

From the Labyrinth of the Self to the Road of Revolution: Ideological Transformation in Gorky's Fiction

Dr R.Sumathi

Assistant Professor

Department of English

Kongunadu Arts and Science College

Coimbatore, Tamil Nadu, India

sumenglit@gmail.com

Abstract

Maxim Gorky, born Maxim Alexei Maximovich Peshkov, occupies a special place in modern Russian literature because he writes his fiction with an unusual intensity about the transition from private suffering into historical and political consciousness. His early stories are populated by losers, tramps, workers and extremely wounded characters living lives of extreme isolation or poverty, even being disgraced; they touch on subjects of starvation, degradation, and sexual subjectivity. They are not only social victims but also the genesis of Gorky's wider humanity. With the development of his literary career, though, Gorky's fiction steadily grew more influenced by revolutionary ideology and predicated on the possibility of collective transformation. This transformation is readily demonstrated in the cultural and domestic drama of a working-class family which, alongside this novel, becomes *Mother*, the narrative of political consciousness and mass struggle that is palpable in their work, an autobiographical trilogy, and the self shown as one with labour, science, education and condition. The paper argues that the perusal of Gorky's fiction developed in three principal stages. The first shows the individual in crisis, cut off from society and in a state of isolation and despair. Second, it synecdoches that suffering into a critique of society, tracing private agony back to material

oppression and inter-class violence. Third, it converts the solitary subject into a collective revolutionary agent and claims that revolutionary consciousness is the greatest form of human development. Gorky's centrality isn't just because he depicted the oppressed; it's his literary effort to envision a new kind of person, one forged from solidarity and discipline and historical purpose instead of resignation or individualism. Thus, his fiction serves as a hyphen between nineteenth-century realism and the ideological literature of the Soviet epoch.

Keywords: Alexei Maximovich Peshkov, Russian literature, humanity, material oppression, nineteenth-century realism, Soviet epoch

Introduction

Maxim Gorky, born Alexei Maximovich Peshkov, is best remembered as the mighty voice of social protest in early 20th-century Russia. His writings depict a society in crisis: the ending of long-established social systems, the increase of revolutionary movements, the development of Marxist thought, and the quest for new ways to conceptualise human existence. Gorky, in other words, is writing a fiction of consciousness and, more precisely, the kind of consciousness that emerges when one is subject to oppression and learns what it means to be oppressed. No small part of Gorky's message has to do with how you turn awareness into action. His short stories and novels are not limited to social description. Of moving from the suffering of the separate self to the coming into view of a collective revolutionary horizon. This is precisely the movement that this paper aims to describe.

Gorky is well known for his theme of "From the Labyrinth of the Self to the Road of Revolution: Ideological Transformation in Gorky's Fiction", which summarises one of the most important patterns informing Gorky's fiction. A large part of Gorky's writing earlier in his career concerned people at the margins of society: beggars, vagabonds, workers, failed aspirants to great things, and those beaten down by poverty or despair. These figures are often absent from stable communities and significant political activity in the brain. But they are never

shown as completely passive either. Speech and moral energy . Gorky imbues them with a kind of strange dignity, as though no matter how ruined the person is, one still has the potential even for renewal. But this lens changes over time. Gorky progressively conjures up the notion that private despair cannot be cured just through private perseverance. Rather, he understands freedom as social solidarity, revolutionary struggle and the mass reconstruction of human life through collective force. Such ideological progression exhibits not just Gorky the artist but also Gorky the man as he was answering to the historical milieu of his day.

The last imperial decade in Russia was characterised by deepening inequality, labour unrest, censorship and political repression, as well as radicalisation. Writing during this period, Gorky formulated the question of how fiction could both reveal oppression and be involved in the creation of a new world. His answer was not static. From the observation of tragedy to revolutionary commitment, it changed from sentimental empathy to combative political vision. This evolution makes his fiction especially rich terrain for examining the relationship between literature and ideology.

Gorky's Historical Position

In order to properly understand Gorky the writer, we first have to know Gorky the historical figure. He was born Alexei Peshkov in 1868 and endured long stretches of poverty, upheaval and back-breaking labour as a child. His life allowed direct access to the subjects he later fictionalised: workers, drifters, craftsmen and those on the boundaries of civilisation. This background was significant in that it provided a hard social grounding for his writing. It is not that Gorky was looking at the poor people from a distance; he wrote from inside the social world of uncertainty and want. It saved him from any sentimental abstraction, even an emotional one in his fiction. Simultaneously, Gorky was more and more of a widespread figure in political and philosophical spheres with links to revolutionary ideas. He encountered Marxist thought and writers and activists who argued literature ought to collaborate with social change.

