can play in enriching one's life and in Mother he wastes no opportunity in bringing this message home.

Pelagueya is determined to understand what the movement is all about and therefore accepts Andreyev's offer to teach her how to read.

This is a skill she loses during her torturous life with her late husband. It is not an easy task for Pelagueya to re-learn how to read at an advanced age and she cries out in despair. "I'm learning to read ... it's time for me to die and I'm just learning to read" (102). After numerous tears of frustration and embarrassment, she puts an end to the lessons and secretly begins to teach herself. This is incidentally reflective of the way Gorky himself becomes literate and enlightened. Here too he is making a very portentous point.

Education in the repressive regime is an indispensable weapon. The revolutionaries at this time are not allowed to hold public meetings and even the gatherings in Pelagueya's house are held at great risk. The only mode of spreading the revolutionary word is therefore through leaflets, pamphlets and other prohibited literature. Pelagueya is not the only one encouraged to read because Gorky is aware that the illiteracy rate is highest among peasants and through the character of Rybin, therefore, he advocates for simple literature that even "calves" can read but which contains "such hot truth that the people will rush to their own death" (159). Gorky also encourages the peasants to read because as Yefim, a peasant rightly observes, "Nowadays a book is like a candle in the night to us" (163).

The next stage in the growth of revolutionary consciousness is active involvement in the cause as it enhances a person's level of commitment. For Pelagueya, this opportunity comes with the unexpected arrest of her son.

She is shortly thereafter given the task of smuggling prohibited literature into the factory, a task she does with admirable ingenuity. She plays on her neighbour's sympathy and is given the chance to sell food inside the factory. Unknown to the neighbour, Pelagueya stuffs prohibited leaflets under her clothing. This particular act has several effects. First, Pelagueya steps in and fills a gap that has been left by the revolutionaries who have been arrested, continuing the fight for the cause. Second, the act serves to boost the confidence and morale of the other revolutionaries and their sympathisers. Third, she instills fear in the authorities as it becomes clear to them that the movement is stronger and more wide-spread than they think.

Probably the most crucial effect for Pelagueya, is that for the first time she feels a sense of worth and pride at her brilliance.

Formerly, life used to happen somewhere in the distance, remote from where she was, uncertain for whom and for what. Now, many things were accomplished before her eyes, with her help. The result in her was a confused feeling, compounded of inferiority, pride, confusion and sadness. (286)

Last but not least, she earns the respect of her son. This tremendously improves relations with him considering that he has never in the past seriously considered the role his mother plays in his life.

After Pavel's arrest, Pelagueya's physical move from the factory to the town marks a new beginning for her. Her conception of work changes and becomes

connected with the work being done by the revolutionaries. To Pelagueya, "the greater the number of those who work for his [Pavel's] cause, the clearer will his truth come out before the people" (199). Her consciousness also increases with time as she explains to Sofya "Of course its not easy for me. But it would have been worse some time ago; now I know that he's not alone, and even that I am not alone" (207). From this point on, Pelagueya moves on to maturity. She cuts a niche for herself in the struggle, becoming an expert in what she does best transporting prohibited literature using different disguises. This is however not all that she does for the movement.

Pelagueya also works in unison and harmony with other revolutionaries in the struggle while at the same time maintaining her individuality. For instance, she provides an important communication link between the imprisoned revolutionaries and those still outside. To do this, she uses her privilege as mother to visit her son, Pavel. Her ingenuity and even cheek at getting messages across to the prisoners leaves one agape as she brow beats the authorities at their own game. The latter do not wish the prisoners to know what is happening in the outside world and therefore forbid talk about "dangerous" topics. Yet it is the seemingly mundane and harmless topics that Pelagueya uses to pass messages across to the prisoners.

Pelagueya uses her ingenuity to inform Pavel that the leaflets have reappeared in the factory, making him understand that she is responsible for this and also informs her son that Nikolay (a revolutionary) is safe, after escaping from prison through gates, negligently left ajar.

This, boosts the morale of the revolutionaries in prison as they know that one more person has escaped the inactivity of prison life and rejoined the active struggle for the cause. Again, it forces the revolutionaries to recognise Pelagueya's potential as a "comrade in arms".

