

Women Emancipation in Leo Tolstoy's Masterpiece 'Anna Karenina'

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Abstract

Lev Nikolayevich Tolstoy was a Russian novelist and a short story writer. He does not only contribute for the literature but also widely known for his complicated and paradoxical persona and for his extreme moralistic and ascetic views in the 19th century. He also had contributed for the great philosophical work in terms of its morality. With the same he was a renowned social worker. The two greatest novels namely 'War and Peace' and 'Anna Karenina' had put a deep impact on the society and especially on life of the women. The novel is just not about the love story but the author Tolstoy weaves multiple storylines, exploring themes such as love, jealousy, betrayal, societal norms, and the search for meaning in life. This particular novel is said to be the best combination of realist and modernist views that highlights the liberal factors for the women emancipation.

The novel highlights gender inequalities and other social stigmas which are attached to women in a social system of Russia during the Tsarist period. With the same it reflects the implications of reforms on the life of the women through Anna Karenina's character. It traced the ability of women to get out of control from the male dominance and becoming an independent. The novel tries to use the sexuality for making choices by the women character which in a way lead to the liberation of their minds and also the slow emancipation of women overall. Indeed, this novel by Leo Tolstoy played a very significant role in the empowerment of women.

Keywords – Literature, Women, Life, Society, Emancipation.

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"Nothing can enslave us, if we free in our minds."

- by **Lailah Gifty Akita**

Literature have enriched the human lives by depicting various types of characters and through their life stories. It is the writings of the authors through which human lives have been shaded in multiple colors. Literature is a form of expression of thoughts and innovative ideas by connecting with each other with a permanent and universal interest by the help of various elements. Like literature the cinema also played very important role in reflecting the social conditions and in general for the revolutionizing the entire social system as such for long term. So, both the elements have deep impacts on the society. It works as a blue print for bringing

changes in to the society for an important cause. However, literature has shifted towards the issues of women and their ground realities slowly and gradually.

Reflection of women in 20th century often include strong independent females, a critical part of society's customs and traditions which hinder the development of women in general and also allowed her for a new evolution of a role of women in the literature. "Women's roles in literature has evolved throughout history and had led women to develop into strong independent roles. Modern literature has served as an outlet and sounding board for women's rights and feminist pioneers."¹ This process has historical evidence as literature has witnessed the roles of women evolving through ages not only for themselves but also for the society. "As women gained equality, the heroine continued to change. By studying these changes, it is observed that not only do the characters embody the female identity, but also the heroines transform into the new figures that women aspire to be."² This research paper is one of the attempts to reflect the situation of a woman in a famous novel about her emancipation, and way towards being independent through Leo Tolstoy's remarkable work.

Lev Nikolayevich Graf Tolstoy was a famous Russian writer who born in Tula province in 1828. He does not only contribute for the literature but also widely known for his complicated and paradoxical persona and for his extreme moralistic and ascetic views in the 19th century. He is well known for his ability to observe the smallest changes of consciousness. Many popular writers take Leo Tolstoy granted for being "the greatest of all novelists," as his art of writing and the thoughts put deep impacts on the human minds. The two greatest novels namely 'War and Peace' (1865–69) and 'Anna Karenina' (1875–77) had put a deep impact on the society and especially on life of the women.

Anna Karenina deals with the multiple aspects like family, faith, desire, social reforms and tsarist Russian society which contains more than 800 pages. This particular novel is said to be the best combination of realist and modernist views. "In life of Tolstoy's figures there are a lot of biographical elements. At the same time, they have a very important characteristic feature: they are given ability of desire for love, happiness by the author."³ Tolstoy was a challenger to the injustice done towards women and always sympathies the cause of emancipation of women. He contributed for the changing opinions about the female issues in Russian society and bring them towards the path of equality.

Anna Karenina: A Major Breakthrough

It is the best reflection of the theme that deals with love, affection and family life which Leo Tolstoy had ever portrayed on paper. "The novel's first sentence, which indicates its concern with the domestic, is perhaps Tolstoy's most famous: "All happy families resemble each other; each unhappy family is unhappy in its own way." Anna Karenina interweaves the stories of three families, the Oblonskys, the Karenins, and the Levins."⁴ This novel is divided into the 8 parts. Anna Karenina deals with the multiple aspects like family, faith, desire, social reforms and tsarist Russian society which contains more than 800 pages. She keeps the worth and values of the main as well as the other various characters from their state of mind, feelings and attitudes. In many cases of the conversation with each other these characters are maintaining very sympathetic tone.

The novel uses some important motives which are often shaded in beautiful ways with the help of The Interior Monologue, adultery and element of forgiveness. These parts increase the beauty of the novel and attract the several readers.