This matters very much because Gorky's fiction was never created in a vacuum, devoid of politics. But his increasing allegiance to socialism transformed how he depicted character, conflict, and the purpose of narrative. For much of this work, the social world is a dark place but still one that can be resisted at least spiritually or morally. The later works tend to focus more on collective struggle, political organisation and the making of a new type of human.

Gorky was closely tied to discussions of literary realism and the future character of Soviet culture. In later discussions of socialist realism he was sometimes treated as a pioneer, particularly on account of the impact of *Mother* and his pronouncements about literature and social engagement. Even when his real fiction, creative or social, was more nuanced than cheap propaganda, the role of culture increasingly positioned him on what we might today recognise as one side of cultural battle lines around drama to the revolution. Gorky, accordingly, is not only a central figure in his own texts; he also played an important role in the twentieth-century literary politics.

Early Fiction and Marginal Lives

The earlier fiction of Gorky is most properly seen as marginal life literature. His narratives often include characters who are outsiders and have little status, privilege or social capital. Such faces may be of drifters, labourers, beggars, vagabonds, or those forced to moral and emotional isolation by poverty. What binds them together is not ideological agreement but a common exclusion. Gorky is not purely sociologically interested in them. He observes that they retain a kind of raw humanity that a refined social order has not been able to squelch.

A key feature of these early narratives is their emotional tension, caught between despair and pride. Although the suffering of Gorky's characters is profound, they are rarely mere victims. Rather than plaintive, they are defiant, ironic, bitter or yearning. It lends a certain raw vitality to the early fiction. Gorky is essentially saying that even the most broken person can still achieve some form of sentience. Thus, the crisis of these works is not simply material

deprivation but an inner conflict to maintain a coherent identity in contexts that rendered people as organisms. This is the first of Gorky's ideological formations: the isolated individual exists, suffers, rebels and feels that life ought to be different. But these early stories are no direct political revolution. They do offer collective organisation as the answer to suffering, but not yet. Instead, they focus on character, mood and moral urgency. Honest enough, however, because they lay the foundation for more important works to come. In turn, Gorky insists on the dignity and emotional richness of the masses so as to grant them a narrative space where they are not marginal but principled characters in literature. The turn in outlook is ideological in advance of being political.

The Crisis of the Self

The crisis of the individual in Gorky's early fiction tends to be because such a self cannot secure stable signification within this social world. These characters are not just destitute: they are confused, fractured and uncertain about their place in the world. It is existential as well as material suffering. They wonder if life has dignity, if freedom can be attained, and whether or not a human being can avoid degrading experiences. This renders Gorky's fiction with an earnest severity of morals that operates beyond mere realism. You have heard a timely yet timeless crisis: the crisis isn't just, "What happens to this person?" But, "What kind of a person can live in such a world?"

This notion becomes crucial as Gorky does not respond to this crisis with retreat and personal solace. His early characters have dreams, illusions, or fantasies, but they are all precarious escapes inside. The problem remains social. The social order robs individuals of meaningful participation, education, security and respect, which makes them weak. And so the crisis of the self is already a social diagnosis. Gorky's fiction, suggests that alienation is created by environmental conditions, not deep human moral failure.

This diagnosis lays the groundwork for his future doctrine. If social conditions break the self, then private action is insufficient as a cure. It must be collective. The earlier fiction thus serves as a prolegomenon to a great evolution of Gorky's thought. It reveals the human suffering generated by capitalism, poverty, and oppression but has not yet articulated a revolutionary solution. In the works that follow, this remedy becomes more readily apparent.

From Observation to Critique

Gorky grew up, and his fiction began to capture more than just marginal life. It was becoming increasingly critical of the structures that produce that life. This is an important transition. The earlier work reflects sympathy and sensualism; the later ones have a direct sociality. Rather than externalising the poor in an image, Gorky comes to explain their suffering as part of class relations, political systems, and historical forces. This ideological frame changes, though the emotional texture of the fiction remains.