"I saw your god child." Pavel fixed a silent questioning look on her eyes. She tapped her fingers on her cheeks to picture to him the pockmarked face of Vyesovshchikov.

"He's all right! The boy is alive and well. He'll soon get his position-you remember how he always asked for hard work". (280)

This link, Gorky seems to be saying, can only be provided by a person who has the cause at heart. There are several parents whose children are imprisoned along with Pavel, but they do not use this opportunity to further the cause. Instead they sit in the waiting room and whine at the futility of coming to visit their children. Pelagueya, on the other hand, is driven by a purpose and is always burning to discuss "harmless" topics with her son.

Pelagueya also maintains the humanness in the struggle. Gorky works at shattering the myth that the revolutionaries, otherwise known as Social Democrats, are cold-blooded murderous, almost rebels without a cause. The first attraction about her is that she continues to mother anyone and everyone in need of her love and concern. The symbolism of Pelagueya's character is discussed in greater detail in the section on Gorky's style.

The theme of religion, which Gorky discusses through Pelagueya, also brings out the humanness of the revolutionaries. More than any other revolutionary in the book, she struggles with her spirituality until she reaches a satisfying conclusion. Initially she prays daily and ritually in front of her icon but as her revolutionary consciousness grows, she begins to question the significance of this ritual and stops the practice. It is only through discussions with other revolutionaries that she reaches the conclusion that Jesus Christ and what He stands for, is good. What is wrong and undesirable is the portrayal of Jesus by the church. As Rybin laments:

They have mutilated even our God for us, they have turned everything in their hands against us. In the churches they set up a scarecrow before us. They have dressed up God in falsehood and calumny; they have distorted His face in order to destroy our souls. (234)

What beats Pelagueya is that, according to the Bible, Jesus is a humble man and a friend of the poor, yet in churches where the poor go to him for consolation, "she saw him nailed to the cross with insolent gold, she saw silks and satins flaunting in the face of want" (246). At the end of her spiritual journey, although she still does not fully understand why God allows his own people to suffer, she concludes, "In regard to God, I don't know; but I do believe in Christ ... I believe in his words, "Love thy neighbour as thyself" (314). In other words although Pelagueya believes in the teachings of Christ, she discards the church as an institution because it seemingly contradicts His teachings.

Gorky therefore makes it clear that the revolutionaries are good people who have the fear of God in their hearts. What they are opposed to is religion and the church being used as tools of oppression by the powers that be. The church is, for instance, used by the regime to hammer into the minds of people that loyalty to God is equated with loyalty to the Tsar. This assertion paralyses the people because it then makes it almost a sacrilegious act to go against the Tsar.

Pelagueya also plays the role of an advocate for the work of her son and the other revolutionaries. Everywhere she goes she exhorts people to open up their hearts and minds to the truth that they preach. She also gets a chance to openly mobilise people for the cause just prior to her arrest. She paints a grim picture of the life of workers under the capitalist regime and uses the opportunity to talk about the work of the revolutionaries, urging the people not to turn their backs on them. She portrays them as the only avenue of hope that the suffering masses have:

Our children are carrying the truth into the world. Bright people, clean people are carrying it to you. Thus far there are few of them; they are not powerful; but they grow in number every day. They put their young hearts into free truth, they are making it an invincible power. Along the route of their hearts it will enter into our hard life; it will warm us, enliven us, emancipate us from the oppression of the rich and from all who have sold their souls. Believe this. (399)

As the novel progresses, Pelagueya continues to mature in the struggle. After the son has been detained for six months without trial, it dawns on Pelagueya that she no longer feels the sorrow and pain of being apart from him and not knowing his fate.

She now understands why he has to suffer and decides to play her role in the movement. No wonder then that she is outraged by doubts cast by Sofya, about her capabilities as a revolutionary. One other crucial sign of maturity, is the ability to look back at the past, not with bitterness but in light of her new life in the movement. With the help of her newly-found friends, she discovers that life does not have to be as hard as it has previously been for her:

Now I am able to say about myself, about my people, because I understand life. I began to understand it when I was able to make comparisons. Before that time there was nobody to compare myself with. In our state, you see, all lead the same, and now that I see how others live (216).

