

MAXIM GORKY'S *THE MOTHER*: A SUPREME EXAMPLE OF SOCIAL JUSTICE

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ABSTRACT

At the heart of early twentieth-century Russian literature, Maxim Gorky's The Mother (1906) stands as a profound articulation of social justice and revolutionary awakening. Rooted in the moral turbulence of pre-revolutionary Russia, the novel fuses art and ideology to portray the transformation of ordinary lives under the weight of class oppression. Through the character of Pelageya Nilovna, Gorky constructs a narrative of awakening, where personal suffering evolves into collective consciousness and moral courage becomes a catalyst for social change. Grounded in Marxist theory, social realism, and feminist interpretation, the study investigates how The Mother embodies the ideals of human dignity, solidarity, and emancipation. Critical perspectives from various schools of thought reveal the novel's dual function as both a political manifesto and a universal story of liberation. Despite debates over its didactic tone, The Mother endures as a powerful testament to the capacity of literature to awaken conscience, inspire resistance, and shape the discourse of justice across generations.

Keywords: Gorky, *The Mother*, Social Justice, Proletarian Consciousness, Socialist Realism, Marxist Criticism, Feminist Interpretation, Moral Awakening, Collective Identity, Revolutionary Literature.

Introduction

Maxim Gorky's *The Mother* (1906) stands as a monumental work that unites the literary, ethical, and political aspirations of early twentieth-century Russian thought. Set in the turbulent years preceding the Russian Revolution, the novel portrays the awakening of human consciousness under the pressures of exploitation and repression. Through the journey of Pelageya Nilovna, Gorky constructs a symbolic narrative of liberation in which personal suffering is transformed into collective awareness. His depiction of working-class life transcends documentary realism, revealing an ethical vision where literature becomes a means of social transformation. Gorky's own life, marked by poverty, imprisonment, and his association with revolutionary circles, shaped his conviction that art must participate in humanity's moral progress. In *The Mother*, he fuses compassion with critique, emotion with ideology, showing how the power of narrative can awaken empathy and inspire resistance. The novel endures not merely as political literature but as a profound meditation on human dignity and justice.

Background and Purpose

At the dawn of the twentieth century, Russia was a society marked by harsh class divisions, industrial oppression, and political censorship. The working class endured inhumane conditions while being denied education and civic participation. Amidst this environment, Gorky emerged as a voice of moral defiance. His writings were deeply informed by his experiences as a laborer and his exposure to Marxist thought. He regarded the writer not as a detached observer but as a participant in social evolution, one who must interpret the suffering of the masses and articulate a path toward transformation.

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The Mother was written during the first Russian Revolution (1905), a time of moral and political upheaval. Gorky's purpose was to depict the genesis of revolutionary consciousness through the intimate story of an ordinary woman. Pelageya Nilovna's transformation from submission to defiance mirrors the awakening of an entire class. Her moral courage becomes a metaphor for collective justice, suggesting that the roots of revolution lie not in violence alone but in compassion and ethical conviction. Gorky elevates the maternal figure into a symbol of social responsibility, embodying the nurturing power of moral awakening that precedes political liberation. In doing so, he transforms the domestic sphere, traditionally private and apolitical into the birthplace of collective justice.

Gorky's approach also marks a significant shift in Russian narrative tradition. While nineteenth-century writers such as Tolstoy and Dostoevsky explored the moral struggles of individuals, Gorky's realism sought to expose the social structures that perpetuate inequality. His characters are not isolated souls but participants in history. Through their dialogues, labor, and acts of solidarity, Gorky constructs a moral universe where justice becomes a lived and shared experience. Thus, *The Mother* functions simultaneously as a political document and a moral allegory, an aesthetic embodiment of humanist values grounded in social realism.