This change was also symptomatic of a more general shift in the place Gorky granted to literature. He came to the conclusion that literature might be a vehicle for education, agitation and ideology. One academic reading of Gorky's work points out that he regarded literature as one of the best avenues for spreading ideas. It is a bold statement and one that starkly demonstrates how his thought had shifted from the observation of art to the intervention of agency. Literature was no longer just a reflection of life; it was an agent in the transformation and the reformulation of life.

This transition from observation to critique is consequently at the crux of Gorky's evolution. He does not set aside compassion for those who suffer. Instead, he exploits that sympathy to reveal the mechanisms of social oppression. The lone worker, the nomad, is proof of the shattered social pact. The world of the fiction becomes a criticism of society, and the moral power of the writer is subsumed in this transformation. This paves the way for *Mother*, the revolutionary imagination.

Revolutionary Consciousness

The chief notion tying Gorky's early and later fiction is revolutionary consciousness. For our standards, consciousness is very low: the discovery that life is horrible or humiliating. Then, consciousness widens into social awareness: the individual sees their constrained and private suffering writ large as class oppression and historical struggle. Fourth, consciousness is revolutionary when it becomes the organisation of collective action. Thus, Gorky's fiction proceeds with amazing regularity.

This is another reason why the move from individual to collective is not just swapping one alternative for another. So the individual still matters; what is important here is how you define individuality. According to the evolutionary and ideological Gorky of later years, a person is at his best only when he struggles in society, with society. Deriving from broader trends in revolutionary literature, where the development of self is linked with political consciousness. Describing Gorky and the Russian revolt, one online resource on this movement dwells on the fact that "the focus of the revolution gradually evolved from self-liberation to liberating 'the people', in which, as a result, an individual's fate is intertwined with the masses. This same logic manifests in Gorky's fiction.

Revolutionary consciousness in Gorky is a slow, difficult process accompanied by suffering and emotion. It does not come as unadulterated dogma. Rather, it develops through experience, debate, work and encounter with oppression. The reason this fiction is so convincing is because it portrays a process rather than states an idea. It can take some time before the characters are converted. They learn through experiences and sometimes other characters who already have revolutionary consciousness. This process sits at the heart of *Mother*, where the awakening of a *Mother* is as personal as political.

***Mother* as Turning Point**

Mother is the most important text for understanding Gorky's ideological evolution. It represents the turning point where the suffering individual becomes part of a collective political movement. The novel centres on Pelageya Nilovna, whose life changes as she becomes involved in her son Pavel's revolutionary work. At first, she is timid, domestic, and fearful. She has been shaped by oppression and habit. But through her son's activism and through contact with workers and underground political discussion, she undergoes a profound change.

The significance of *Mother* lies in the fact that Nilovna's transformation is not merely psychological. It is social and ideological. She begins to see the world differently because she enters a new community of action. Her identity as a *Mother* does not disappear; instead, it becomes the route by which she moves from private grief to public responsibility. The domestic sphere is therefore politicised. The home ceases to be only a place of suffering and becomes a starting point for revolutionary consciousness.

This is one reason the novel is often treated as an early model of socialist realism. It presents a morally legible world in which the oppressed can be awakened to truth through collective struggle. Even though the term "socialist realism" became associated more formally with the Soviet period, *Mother* anticipates many of its features: emphasis on labour, revolutionary purpose, ideological clarity, and the shaping of the new citizen. But the novel remains emotionally powerful because it grounds these ideas in human relationships rather than abstract doctrine.

Motherhood and Politics

The most remarkable thing about *Mother* is the way it transmutes Motherhood into something like a political category. Motherhood in the canon of literature has often simulated loss, compassion and privacy of morals. Through Alexei Maximovich Peshkov Gorky, we retain these attributes, though they are rechannelled into revolutionary deeds. Nilovna falling

in love with her son turns into a rut and an entire collective struggle. Her maternal instinct does not stop at the family. It expands outward to include all those suffering with workers and even mankind as a whole.

This change is significant ideologically because it breaks down the distinction between public and private life. Nilovna is not regarded as emotional aside from politics. Rather, it is an emotive conduit through which political truth is deciphered. This accessibility is also what makes the novel so exciting. Revolution appears to readers not only as a theory but also through the change of emotion, memory, courage and duty.