At the end of this discovery, she sheds tears of happiness and gratitude. The final test of Pelagueya's maturity and commitment to the cause however, comes when she is arrested for being in possession of prohibited literature.

When all seems lost, Pelagueya stands up and talks about the cause as she understands it. For her this may be the only chance and she takes it. In the pandemonium prior to her arrest, she distributes all the leaflets that highlight Pavel's defence statement. Her fear of a beating, reminiscent of the time with her husband, threatens to overpower her but she overcomes it. She is beaten up but rather than get subdued as is the practice in the past, she portrays a spirit akin to her son's and stands up to be counted.

With every blow delivered she speaks with all the strength left in her, exhorting her audience to gather up into one single force and be fearless because "there are no tortures worse than those which you endure all your lives" (401). She also encourages them to struggle on in search of truth because the capitalist regime cannot "drown reason in blood; they will not extinguish its truth" (401). She does not spare her tormentors and assures them that, "You heap up only wrath against yourselves, you unwise ones! It will fall on you----" (402). She only stops when a policeman begins to throttle her.

As the novel ends, one is left with a sense of awe and admiration for Pelagueya. At the height of her revolutionary maturity, when faced with persecution and even death, she is ready to be sacrificed and goes down kicking. Gorky ends the story on a cliff hanger, implying that it is not important to know Pelagueya's fate after her arrest, what matters is that she knows the truth, lives it and willingly lays down her life for it. The going is tough, but she jumps all hurdles to become a revolutionary worth her salt. What can be more fulfilling and enriching than this? To Gorky, nothing.

One other character in Mother who deserves mention is Pavel, Pelagueya's son, who may as well be an anti-thesis of Pelagueya. One may move a step further and even draw parallels between these two characters. Unlike Pelagueya, Pavel is cut out to be a leader and Gorky therefore uses him to lay down the criterion of a good revolutionary leader.

Right from the moment Pelagueya notices a change in her son, he becomes very dedicated to the cause and never once waivers. Where Pelagueya is allowed to show human emotions, Pavel has to observe the strictest of discipline however much it hurts him and those around him. As Andreyev observes, "Pavel is a rare man-He is a man of iron" (97). For example, Pavel, accepts prison as inevitable and while Pelagueya is praying that the cup of suffering should pass from the hands of her son, the latter nonchalantly declares, "There is nothing bad in what we're doing, and there's not going to be. And yet prison is awaiting us all. You may as well know it" (31).

Love is an emotion that Pavel has difficulties coming to grips with and at times treats it almost with disdain. As he says, "I want no love, I want no friendship which gets between my feet and holds me back" (139). To him, the kind of love that Pelagueya and his beloved Sasha want to shower him with, has no place in his life until the struggle is over. Pavel sees no hope for a normal family as long as the old regime stands. He gives two plausible reasons for this negative opinion. One, revolutionaries spend a lot of time in prison and therefore apart from their families. Second, if they have children, the revolutionaries have to forfeit active struggle in order to fend for them.

Ironically, it is the prison sentence (exile) that Pavel receives for being a Social Democrat which gives him and Sasha hope of a future together. However Sasha is under no illusions and she knows that she must go to Pavel on his own terms. She realises that tying him down with her love is detrimental to the proletariat cause.

Sasha, facing imminent arrest and exile in Siberia, decides to join Pavel and make the most of what life offers. She vows to bolster the Movement which is sacred to Pavel. She ends her talk with Pavel's mother on this subject on a solemn but realistic note:

My aim, my desire is to increase his energy, to give him as much happiness and love as I can ... we will enrich each other by all in our power; and, if necessary, we will part as friends. (378)

It is clear that Sasha is genuinely in love with Pavel and is not driven by lust or some evil intention. Therefore, although several revolutionary spouses die young or are languishing in prison, Gorky is optimistic that from the struggle will emerge marriages where couples have mutual respect, genuine love and commitment.

STYLE IN MOTHER

The first thing that catches a readers eye is the structure of the first chapter. Although there is no visible split, it is divided into two distinctive parts. The first part draws a broad overview of the lives of the workers and this is for various reasons. First it sets the mood of the novel for the reader as it is clear from the first sentence that the content of the novel is not to be taken lightly:

Every day the factory whistle bellowed forth its shrill, roaring, shuddering noises into the smoke grimmed and greasy atmosphere of the working men's suburb, and obedient to the summons of the power of steam, people poured out of little gray [sic] houses into the street (3).