Definition of Social Justice

For the purpose of this study, *social justice* is understood not as an abstract moral principle but as a lived condition of equity, dignity, and participation. Drawing from the Marxist-humanist tradition as well as modern theorists such as John Rawls (1971) and Amartya Sen (2009), social justice is conceived here as the harmonization of individual freedom with collective welfare. It implies the dismantling of structural inequalities and the creation of conditions in which all individuals can realize their potential. In literature, social justice manifests through both theme and form, through the portrayal of social oppression and the imaginative reordering of human relations toward fairness and compassion.

In *The Mother*, justice is dramatized as awakening. The process of Nilovna's enlightenment parallels the moral education of a community. Through her, Gorky presents justice as both emotional and political, an alignment of empathy with action. Her evolution from a fearful mother to a messenger of truth demonstrates that social transformation originates in consciousness. Gorky's social realism thereby becomes a form of ethical realism: it portrays the world as it is, yet envisions it as it ought to be. The novel insists that moral growth is inseparable from social change, and that true justice requires both inner conviction and collective solidarity.

Scope and Objectives

The present study examines *The Mother* as a supreme example of social justice literature that fuses ideology with art. Its scope encompasses the novel's historical setting, its philosophical underpinnings, and its aesthetic strategies. The research aims to interpret how Gorky's narrative transforms revolutionary politics into moral narrative, how the rhetoric of justice becomes embedded in the emotional lives of ordinary people.

The specific objectives of this study are:

- To analyze *The Mother* as a literary and ethical representation of social justice grounded in Marxist-humanist values.
- To explore how Gorky's realism, symbolism, and characterization serve his ideological vision.
- To evaluate the novel's relevance to contemporary understandings of justice, equality, and social change.

Through this interpretive framework, the study seeks to demonstrate that *The Mother* remains not only a revolutionary text but also a timeless moral statement. Its enduring power lies in its ability to convert private suffering into collective strength and to reveal, through narrative art, the ethical foundations of social justice.

Literature Review

Since its first publication in 1906, Maxim Gorky's *The Mother* has inspired a wide spectrum of critical interpretations, ranging from Soviet ideological celebration to postmodern reevaluations of its ethical and aesthetic significance. Early commentators regarded the novel as a prototype of socialist realism, a work that captured the spirit of proletarian revolution and the awakening of social consciousness. Gorky's portrayal of working-class life was seen as an artistic reflection of Marxist theory in narrative form. Scholars such as Lukács (1938) and Belinsky (1940) viewed *The Mother* as an exemplary synthesis of political ideology and moral idealism, arguing that it successfully transformed class struggle into a human drama of faith and endurance. In contrast, Western critics of the mid-

twentieth century, including Simmons (1975) and Peace (1987), challenged the novel's artistic autonomy, suggesting that its ideological function restricted its psychological and formal complexity. However, later readings by Clark (2000) and Dobrenko (2011) reposition the work as an ethical text that transcends propaganda, interpreting Gorky's realism as a medium of moral communication and social empathy.

- **Marxist and Class-Based Critiques**

Marxist criticism has remained the dominant interpretive framework for *The Mother*, emphasizing its representation of class consciousness and revolutionary transformation. Lukács (1938) identified Pelageya Nilovna as the dialectical center of the novel, bridging the moral and historical dimensions of proletarian struggle. Gorky's narrative enacts Marx's vision of the oppressed becoming aware of their collective power. Eagleton (1986) later extended this reading, noting that Gorky humanized Marxist doctrine by translating abstract theory into emotional realism. Recent analyses, such as those by Dobrenko (2011) and McLean (2014), approach the novel as a pedagogical text in which political education and emotional development intertwine. They argue that Gorky's storytelling itself performs a revolutionary function: it awakens both the characters and the readers to the necessity of social justice. Through this interpretive lens, *The Mother* becomes not merely a reflection of Marxist thought but a moral enactment of it, where compassion and class consciousness are inseparable.