Novel and Reflection of the Diverse Themes

a. Russia in 19th Century and Reflection of the Social Change

As far as farming is concerned it was mentioned through the character of the Levin who wishes to implement the modern technology and methods for the farming activities get oppose by his peasants as they believe that the traditional methods are the best ways to work with. It highlights the fight which can be seen between the old patriarchal values and a new liberal, free thinking. While these new ideas, technology and rationalism is emerging then conservatives in society still challenge that and believe in traditions like serfdom and authoritarian government.

Besides this issue, other social and political transition that the novel reflects through Levin who tries to participate as a proponent of democracy in the village council, its meetings and discussions but realizing the complexities of the system he left out the same.

As being more inclusive the novel speaks about the marriages. It has been an important element over which the entire novel revolves. It speaks about the women suffering in their married life through their anxieties and also tried to fight for their rights and choices for love with reference to marriage. It also emancipates women for becoming independent and choosing their real-life partners. This particular marriage part of the novel left behind the Russian tradition of arrange marriage and focused on the love marriage. This change in traditions open ups the door for new potentials where the values and emotions of the human minds are preserved.

b. Picturization of Family Life

The starting of the novel itself throw lights on the idea of happiness. Throughout the story it picturizes the ideal family life which has its comforts, family functions and togetherness with the domestic bliss. The high-class family life depicts the lavish facilities with availability of services by the servants.

The two important characters in the novel Levin and Anna portrays two different conditions of their family life. Anna destroys her earlier family life and died with misery and sorrow with her own thoughts. Whereas Levin creates his family and concludes the novel happily where the love wins over all difficulties in married life. So, at last Tolstoy left behind the positive conclusion of love, affection, faith and family goes hand in hand.

Novel & the Idea of Emancipation of Women

The idea of emancipation of women come into conflict in the novel at some point. Anna starts in the beginning of the novel as a very ideal women who seems to be attractive for every man. Anna Karenina, the focus of the novel struggles between her passion for Vronsky's love and for her desire for the independent life. With the same her marital duties towards her husband and home are continuing which again involved her maternal love for the child too. Not only this but also novel states that the social prestige that she carries by her engagement with different strata of people in society through various functions is also shows the great part of her own personality and she as a human being. The idea of being an independent lady cut path from the conservative

society to the more rational society in which women is shown as a symbol for her own upliftment. Also, in a confusing world Levin struggled to define his own identity just beyond his emotions and finally reached towards the better understanding of life by accepting his love towards her wife and spending remaining life in a well manner. It can be noted down that in the hierarchy of the men, women are rising up as the center of attraction.

Ramifications of Anna Karenina

This novel has exerted multiple impressions on diverse areas. Since it has covered a wide range of systems, it becomes crucial to assess the implications.

Exceptional contribution in the literature - Leo Tolstoy's great novel is regarded as very influential. It has left footprints on several countless writers. The interesting narrative structure, complexity of emotions within the characters and profound exploration of relationships from beginning to the end upset a high standard for subsequent novels. The writer has sketched the deep psychology of the characters. Many writers have been inspired by Tolstoy's psychological insight.

Highlighting the Social Structure - Anna Karenina depicts a real picture of the social system existing in Russia during the 19th century. It portrays particularly class structure, moral hypocrisy, inequality among the classes and treatment given to women in aristocrats. It offers one of the great critics of the Russian social system.

Feminist Interpretation - Anna Karenina's character has been the subject of extensive feminist analysis. Her character can be understood from the various dimensions like some can figure out her as the oppressed one by the patriarchal society while others can view her as a flawed individual who exert her power in society. The gender role regarding female being the main character has been explored by the Leo Tolstoy. It becomes a matter of contemporary discussions of feminist theory.

Conclusion

Anna Karenina highlights the social system in 19th century Tsarist Russia and provides the contemporary life of people with the touch of humanity. The novel Anna Karenina is not just a love story but also a profound examination of human nature in complex situation and the moral dilemmas that confront individuals in their pursuit of happiness. Tolstoy's rich prose and keen insight into the human psyche continue to captivate readers around the world. The emotive aspects in the human life has acquired the significance to lead further life.

This life of people can be segregated in two ways as one hand side the luxurious life of the upper class is highlighted with their norms and classy behavior whereas on the other side it shows the contrast life of the villager who are engaging into their work and spending their lives. However, in both the lifestyle love is the most affected part which has bound people and their relations and contrary it has broken some relations for the love only which is best portrayed through the death of the Anna Karenina and the continuation of family life of the Levin. Though the novel is considered by many as a critic still it has contributed towards not only the emancipation of women but also the upliftment of farmers due to the reforms and transformation of society that happened slowly and gradually. The novel has received its fame not only in the sphere of

literature but also it has been adopted into various films, plays, operas, ballet and other artistic work. The adaptability of the character Anna Karenina has kept the theme of the novel alive and vibrant among the audience.

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