The workers described, give a reader a sense of hopelessness as they behave like zombies controlled day in and day out by the shrill of a factory whistle. This first part summarises the lives of these workers telling the reader all there is to know about the characters in the novel, saving Gorky the task of having to give lengthy background information.

Gorky may also be saying that the characters in the rest of the novel are no different from those in the first part and as if to prove his point he begins the second part with, "Thus also lived Michael Vlasov" (6). Because of this kind of introduction, the reader already understands the environment of future characters. To Gorky, putting his truth forward is paramount and skipping lengthy introductions gives him an opportunity to talk about it very early in the novel without dwelling too much on the dreary past.

The author uses the technique of suspense by hinting at the hope for a brighter future in Part One. The reader is informed that from time to time, strangers visit the typical village painted in part one. What is not made clear is why the villagers become apprehensive or agitated when they talk to these strangers:

The men did not argue with him [the stranger], but listened to his odd speeches with incredulity. His words aroused blind irritation in some, perplexed alarm in others, while still others were disturbed by feeble, shadowy glimmer of the hope of something, they knew not what. (6)

Gorky thus sets the stage for his novel. Not only are we acquainted with the characters but we are almost certain that something is going to happen that may drastically change their lives for better or worse. This motivates the reader to go on with the novel despite its gloomy beginning. One should also bear in mind that such a broad picture convinces readers during Gorky's time that whatever happens to workers in the novel is happening to workers everywhere. This forges a proletariat kind of solidarity and reassures the Russian workers that they are not alone in the struggle.

The novel derives its title from the main character, Pelagueya Nilovna known simply as Pelagueya. Mother is predominantly about Pelagueya and all that goes on in her life and around her but this is not the only reason it is named thus. She is representative of all the suffering masses for whom Gorky writes and this is confirmed by the reflections of Nikolay Ivanovich and his sister, Sofya, as they listen to Pelagueya recount her life history.

The brother and sister listened in attentive silence, impressed by the deep significance of the unadorned story of a human being, who was regarded as cattle are regarded, and who, without a murmur, for a long time felt herself to be that which she was held to be. It seemed to them as if thousands, nay millions, of lives spoke through her mouth. (217)

As Nikolay and Sofya rightly note, Pelagueya's existence is commonplace and simple, but so is that of multitudes, so her story assumes "even larger proportions in their eyes" (217), taking on the significance of a "symbol". Pelagueya's typicality therefore gives the novel its name.

The title of the novel is also symbolic because Pelagueya Nilovna is mother, not only to her real son Pavel but also to many other revolutionaries, who freely call her mother because of her genuine love and concern. She is, from the very beginning, a very emotional woman with a heart large enough to accommodate anyone in need of motherly love and affection. For example, she, without much ado, takes to Pavel's friend Andreyev, asks him to move into her home and later confesses to him that she probably loves him more than she does her own son. Again, she knits woollen stockings for Natasha, a young revolutionary, to keep her warm during the winter although she barely knows her. Pelagueya treats all revolutionaries that she comes across with the bearing of a mother and fills the void created by parents who disown their children for joining the movement. Such children include Natasha and Sasha who turn their backs on wealth for the sake of truth. No wonder Andreyev compliments her:

Everyone loves those who are near. To a large heart,
what is far is also near. You mother are capable
of a great deal. You have a large capacity
of motherliness. (97)

It should be noted that throughout her growth and maturity in the movement, Pelagueya never once loses her motherly touch. If anything, she shows it more often as she becomes more confident about her self-worth.

For instance, she continues to shower her love on other revolutionaries like Yegor, Sofya, Nikolay and even Vyesovshchikov, who likes dogs, mice and all sorts of animals but dislikes people.