- **Feminist and Gender-Based Critiques**

Feminist scholars have revisited *The Mother* to explore how Gorky reconfigures gender roles within the revolutionary context. Kolobova (1999) argued that Nilovna's moral and political evolution transforms the maternal archetype into a site of empowerment, turning motherhood from a symbol of domestic confinement into an instrument of collective liberation. Later critics such as Weeks (2012) and Kagan (2016) suggest that Gorky's redefinition of femininity challenges patriarchal norms by presenting moral courage and empathy as revolutionary virtues. Nilovna's maternal love, once directed toward her son, expands into a universal compassion that fuels her activism. Connolly (2010), however, cautions that Gorky's portrayal still binds womanhood to motherhood, limiting the protagonist's independence. Despite such debates, feminist readings generally agree that *The Mother* anticipates later discourses of care ethics and moral responsibility as foundations for justice, bridging gender and class perspectives within a unified moral vision.

- **Aesthetic and Reception-Based Critiques**

Critical opinions regarding the novel's artistic merit have varied across decades. While Simmons (1975) and Peace (1987) dismissed its style as overly didactic, later scholars found depth in its ethical intentionality. Clark (2000) introduced the concept of "ethical realism" to describe Gorky's blending of artistic simplicity with moral profundity. Dobrenko (2011) and Lavrin (2015) examined how *The Mother* was received differently under changing political conditions, from its Soviet canonization as revolutionary scripture to its post-Soviet revival as a work of moral humanism. These shifting receptions underscore the novel's capacity to transcend ideological boundaries. As a text, it functions simultaneously as historical testimony, moral allegory, and pedagogical instrument, revealing the adaptability of Gorky's realism to varying social contexts.

- **Comparative and Pedagogical Studies**

Comparative and educational studies have expanded the novel's relevance beyond Russian literature. Dutt (2014) compares Gorky's humanism to that of anti-colonial writers such as Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o and Mahasweta Devi, emphasizing a shared commitment to portraying the poor as moral agents. The novel's themes of resistance, compassion, and moral courage continue to serve as frameworks for teaching ethical reasoning in literature classrooms around the world.

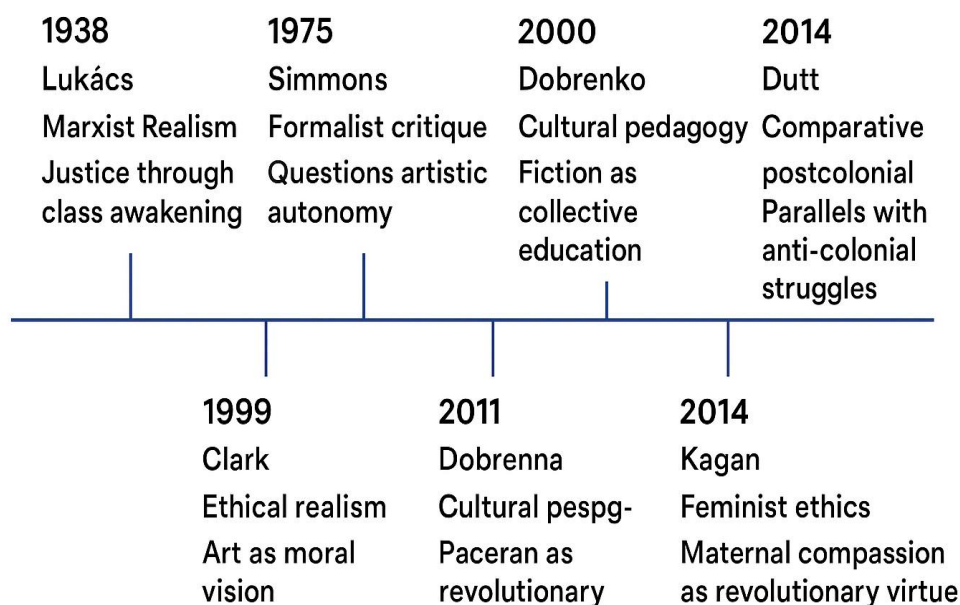
Table 1: Key Scholarly Studies on *The Mother*

Scholar / Year	Approach	Key Contribution
Lukács (1938)	Marxist Realism	Justice rooted in class awakening; literature as ethical force.
Simmons (1975)	Formalist Critique	Overly didactic style limits aesthetic autonomy.
Kolobova (1999)	Feminist Analysis	Motherhood redefined as political consciousness.
Clark (2000)	Ethical Realism	Art as medium of moral vision and social empathy.
Dobrenko (2011)	Cultural Pedagogy	Fiction as collective education in justice.
Kagan (2016)	Feminist Ethics	Maternal compassion as revolutionary virtue.
Dutt (2014)	Comparative Postcolonial	Parallels between proletarian and anti-colonial struggles.