By employing a maternal archetype in Gorky's use of Motherhood, Gorky offered a more general theory of regeneration. The *Mother* is the one who gives birth and goes into battle to protect her brood. Within the cycle of *Mother*, these functions become emblematic of and inherent to the revolutionary project as such: defending human dignity, building a new order of things and supporting (or becoming) a future collective subject. It thus links biological and historical creation of revolutionary politics that can be imagined as collective Motherhood.

Collective Revolution and the Masses

If the early fiction is centred on individual suffering, the mature fiction is centred on masses. That's not just a problem of scale; that's a problem of ideological architecture. This potential for historical change is embodied in the masses of Gorky's fiction. They are no longer just a backdrop to the life of an individual. They take on the activist role in moving history forward. This concept is crucial to revolutionary literature as a whole, but Gorky reshapes it with almost emotional and moral contours.

A discussion of Gorky's social thought proves that the exchange between powerful masses and individual units undergirds the new society of the revolution: a "healthy and vigorous exchange" where masses generate emotions, an "individual who takes them over ...returns them in transformed form". This translation presents some sort of Gorky's fully

fledged fiction-like logic. The individual and society do not function in an antagonistic manner to one another. They work in tandem when properly formatted. The masses give life to the individual, and it is always the individual who provides motives, language and consciousness to the masses.

That vision as a collective universe is vastly different from the isolationist self of the early stories. The maverick reaper gives away to the revolutionary participator. It leads to a new subject, one not outside of history but an agent in it. Gorky's fiction suggests that true human fulfilment can only take place in collective life. This ideological centre is at the heart of his maturity, and it is what makes work seem timeless in the literary canon.

Labour and Human Formation

Another central element in the evolution of Gorky's ideology: labour. Labour is not simply a social fact in his fiction; it is also an instrument of human formation. Workers are crucial because labour brings a community into being, creates discipline and vision, and shares experience and the potential for consciousness. The narrative Gorky tells about the relationship between work, dignity, endurance and political awakening is insistent and verbatim. In this reading labour is not merely a simplistic idealisation of the worker, but rather one of the few social practices a society can utilise to thwart passivity and alienation.

Mother connects labour to revolutionary organisation because factory life reveals the schism between exploitation and class struggle. Shared conditions bring workers together as a shared condition becomes the basis for collective understanding. Labour also features in the narrator's education within the autobiographical trilogy. Through work and hardship, by tangible contact with the world, the young self learns. Thus, labour becomes a formative experience and no longer simply an economic one. Gorky's ideology thus values human beings through productive social activity and not in solitary self-expression.

It also explains his later affiliation with socialist realism. Those works, and many more like them, aspire to epic effect in part because socialist realism hoped to portray labour not merely as arduous toil but rather the wellspring of a new social consciousness. Gorky's fiction gets this focus in gear by associating labour with ethical development and social aspiration. Labour is the medium in which the human being comes to social reality.

Autobiography and Self-Making

The combination of individual crisis and collective transformation runs through Gorky's autobiographical trilogy. The trilogy is not a triumphant tale of personal success in the customary sense. It is, rather, the documentary of consciousness forged through pain, toil, wandering and contact with an array of souls. *MY Childhood*, *In the World* and *My Universities* reflect a self that is rooted in painting and social contact. And this is vital ideologically. The self is not viewed as a free-standing essence. It is something forged in time through struggle and experience. This renders the autobiographical subject a historiographical one. The narrator's maturation is no less a product of social conditions than individual genius. He argues that this extra dimension contributes to Gorky's wider contention, which is the mirroring of man in his environment, but also education and social life can then change him.

This trilogy also demonstrates how individual suffering can form the foundation for wider understanding. The child, the apprentice, the worker and the wanderer all contribute to a consciousness that finally has the ability to comprehend society. Personal trouble and social comprehension are the large arc of Gorky's fiction, too. That is, it is literature's kind of ideologisation. History breaks in at the site of the self, and so it is a site where revolutionary possibility is prepared.

Humanism and Doctrine

Gorky can often be slotted into a humanist writer or ideological writer, but his fiction is most productive when held within the tension of both. He cares passionately about human

dignity, emotional life and moral possibility. Simultaneously, the later fiction becomes both identified with socialist purposes and revolutionary doctrine. That tension between the two gives his work an interest factor.