Even the truth that Pelagueya gives to the crowd prior to her arrest is symbolic as it is portrayed as being truth from a mother's heart. This means that it could have come from any woman who has known the pains of child birth and rearing. She implores the crowd. "I will tell you and you believe the heart of a mother, believe her gray hair" (398). Pelagueya's truth is simple enough for all to understand and Identify with. It is truth that they are already aware of but through Pelagueya they now begin to see the connection between the Tsarist regime and their misery and the hope embodied by the revolution. One may go further and speculate that the truth is made all the more glaring by the mere fact that it is told by a middle-aged mother who has experienced the same kind of life but who has embraced the truth and been raised above their lot.

It is also symbolic that the reader learns about Pelagueya's name through a revolutionary. Previously she is referred to as Vlasov's wife or Pavel's mother. It may be argued that she re-gains her identity and rightful respect as an individual when she comes into contact with the revolutionaries. From the start of the novel to the end, Gorky describes events through Pelagueya's eye giving these her own interpretation. This is a stroke of genius because it seems like there are no intrusions from the author.

In the novel, there is never a scene where Pelagueya is not present. We travel with her everywhere she goes and we are treated to her own interpretation of whatever events come across our way as we sojourn with her.

All the themes in the novel are discussed either through her or in her presence. For instance, we journey with her and Sofya as they transport prohibited literature to a peasant comrade. At night as she lies down to rest, we learn about the mistrust peasants have for the intelligentsia from the conversation that reaches her ears. This is from the discussion between the peasants and Sofya, member of the intelligentsia. This style of narration makes issues raised by the author credible to the reader.

The language of the novel is strikingly simple because of this style of narration. Gone are the streams of consciousness and deep philosophical debates that characterise the writings of other Russian writers. Because everything is viewed through Pelagueya's eyes, the language has to correspond to her level of thinking. Gorky therefore makes issues so simple and clear that the reader is forced to believe that, if Pelagueya can understand Gorky's truth, so can they. The book is truly written by a worker, about a worker and for the worker.

The language may be simple but it is not bland. It is rich with imagery and metaphors appropriately used to deliver important messages. During "the muddy penny" incident, Pavel urges workers to go on strike because of an order passed to deduct one percent of their earnings to cover the expenses of draining a nearby marsh.

The workers refuse to listen to him and Rybin cautions him that "It's a heap of dung you won't lift with one toss of the pitchfork" (72). This means that the pace of change is going to be slow because one cannot expect to change the attitude of the workers and rid them of their fear of the capitalist regime overnight. Other metaphors combine message with humour. Rybin argues with a priest on the role of the capitalist regime:

"The people are a flock," says he, "and they always need a shepherd."

And I joke. "If," I say, "they make the fox the chief of the forest, there'll be lots of feathers but no birds." (213-214)

Rybin covertly criticizes the regime and the church. He is essentially saying that instead of protecting the peasants like a good shepherd, the regime makes life more miserable for them and even contributes to their decimation. The church is also seen as helping the regime to dupe the suffering masses into accepting capitalists as their God-given shepherd.

Running through the entire novel is also a lot of imagery drawn from the Biblical trials and tribulations of Christ here on earth. The sacrifices that the revolutionaries make are severally compared to the crucifixion of Christ for the sake of truth. The capitalist regime is described as taking pleasure in watching Christ groaning on the cross. This may refer to the harassment, torture and even death that revolutionaries experience under this oppressive regime.

The revolution is described as "a holy procession in the name of the God of truth and light, the God of Reason and Goodness", whose crown of thorns is not too far (178). This crown is like the one placed on Christ's brow during his crucifixion.

The picture entitled "Jesus Christ walking to Emaus" which Pavel hangs up in their home is also very symbolic. It portrays the resurrected Christ walking to Emaus where he first appears to his disciples. The revolutionary period can be compared to the life, death and resurrection of Jesus as recorded in the Bible. Like Jesus, the movement preaches a truth that is accepted by some and rejected by others. Again, there are those who like the followers of Jesus will be persecuted and killed for the sake of the truth that they hold dear. However because of the immutability of that truth and the inevitability of change, the movement will emerge victorious just as Jesus conquered death and resurrected. The picture therefore sums up the trials and tribulations that a revolutionary must live through and the victory that awaits those who shall overcome all these.