Summary and Research Gap

The critical corpus on *The Mother* reveals its multidimensional character as both a political and ethical text. However, most analyses treat ideology, gender, or form as separate concerns. Few studies integrate these aspects to interpret how Gorky's narrative technique itself embodies social justice. The present research aims to fill this gap by examining how his realism, moral vision, and narrative empathy converge to create a holistic representation of justice that continues to resonate beyond its historical moment.

Evolution of Scholarly Perspectives on Maxim Gorky's *The Mother*



Methodology and Analytical Framework

The methodological design of this research integrates historical, thematic, and structural approaches within a Marxist-humanist interpretive framework. Since *The Mother* is both a literary and ideological artifact, its analysis requires attention to context, narrative strategy, and moral philosophy. The study employs qualitative textual analysis, drawing upon close reading and comparative interpretation to explore how Gorky constructs a vision of justice that transcends propaganda. The aim is to demonstrate how his aesthetic method, rooted in realism and moral empathy, transforms the political into the ethical. Combining Marxist criticism, feminist theory, and narrative analysis, the methodology focuses on Gorky's articulation of consciousness, his representation of moral growth, and his engagement with collective identity. This multi-layered approach allows for an understanding of *The Mother* not merely as a product of its time but as an evolving text that dialogues with universal questions of justice and human dignity.

• Contextual and Historical Reading

The study begins with a contextual reading that situates *The Mother* within early twentieth-century Russia's socio-political landscape. Gorky wrote the novel during the pre-revolutionary period marked by industrial exploitation, political unrest, and the rise of socialist movements. Understanding this historical background is essential for interpreting the text's moral urgency. The methodology relies on historical materialism to examine how economic and social conditions shape the characters' consciousness. This contextual grounding also considers Gorky's personal association with revolutionary

activists, which influenced his portrayal of the working class as both oppressed and morally superior. The historical analysis thus reveals the novel's dual purpose: to reflect social realities and to inspire moral action toward justice.

- **Thematic Mapping**

The second stage of analysis involves thematic mapping to identify recurrent motifs related to justice, oppression, and awakening. Using interpretive coding, key themes such as maternal sacrifice, collective struggle, and moral enlightenment are traced across the narrative. These themes are then aligned with broader ideological constructs in Marxist and feminist theory. Thematic mapping helps uncover the underlying ethical structure of the novel, where personal virtue and political conviction converge. It also allows for cross-comparison of how justice is portrayed not only as a socio-economic demand but as a spiritual and emotional ideal. This process clarifies Gorky's strategy of transforming individual experiences of suffering into a collective moral vocabulary.

- **Narrative and Structural Analysis**

Narrative and structural analysis form the core of the methodology, focusing on how Gorky's storytelling techniques communicate his vision of social justice. Attention is given to narrative voice, symbolism, and the rhythm of dialogue, all of which function as ideological devices. Structural study also examines the interplay between realism and idealism, how Gorky maintains emotional sincerity while advancing revolutionary purpose. The use of repetition, progression of consciousness, and transformation of domestic space into a public arena are analyzed as deliberate artistic mechanisms. Through this lens, *The Mother* emerges as a text that integrates moral persuasion into narrative form, achieving a synthesis between political conviction and literary art.

