

# “Maxim Gorky’s Mother’: A Marxist – Feminist Approach”

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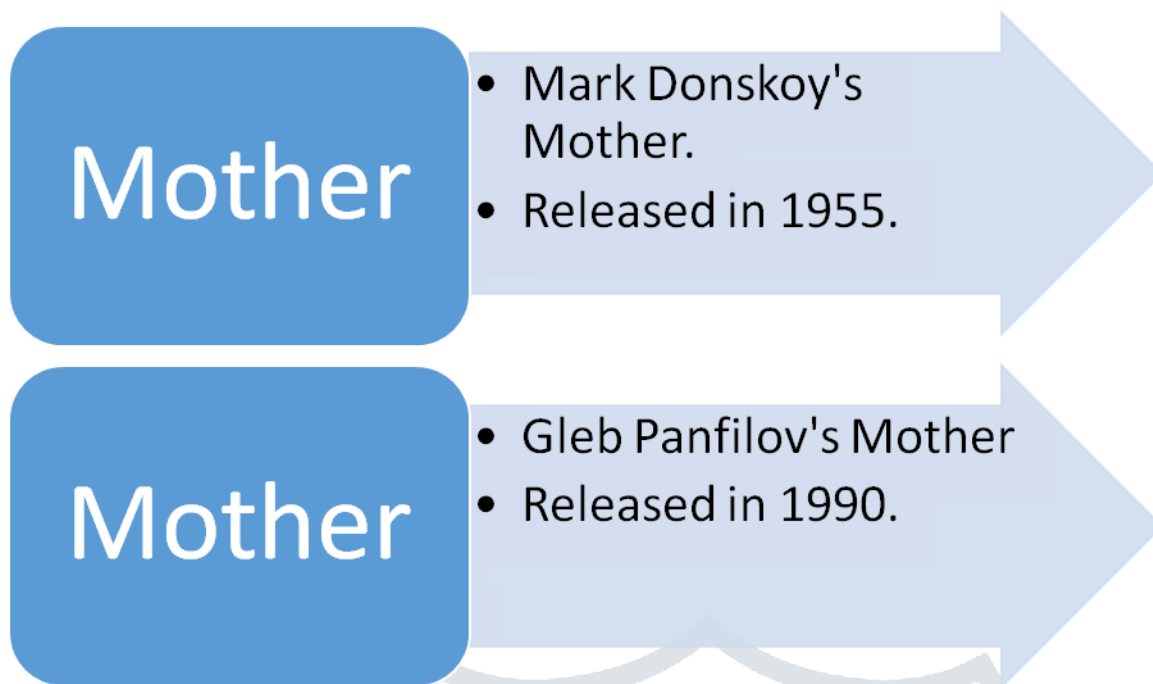
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**Abstract:** *The world is witness of many revolutions during the 18th and 19th century. Russian Revolution is one of the famous revolutionary movements of the universe for the said era. Maximum Gorky had written a book on this which is entitled as ‘Mother’. Maxim Gorky’s novel ‘Mother’ was written as an influential piece of propaganda during the unstable times in Russia. A lady in the novel Nilovana who with the revolutionary spirit holds the responsibility of the worker’s revolution initiated by Pavel - her son, when her son gets imprisoned due to his involvement in the workers revolution is the basic story of the Novel. As the novel progresses she becomes mother of all the revolutionaries and takes up the responsibility to complete his son’s undone task. A heart rendering picture of the miserable life of the workers who get little reward for the work they do is presented in the novel. From Monday to Saturday they live the life mechanically, like machines and on the weekend they get busy and completely drowned in drinking and violence, - outside home or within the families, and the major victims are their wives. The current paper focus a light on the Feminist approach of Maximum Gorky in the book ‘Mother.’*

**Keywords:** *Mother, revolution, workers, capitalist, feminist, rights, society etc.*

**Introduction:** The novel which is considered as one of the most influential novel of the century is none other than “Mother” written by Maximum Gorky. It was adopted to make a silent film under Vsevolod Pudovkin's direction with the same name in 1926. The novel was dramatized a as a play in 1932 by German playwright Bertolt Brecht in Die Mutter. The novel was adapted in two other films of the same name which is given as below:



**Figure Number 01- The Film Mother released on Maxim Gorky's Mother.**

As shown image number one, Mark Donskoy's Mother released in 1955 and. A Russian- Soviet writer Maxim Gorky whose name was Alexei Maximovich Peskov. He was a founder of the socialist-literary method and was also a political activist. For the prestigious Nobel Prize he was nominated for five times. The Tsarist regime was directly opposed by him. He was associated for a longer period of time with Vladimir Lenin and Alexander Bogdanov's Bolshevik Wing of the party. In the course of time Gorky got separated from him. He was expatriate from Russia and later the Soviet Union for a significant part of his life. Generally the theories of Marxism and Feminism are considered different and separate. On the one hand the Marxist approach emphasizes social life is based on "Conflicts of Interest" means the conflict between the Bourgeoisie and the Proletariat. Marxism tried for the achievement of a classless society, the abolition of private property and the prevention of exploitation of working class. Whereas the other theory i.e. the Feminist approach emphasizes life is based on "conflicts of gender". Basic focus of Feminism is on the establishment defending of equal political, economic and social rights and it is about providing equal opportunities to women. The goal of feminists is to end - the women's exploitation, oppression, gender-biases and to overthrow the patriarchal system. This novel has a Marxist – Feminist approach because it depicts the problems of the working class in a capitalist society and their revolutionary fervour in to achieve their rights from the view point of a female.

### **What is Marxist – Feminist Approach:**

The term Feminist is arrived in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century which had focused on women's rights and their being a human. They were treated badly by male dominating society. Both the Marxist – Feminist approach together aims at the eradication of the industrial society as a means for emancipation of women. The approach has its roots in "The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State" the book of Engels. He attempted to explain the main reason behind women's inferiority is society and not biology. It is believed by the Marxist – Feminists that the only way to end women's exploitation is to eradicate the capitalist society. If women get

an opportunity to stand equally with men on socialist grounds they can be truly free and equal to men. Hence, the liberation of men and women from the bondage of inhuman capitalist society is the true strength of the theory. The view point of Palagea Nilovna is used by Gorky to show the state of things in the era before the Revolution of 1917. His view point has much importance. It assists us to understand the novel- clearly and completely. Her occupation, psyche, past and even her role in the revolutionary movement are the other factors related to Nilovna.

**Nilovna- The main Female Character of Mother:** Nilovna is a naïve woman at the outset of the novel. Her husband Michael Vlasov, was a pessimist who earned little and on every holiday used to beat somebody that's why he was disliked by everyone. He was an honest and hard working fellow in his job. He never flattered the supervisor, so he earned very little. Vlasov's son - Pavel, hated his father much. When Vlasov died he was only seventeen. Actually with the death of Vlasov, the story of this novel starts and all the responsibilities go on Pavel's shoulders that are the new head of the family. An exploited female Nilovna is proletariat who had no work, so Pavel had to work hard to feed her mother as well as him. Pavel started exhibiting a different set of habits and behaviour which caused much stress to Nilovna. She felt herself an unfortunate mother when her son come to home and drunk even just after two weeks his father's death. Pavel shouted at her mother like his father for food. He demanded to his mother for his father's pipe for smoking. In front of his mother Pavel had behaved like this, for the first time and she meekly says:

“What sort of bread giver you will be if you begin to drink?” He answers:” Everybody drinks.” She remarks “But don't you drink. Your father drank; he made enough misery for me. Take pity on your mother, then, wills you not?”

As she knew that the workers don't have any other place for recreation except the tavern Nilovna is not harsh or strict towards her son. She just began to pray in silence as a helpless mother kneeling before the sacred image upon the wall. A mother's passionate prayers are granted and proved fruitful finally. Pavel started avoiding the beaten path trodden by all gradually in the course of time. Going to parties was avoided by Pavel and he came home dignified even on holidays in the course of time. Reading of some books was started by Pavel and usually copied something on a piece of paper. About her son's books Nilovna always remained curious. He replied when she asked him:

“I am reading forbidden books. They are forbidden to be read because they tell the truth about our- about workingmen's life.”