Gorky, characteristic of Socialist realist writers, uses a lot of romanticism. The vision he has for Russia and the entire world after the ascension to power by the workers, is utopian. At no single time does he talk about bloodshed that may accompany the take-over. Indeed, he seems to think that because everyone will be united in spirit, there will be no cause for conflict as people will appreciate one another as they would music.

Even when Yegor dies, he refuses to seriously acknowledge the finality of death and even the fact that his death is an unnecessary loss to the movement. Instead, through the character of Sasha, he romanticises Yegor's death. To him, although Yegor is physically dead, he still lives on spiritually because of his contribution to the cause.

What does "to die" signify? What died? Did my respect for Yegor die? My love for him, a comrade? The memory of his mind's labor? Did that labor die? Did all our impressions of ... a hero disappear without leaving a trace? ... The best in him will never die out of me. (346)

Sasha even compares Yegor's immortality to that of God, "Don't be in a hurry to bury the eternally alive, the ever luminous, along with a man's body. The church is destroyed, but God is immortal" (347). Although Gorky knows that the reality of things is brutal and says so, he couches his truth with some measure of idealism in order to make it appealing to his readers. It is only in this way that he can give them the will to rise above their own lot and become instrumental in bringing about positive change in their own lives.

Suffice it to say that without doubt, Mother, is an artistic work of art worthy of mention. Despite its political message, it comes through not as a political manifesto but as a literary piece created with painstaking care. In the novel, Gorky finally sheds light on an attainable vision for his people. Gone is the call for individualism to be replaced by concrete and collective action towards a common goal, a proletariat

revolution which will once and for all correct all the ills perpetrated upon the downtrodden in society.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE FATE OF MAXIM GORKY THE WRITER

Man is master, there is nothing he cannot learn,
nothing he cannot do or come to know, his
happiness or misery depends on him alone, and
the only destiny that shapes his ends is the will
to work.

Gorky, quoted in Muchnic 1963

The epigraph summarises the core of Maxim Gorky's works and essentially explains the belief that Gorky has of the Russian society which he expresses in his literature. Almost close to a century after Gorky writes Mother, it is necessary to speculate on the role of his literary works of art on present day Russian society.

In the early nineties, communism collapses and once again the world together with the Russian people, waits with baited breath, to see what political system will take over. Instead of a free state akin to Andreyev's vision in Mother, where people respect their fellow human beings, listen to one another as to music and where work is one great service, the communist regime is repressive.

The downtrodden remain oppressed, work is a compulsory drudgery, there is restricted movement within and outside the Soviet Union and no one openly opposes the system for fear of reprisals. Worse still, because of the fear of powerful capitalist countries like America, the Union concentrates to a large degree on production of arms and nuclear weapons. Due to scant attention paid to industries producing essential household commodities, rationing of these items becomes the order of the day to the present time.

While the last of the communists struggle to maintain their hold over the Soviet Union, a lot of pressure is being brought to bear on the current leadership by capitalist states which this financially crippled state must rely on for aid. Obviously, one of the changes that these powerful states will like to see, as a condition for giving aid, is evidence of faster and more definite transition of the union into a capitalist state. With the breakdown of communism also, there has been a lot of blood shed as several states like Chechnya fight for complete autonomy from the larger Union.

It is again for the citizens of Russia, a time of reckoning, for they must once more unite and determine the future direction of their state. This no doubt gives them almost a sense of "deja vu" as they reflect upon the events leading to the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution. In the confusion surrounding the rejuvenation of a crumbled state, reminiscent of a time almost a hundred years ago, it is to Gorky's works that they should go, if they are to restore faith in themselves and believe that they have it within themselves, to better their lot and once more re-shape history.

It is an indisputable fact that Gorky's place in the history of Russia is firmly entrenched. This is not just as a man who hails from the working class and contributes to the efforts of the Bolsheviks, helping to change the course of history, but as a writer. Anyone interested in studying Russian literature, will find it impossible to ignore the contribution that Gorky makes to the literary world. He is one of the creators of socialist realism in Russia and this is not a myth as some critics contend.

Gorky's works are like a breath of fresh air to the Russian society because his writing is distinct, marking a departure from existing literature. His novels are simple, easy to understand and yet rich in content. They are the kind that even "calves could understand" (Rybin in Mother, 159). Most important, Gorky is the first member of the working class to ever write about Russia's suffering masses, and this no doubt endears him to those who continue to suffer. His works portray the reaction of his characters, the suffering masses who are victims to inherent exploitation. This to many critics, is the core of human conflict.