- **Character and Ideological Study**

This section focuses on character analysis, especially Pelageya Nilovna, as a symbolic and moral figure. Her journey from passivity to activism is examined as a psychological and ethical evolution reflecting Marxist dialectics. Secondary characters such as Pavel, Andrei, and the workers' collective are analyzed for their ideological functions, representing the transition from individual rebellion to communal solidarity. Feminist theory is employed to interpret Nilovna's agency as a gendered expression of justice, where maternal compassion transforms into political resistance. This intersectional approach reveals how Gorky's humanism operates through emotional authenticity, merging personal virtue with collective liberation.

- **Comparative Framework and Ethical Considerations**

The final stage employs a comparative framework to position *The Mother* within global traditions of socially engaged literature. Comparative readings with works by Charles Dickens, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, and Mahasweta Devi help illustrate Gorky's universal moral vision. The study draws on ethical literary criticism, emphasizing the role of literature as a transformative moral practice. Ethical considerations guide the interpretive process, ensuring that the analysis respects cultural specificity while engaging with global concepts of justice. By combining historical realism with comparative ethics, the methodology underscores literature's potential to shape moral consciousness and inspire collective action.

Analysis: *The Mother* as Social Justice Literature

Maxim Gorky's *The Mother* stands as one of the earliest and most compelling literary expressions of social justice in modern narrative tradition. Through its intertwining of moral transformation and revolutionary consciousness, the novel portrays justice not as an abstract concept but as an evolving human experience rooted in empathy, solidarity, and collective struggle. Set in the repressive industrial milieu of pre-revolutionary Russia, the story transcends its political origins to embody universal questions of dignity, equality, and moral awakening. Gorky's artistic power lies in his ability to turn social protest into moral poetry, depicting the journey from ignorance to enlightenment, from subjugation to agency. His realism is not merely documentary but ethical: he exposes injustice not only to condemn it but to inspire an awakening of conscience. The novel becomes a living testament to literature's potential to shape moral vision and mobilize collective will.

- **Historical and Political Background**

The Mother was written during a time of intense political upheaval in Russia, a period defined by industrialization, exploitation, and the growing momentum of revolutionary thought. Gorky himself was deeply involved with socialist activism, and this engagement directly informs his portrayal of workers as moral agents rather than passive victims. The novel's setting, factory towns, cramped tenements, secret

meetings, reflects both the material and psychological conditions of oppression. The police brutality and ideological censorship mirror Tsarist repression of political dissent. However, Gorky's focus extends beyond mere documentation. He elevates the plight of the working class into a moral narrative of redemption, showing that the pursuit of justice is inseparable from the pursuit of self-awareness. Historical realism thus becomes an ethical mirror: the external revolution parallels an inner awakening of humanity's moral potential.

- **From Injustice to Awakening to Justice**

The central moral arc of *The Mother* moves from conditions of injustice toward the discovery of collective agency. Gorky structures this transformation through the journey of Pelageya Nilovna, whose life initially mirrors subservience and fear. The novel's early chapters depict her as a silent witness to her husband's brutality and the factory's dehumanization. Yet through her son Pavel's revolutionary activities, Nilovna encounters new possibilities of moral courage and social solidarity. Her personal awakening signifies the conversion of private suffering into public action, a key step in the evolution of justice. The movement from pain to protest illustrates Gorky's belief that social justice begins in empathy. When Nilovna chooses to distribute revolutionary leaflets, she symbolically claims her role as a participant in historical change. Justice, in this framework, is not merely legal or institutional but profoundly ethical: it begins in the heart's refusal to accept cruelty as normal.

- **Characterization and Narrative Strategy**

- **Pelageya Nilovna as Central Focaliser**

Gorky's use of Nilovna as the focal point of consciousness is both narratively and ideologically significant. Unlike traditional proletarian heroes who are male and militant, Nilovna embodies moral perseverance and spiritual endurance. Her development humanizes revolution by revealing that justice is rooted in compassion rather than vengeance. Her journey becomes the reader's ethical education.

- **Collective Scenes and Pedagogic Dialogues**

The narrative's group scenes, meetings, street marches, and conversations among workers, function as communal spaces of learning. These are pedagogic moments where knowledge circulates, converting individual frustration into organized resistance. Gorky employs dialogue as an instrument of enlightenment; ideas of justice are not imposed but discovered collectively through speech and reflection.