**Changing Role of Nilovna in Society:** Nilovna along with her son also started to change. In the society her role began to change she was totally unaware of it. Though she resisted this ideology in the beginning, she began to change and embraced that ideology herself due to the love for her son. Other revolutionaries were treated like her own children by her and she assumed the role of a mother to all. Khokhol, Pavel's very close friend believed that though Pavel is a good orator yet his speech sometimes lacks the heart of the socialist movement which is the mother seems to have.

**Women and Social Struggle:** The women should take up their roles in society to struggle for their belief is implied by the way a change comes into the character of Nilovna and the way she develops. Gorky has shown in her character that the contribution of women is also important in such revolutions. She becomes completely involved in the revolution at the time her son Pavel gets arrested. In that task Marya becomes her assistant. Leaflets, to the factory, she began to carry for the workers, concealed with the dinner. To the authorities all these proved that instead of Pavel there is somebody else is distributing the pamphlets among the workers. Nilovna while distributing the pamphlets also developed a greater understanding of the ideology; her son was fighting for .She became an activist on the first of May on the day Pavel again gets arrested due to waving the workers flag and shouting:

“Long live the workers.” As soon as Pavel gets arrested, the mother took all the responsibility and sang the song of revolution: “Our march is to join our suffering comrades.”

**Nilvona’s Participation in as an Activist:** The people were requested by Nilvona to open up their hearts and to come forward to support of their children who have devoted to a noble cause selflessly. To participate in the movement Nilovna left her own village and went to the city with Sofya in order to distribute the newspapers. Nilovna, many a times in the month sometimes dressing as a nun, or as a lace hawker, or a rich merchant’s wife or a religious pilgrim, went here and there from one village to another to distribute the forbidden literature and to create awareness among the workers. Nilovna also tried to get Pavel’s speech published, which he made in the court, which was quiet moving and enthralling.

**Climax in the Novel Mother:** In the climax of the novel the novel is attacked by a spy, on the railway station, while she is going to distribute the pamphlets having Pavel’s speech. Nilvona is arrested by the policeman. She is taken away to the prison. She was beaten badly. In this harsh condition her spirit was firm and uncrushed. This situation is symbolic and socialist- realist. There are many other female characters except Nilvona which we find in the novel.

**Other Female Characters-as Activist:** Those female characters like Natasha, Sasha, Ludmilla and Sofya participate in the revolution. Natasha and Sasha belonged to the upper class yet from heart they were proletariats and their heart belonged to the socialist movement. This also shows that for the success of a revolution, participation of people from all walks of life of society is must. When the bourgeoisie come forward the impact is stronger, surrendering their property to support the proletariat. With the help of the characters who have left their mansions and plantations to contribute in the movement demonstrate Gorky’s belief in the Marxist – Feminist theory. The ideology Nilovna was fighting for was good ideally. To explain socialism and what the revolutionists were fighting for is the writer's attempt. In this way the novel proves to be an aesthetically written work, a perfect example of Marxist- Feminist approach. Gorky in his novel Mother depicts the life of a woman working in a Russian factory working hard in their manual labour. They suffer poverty and hunger, along with other hardships.

**The suffering of Nilovna Due to her Husband in Family:** The real protagonist is Pelageya Nilovna Vlasova. The character of her husband in the novel is portrayed as a heavy drunkard who physically assaults her and leave all the responsibility to raise their son- Pavel Vlasov to her, unexpectedly dies. Pavel begins to behave same like his father in his drunkenness and stammer. Gradually he changes his behaviour and get involved in revolutionary activities. Pavel starts to bring books to his home, abandoning drinking. Nilovna being illiterate and having no political interest, is at first curious about Pavel's new activities. She intends to help him. As the main revolutionary character Pavel is portrayed. Though Nilvona was uneducated, she overcome her political ignorance and get involved in revolution. She was moved by her feelings as mother. Thus she is considered the true protagonist of the novel.

**Conclusion:** Thus, Gorky has shown the male dominating society and suffering a female by male dominating society. Pelageya Nilovna Vlasova is the protagonist of this novel. Her husband is a drunken man who leaves all the responsibilities of family and son on her and even torches in both way physically and mentally. Pelageya Nilovna Vlasova is the representative of all those Russian women who suffered a lot by male during the period of industrial revaluation. Natasha, Sasha, Ludmilla and Sofya are other female character represented by Gorky in his novel "Mother." The title itself shows the feminist approach of the writers towards this novel.

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