It is a number that reflects humanism as early fiction is still mining sympathy for the suffering individual. Collective humanism becomes the fiction of the latter. Maximising the well-being of the highest good ceases to be that of the separate self but is rather about creating a culture in which we may all live together with dignity. This change does not eliminate human emotion. Instead, it tries to channel feeling for social ends. According to one source of Gorky's literary theory, he saw literature as a highly effective form of ideological communication. That conviction goes some way towards explaining why his fiction could grow so programmatic without losing all its emotional punch. Yet there is a tension in this. As the ideology becomes explicit in a text, so the fiction is evermore at risk of becoming didactic.

In some of the later disquisitions on Gorky and socialist realism, it was argued that in his meticulously constructed Soviet reality, the very complexity of lived experience was kept at bay. This criticism is important. This demonstrates that the evolution of Gorky did not come without a price. The ambition to produce new human beings and new literature can be levelling on the elaboration of individuality. But even that struggle is part of the historical significance of his work.

Social Realism and Its Limits

Socialist realism is one of the common reputations Gorky has today, but his fiction is more complicated than that category might seem to suggest. The goal of socialist realism was to depict not just what reality is but how it should be under socialism. Gorky's *Mother* was an archetype because it depicted a protagonist of conscious class, evolving towards revolutionary activity and communal purpose. But the book is still built on dramatic passion, ethical uncertainty, and close personal connections. Not an easy ideological primer.

The limitations of socialist realism start to become apparent when the demand for ideological clarity begins encroaching on artistic ambiguity. An alternative line of scholarship on Gorky's role in socialist realism contends that the movement made a final attempt at imposing an ideal Soviet reality, since any attempt to do so threatened to eliminate individuality and human complexity altogether. Not only does this critique matter in that it shows how the ideological development of Gorky also meant a constriction of artistic possibility; The group wishes could become too restricting, too prescriptive, at the same time as considerably overly homogenous. Nevertheless, Gorky's fiction is of historical importance for having dramatised the sincere aspiration to connect literature with social justice. His profession interrogates whether art can be used to create a more humane world. That question is very much open today. Gorky's response was radical, but it was also empathetic to the bleeding person. His fiction is always valuable but never completely leaves the person in crisis behind; it only insists that salvation lies outside of the solitary self.

Historical Impact

Gorky's fiction stretches its influence long after he himself has passed. He defined Soviet literary culture, exemplified socially conscious writing as an ideal, and became lumped in with the ideology of the early Soviet state. Both as works of art and as cultural intervention. They crystallised the parameters of what revolutionary literature might be and set its potential social function.

Gorky also attended later discussions of realism, politics, and the place of the writer. For some readers, he provides a venerated voice of the voiceless and an intersectional rapprochement of literature with human liberation. Others accuse him of feeding into a culture in which art has to be subordinate to ideology. Both views are understandable. But Gorky cannot be denied a central place between classical realism and Soviet works of literature assigned a role by politics.

This is, therefore, the title of not just Gorky's fiction but Gorky as a historical figure: "From the Labyrinth of the Self to the Road of Revolution: Ideological Transformation in Gorky's Fiction". He pushed Russian literature into a different social imagination. His characters start with solitude and suffering, then mature, presenting the case that meaning can only arise from mutual hardship. And so that notion became one of the guiding principles of voluntary literary culture.

Conclusion

The fiction of Gorky records a great deal of ideological journeying, starting with the isolated, humiliated and uncertain sufferer and ending with total revolution as an answer for human beings suffering his insurmountable social crisis. His early narratives evoke a rich portrait of lives lived on the edge and what Judith Malina and Julian Beck called "divine aggression"; in his later fiction, especially *Mother*, that suffering is then transformed into consciousness-raising and political revolt. The autobiographical trilogy amplifies this pattern by displaying in detail how the self is itself created in labour, hardship and society. What is vital in this evolution is how Gorky imagines that connection between the self and history. He does not deny individuality, but he insists that individuality only realises its deepest purpose in collective life. For Gorky, ideology is not merely an idea; it is a way to organise human experience in the direction of liberation. As such, his fiction continues to be an essential part of understanding the cultural history of revolution, the literary aesthetics of oppression, and socialist hopes and contradictions that subscribe to our modernity.

Ultimately the work of Gorky demonstrates the uneven and complex path from personal pain to political engagement. A journey of awakening, learning, sacrificing, and evolving. It is that process which makes his fiction resonate to this day. The individual crisis is real, but not the last word. Even though the price of that answer is hard to ignore, they imagine a collective revolution as the solution.

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