- **Narrative Progression from Private to Political**

The novel's structure mirrors Nilovna's moral evolution. The domestic sphere, initially defined by silence and subjugation, gradually opens into the public domain of social activism. This movement from private to political is central to Gorky's vision of justice: it asserts that personal ethics and social transformation are inseparable. The home becomes the seedbed of revolution, transforming motherhood into moral heroism.

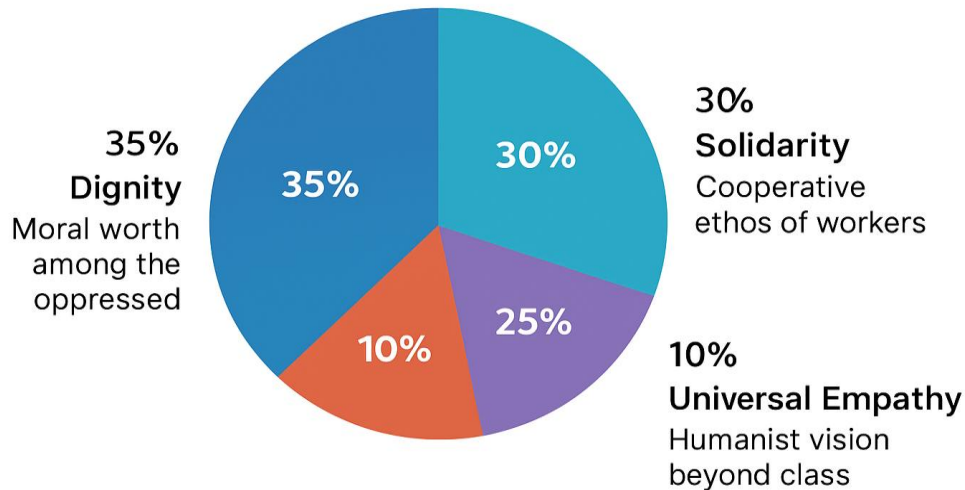
- **Form and Ideology: Social Realism and Aesthetic Choices**

Gorky's artistic method, social realism, unites ideological conviction with emotional authenticity. His prose avoids romantic embellishment, instead emphasizing simplicity, repetition, and clarity to render the moral urgency of the workers' cause. The didactic tone often criticized by formalists (Simmons, 1975) serves, in this analysis, as a deliberate stylistic choice: the language mirrors the awakening of simple people discovering profound truths. Gorky's characters are not psychological studies but ethical types, designed to universalize the struggle for justice. Moreover, the novel's imagery, light, movement, and rebirth, embodies the rhetoric of transformation. The repeated motif of dawn signifies enlightenment, symbolizing both political revolution and spiritual renewal. Social realism here becomes a form of moral realism, seeking not only to depict the world but to improve it.

- **Core Social-Justice Values in *The Mother***

At its moral core, *The Mother* advocates justice as collective empathy and ethical solidarity. Three key values dominate Gorky's conception of social justice: (1) **Dignity**, expressed through the assertion of moral worth among the oppressed; (2) **Solidarity**, reflected in the cooperative ethos of the workers; and (3) **Moral Courage**, embodied in Nilovna's final act of defiance as she proclaims revolutionary truth to the crowd. These values are interdependent: dignity gives rise to solidarity, and solidarity demands courage. Gorky's portrayal anticipates later theories of justice as participatory and dialogical rather than hierarchical. In this sense, the novel transcends its historical period to become a timeless moral allegory, a testament to literature's enduring power to challenge injustice and affirm human potential.