Western critics continue to hold Gorky's obsession with his people against him, yet this is probably the most noble thing that a writer can ever do, to use his talent to try and better the lives of his people. Lukacs (1978) praises Gorky, calling him a successor to the great Russian humanists whose revolutionary cry is a clarion call to the old Russia. To him, Gorky is part of the Russian literary heritage that spans the writings of Pushkin, Tolstoy and Chekhov among other great writers.

Lukacs further terms Gorky's works, a monument, bearing witness to the indestructible popularity and vitality of Russian classical literature.

Although part of Gorky's vision, the victory of the workers, comes to pass, there is still a lot left in his vision that can give people the motivation to push on. For one, the workers are not really in control of the government as Gorky desires in his Marxist ideal. Russia is ruled by the elite who determine the lot of the proletariat. Clearly therefore, it is not only to history books that the people should go, but to literary works like those of Gorky, capable of inspiring them to greater heights. It is time again for the "Great Literature" of Gorky to "loosen the tongue of the dumb" and open "the eyes of the blind" (Lukacs 1978, 217). Gorky's literature will no doubt reveal, "to (the Russian) man the great possibilities and faculties that slumber in him and that can be turned into reality by his actions" (217).

Gorky's works are of much relevance to other literary societies fighting to make the lot of the suffering masses better. Gorky's works are an inspiration to the poor because they motivate them to rise above their own lot. Even more important is the fact that such works help citizens of any country to get a voice and finally be able to hold their own governments accountable. It is only when such citizens realise their own worth that they can determine the direction they want their country to take. One can therefore only conclude that Gorky the writer is not a man one can easily forget.

One may be tempted to play down his role in the making of the history of Russia but one just has to read his literature and marvel at the optimism he has for the future of mankind, his determined search of a truth that may help shape this future and his vision of breaking the chains that bind the lowest dregs of society. For, as Gorky beautifully puts it:

However thick this layer [of beastly brutalities] may be, bright, healthy and creative things can never-the-less break through it; fine, human seeds grow never-the-less, fostering an imperishable hope of our re-birth to a brighter, truly human life. (Lukacs, 14)

The working lot in the Soviet Union, are still grappling with ways of improving their lot. Even with the breakdown of communism it is clear that the Russian man is still hoping to achieve the vision that holds Gorky spellbound. Indeed one cannot help but disagree with Chekhov's contention:

It seems to me.... that a time will come when Gorky's works will be forgotten but he himself will hardly be forgotten in thousand years. So I think or so it seems to me-and maybe I am mistaken. (Muchnic 1963, 103)

It is at such turning points in history, when people face the future with uncertainty mingled with fear, that such works of inspiration should be upheld.

CONCLUSION

This thesis sets out to achieve three objectives. One, to trace Gorky's chronological growth and source of inspiration and its impact on his writing. Second, to analyse his search for an appropriate truth for the downtrodden in Russian society and third to attempt to speculate upon Gorky's relevance in present day Russia.

To achieve these objectives, the study adopts Marxist criticism. Through this analytical framework the study is able to meet its set objectives. This is accomplished through the use of the framework to undertake a systematic analysis of Gorky's early collection of stories, plays and novels up to the period prior to the 1917 Revolution. The framework enables this study to answer important questions like why Gorky bothers to write at all, what he writes about, who he writes for and how he writes.

It is also the contention of this study that through Marxist criticism, this study is able to unearth the quality of timelessness inherent in the works of Gorky. It is a fact that the reason that motivates Gorky to write is as real today as it was during his time thus making his works as relevant as they were in yesteryears.

Although this study advances scholarship on the works of Maxim Gorky in many ways, there is still room for more studies. This thesis is limited to the period before the Revolution of 1917. This is mainly because of a great shortage of Gorky's works during the time of research. With the opening up of Russia, it would be worth-while to study in greater depth, Maxim Gorky's reaction to the communist regime and the attainment of his vision. Of significance too is how his reactions impact upon his writings and whether he retains his vision of a Marxist revolution and government.

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