Core Social-Justice Values Represented in *The Mother*



Discussion and Interpretation

Maxim Gorky's *The Mother* remains one of the most significant contributions to the literary discourse on social justice. While its ideological purpose is evident, the novel's enduring influence lies in its moral and aesthetic complexity. Gorky's narrative transcends its political setting, evolving into an ethical meditation on human dignity, solidarity, and the transformative power of moral courage. The story of Pelageya Nilovna illustrates how consciousness is shaped through lived suffering and how empathy can become the foundation of social resistance. Justice in *The Mother* is not imposed from authority; it grows organically from shared human experience and the recognition of collective pain. Gorky's realism, rather than serving merely as political propaganda, emerges as a mode of ethical vision, linking art with moral responsibility. The following discussion elaborates on the novel's key strengths as a work of social justice literature, its critical limitations, its implications for global literary ethics, and a comparative synthesis of its moral and structural elements.

- **Strengths of *The Mother* as Social Justice Literature**

- **Integration of Morality and Revolution**

One of the novel's principal strengths lies in its fusion of morality with revolutionary ideology. Unlike purely political tracts, *The Mother* transforms the idea of justice into an ethical and emotional experience. The awakening of Nilovna exemplifies the intersection of personal virtue and collective emancipation. Gorky's approach implies that revolution without moral grounding is incomplete; justice must emerge from empathy and awareness rather than mere anger or revenge. The novel's insistence that every act of compassion carries political significance anticipates the later development of humanist socialism and ethical Marxism.

- **Representation of the Oppressed as Moral Agents**

Gorky's portrayal of the working class differs sharply from both naturalist fatalism and sentimental humanism. His workers are not passive victims of circumstance but moral agents capable of critical thought and ethical decision. Through dialogue and collective reflection, they embody the process of enlightenment that Marx envisioned as the precondition for social change. Nilovna's transformation from submission to defiance mirrors the awakening of the proletariat from silence to speech, from isolation to solidarity. This portrayal restores moral dignity to the oppressed and reinforces the idea that justice begins with recognizing the moral worth of every human being.

- **Feminine Ethics and Revolutionary Compassion**

A striking innovation in *The Mother* is its feminist dimension, which fuses maternal love with revolutionary compassion. Gorky redefines motherhood as an ethical stance rather than a biological role. Nilovna's love transcends familial limits and expands into universal solidarity. Her compassion for the suffering of others motivates her activism, thus aligning emotion with political action. This synthesis of feminine empathy and socialist justice challenges patriarchal notions of heroism by positioning care and sacrifice as revolutionary virtues. The result is an early articulation of what later feminist theorists call "ethics of care," where justice is grounded in relational responsibility rather than authority.

- **Universal Humanism and Ethical Realism**

Gorky's realism is distinctive because it aims not only to represent the world but to morally transform it. His concept of "ethical realism" (Clark, 2000) posits that art should awaken moral consciousness through the depiction of social truth. *The Mother* demonstrates this principle by transforming historical material into moral parable. The characters' dialogue, their gradual realization of injustice, and their willingness to act all serve pedagogical purposes. Justice, in Gorky's moral universe, is not a legal or political endpoint but an ongoing ethical process, an education of the heart as well as the mind.

- **Limitations and Critical Caveats**

- **Didacticism and Artistic Restraint**

Despite its profound ethical message, critics such as Simmons (1975) and Peace (1987) argue that *The Mother* suffers from overt didacticism. The characters often serve as ideological instruments rather than psychologically complex individuals. Gorky's moral clarity occasionally simplifies the contradictions inherent in social struggle. While this quality enhances the novel's pedagogical power, it diminishes its aesthetic subtlety. The line between moral conviction and propaganda sometimes blurs, leading to debates about whether the text should be classified as art or political document. Nevertheless, its directness can also be viewed as a deliberate technique: simplicity becomes a tool of accessibility, ensuring that moral truth reaches the widest audience.

- **Gender Constraints within Liberation**

Feminist readings acknowledge Nilovna's empowerment but also critique the limitations of her agency. Connolly (2010) argues that her role remains confined within maternal identity, and her public activism is mediated through her relationship with her son. Gorky's reimagining of motherhood as political virtue risks reinforcing traditional gender roles, even while seeking to transcend them. This paradox reflects broader tensions in early socialist thought, where women's liberation was often subsumed under class struggle. While Gorky humanizes female experience, his vision stops short of full gender equality.

- **Ideological Determinism**

Some Marxist critics, notably McLean (2014), have noted the novel's reliance on ideological determinism, the sense that characters are driven by historical inevitability rather than autonomous choice. This limits the complexity of moral decision-making. Justice appears as destiny rather than deliberation. Although Gorky sought to portray collective agency, the portrayal occasionally undermines individual freedom, a tension that continues to challenge the integration of ethics and revolution in literature.

- **Implications for Literature and Social Justice**

- **Literature as Ethical Praxis**

The Mother provides a framework for understanding literature as ethical praxis. Its narrative demonstrates how storytelling can educate moral consciousness and encourage civic participation. By dramatizing oppression and moral awakening, Gorky constructs fiction as a form of ethical pedagogy. This function anticipates Paulo Freire's (1970) notion of "conscientization," the process of awakening awareness through dialogue and reflection. In this sense, Gorky transforms narrative into moral action, making literature an instrument of justice.

- **Cross-Cultural Resonance and Global Justice**

The influence of *The Mother* extends beyond Russia. Anti-colonial writers such as Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o and Mahasweta Devi adapted Gorky's moral realism to depict the struggles of marginalized communities. The novel's themes of oppression, awakening, and solidarity resonate across global contexts, linking industrial labor in Russia with colonial exploitation in Africa and Asia. This transnational

dimension reinforces Gorky's universal humanism: justice becomes a shared moral language that transcends geography and ideology.

▪ Contemporary Relevance

In the 21st century, Gorky's moral concerns remain urgent. Issues of labor exploitation, gender inequality, and political repression persist, making *The Mother* a relevant moral guide for modern readers. Its emphasis on empathy and collective courage anticipates contemporary social movements that blend activism with ethical responsibility. The novel suggests that justice is not achieved through violence or ideology alone, but through the cultivation of moral insight, an idea increasingly vital in the face of global injustice and polarization.

▪ Theoretical Implications

The novel's structure exemplifies what literary theorists now term "social justice aesthetics" the integration of form, ethics, and ideology to produce transformative reading experiences. Gorky's use of realism, repetition, and moral symbolism aligns with the tradition of ethical narrative theorists such as Booth (1988) and Nussbaum (1990), who emphasize literature's capacity to nurture empathy. *The Mother* thus functions as a moral laboratory, where readers rehearse the experience of justice through emotional identification and reflection.

• Comparative Table of Novel's Social Justice Features

Table 2: Features of Social Justice in *The Mother*

Dimension of Justice	Gorky's Representation	Literary Mechanism	Moral Implication
Class Justice	Workers' awakening from oppression to agency	Realist depiction of factory life and dialogue among workers	Liberation through collective awareness
Gender Justice	Transformation of motherhood into activism	Character arc of Pelageya Nilovna	Feminine empathy as revolutionary ethics
Moral Justice	Awakening of conscience through compassion	Symbolism of light, rebirth, and education	Justice as moral illumination
Political Justice	Struggle against Tsarist repression	Revolutionary organization and protest scenes	Justice as resistance to tyranny
Universal Justice	Unity of human dignity across classes and nations	Ethical realism and humanist tone	Justice as shared moral humanity

Conclusion

Maxim Gorky's *The Mother* stands as a profound synthesis of moral, social, and political ideals. Through Pelageya Nilovna's transformation from submissive mother to conscious revolutionary, Gorky presents justice as both ethical awakening and collective action. The novel transcends its historical setting to articulate a universal vision of human dignity, empathy, and solidarity. Its fusion of realism and idealism illustrates literature's power to convert private suffering into public conscience. Despite its didactic tone, *The Mother* remains an enduring model of socially engaged art that continues to inspire global movements for justice and equality. Future research may explore its cross-cultural reception, feminist reinterpretations, and influence on postcolonial and proletarian literatures. Ultimately, Gorky's masterpiece affirms that true revolution begins within the moral imagination, where compassion evolves into collective liberation.

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