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International Congress on Multidisciplinary Studies in Education and Applied Sciences

March 30th 2025



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“The role of women in society in the novel ‘The Mother’; perspectives from the East and the West”

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Abstract

This article examines the role of women in society as depicted in the novel "The Mother," analyzing the protagonist's journey through the lens of both Eastern and Western perspectives. It explores how the novel addresses traditional gender roles, motherhood, social change, and the evolving status of women, revealing the complexities and challenges faced by women in different cultural contexts.

Keywords: women's role, society, The Mother, East, West, gender roles

The place of women in society has always been a subject of intense debate, reflection, and evolution. In literature, women's roles have often mirrored, challenged, or redefined their status within different cultural frameworks. The novel "The Mother" (often associated with Maxim Gorky's classic or used as a representative title for works dealing with maternal themes) is a rich source for exploring how the role of women is portrayed amid changing social realities. This article delves into how "The Mother" highlights the position of women within society from both Eastern and Western viewpoints, analyzing the underlying cultural, political, and personal dimensions that shape the narrative.

From both Eastern and Western perspectives, traditional societies have long prescribed distinct roles for women, often centering around the family, caregiving, and obedience to patriarchal authority. In "The Mother," the protagonist's journey is initially marked by her acceptance of conventional duties—caring for her family, enduring hardship, and maintaining the household. In many Eastern societies, such as in Central Asia or Russia



(the original context of Gorky's novel), women were expected to embody virtues of patience, humility, and sacrifice. Similarly, in many Western societies of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the ideal of the devoted mother and wife was prevalent.

The novel portrays the mother as a symbol of resilience. Her sacrifices are not just personal but are emblematic of a broader collective experience shared by women globally. Yet, as the story progresses, the mother's awakening signals a shift away from passive acceptance to active participation in social change.

One of the novel's most significant contributions is its depiction of women breaking away from imposed limitations. The mother's involvement in her son's revolutionary activities serves as a metaphor for women's emancipation, both in the East and West. In the context of the Russian Revolution and similar Eastern political upheavals, women began to step outside the confines of domesticity, participating in protests, education, and political activism. The mother's transformation from a silent sufferer to an active voice challenges the notion that women are destined to remain on the periphery of history.

In Western contexts, the early 20th century was marked by the suffragette movement and campaigns for women's rights. The mother's journey in the novel parallels these historical developments, reflecting a universal desire among women for recognition, respect, and agency. Literature becomes a mirror and a catalyst for societal transformation, as female characters like the mother serve as inspirations for real-world change.

Motherhood, as depicted in the novel, is not merely a biological or social function. It is a source of profound inner strength. The mother's love for her child motivates her to transcend her fears and challenge oppressive structures. This depiction resonates with both Eastern ideals of maternal devotion and Western concepts of individual agency. The character's evolution demonstrates that motherhood can be a powerful force for justice and progress, countering stereotypes that reduce women's roles to subservience. The novel "The Mother" is set against the backdrop of social upheaval, where questions of justice, rights, and identity are at the forefront. The mother's journey is not isolated



but unfolds within a community where women from various backgrounds are drawn into the movement for change. This collective experience highlights how women's struggles often intersect with broader cultural and political dynamics.

From an Eastern perspective, especially in societies influenced by socialist ideals, the rise of women's activism during periods of revolution was seen as both a necessity and a challenge to centuries-old customs. In "The Mother," the protagonist's embrace of new ideas reflects the growing recognition that societal progress is impossible without women's participation. The narrative also touches on the tensions that arise when traditional norms collide with revolutionary ideals.

In Western contexts, the rise of women's movements paralleled similar struggles. Women in Europe and America, inspired by ideas of equality and individual rights, began to demand suffrage, access to education, and legal autonomy. "The Mother" serves as a literary bridge, showing that while the specifics of women's oppression may differ between East and West, the desire for dignity and equality is universal.

A recurring theme in "The Mother" is the power of women's solidarity. Throughout the novel, female characters support one another, share knowledge, and protect each other from the dangers of a repressive regime. This sense of sisterhood is vital for survival and progress. In both Eastern and Western societies, the growth of women's organizations—whether underground revolutionary groups or public suffrage societies—played a crucial role in advancing women's rights.

The mother's journey is intertwined with those of other women who inspire her and learn from her example. This collective effort undermines the stereotype of the isolated, powerless woman, replacing it with a vision of women as active agents of history. The novel thus suggests that meaningful change comes not from individual heroism alone but from shared commitment and mutual support.

"The Mother" is not merely a story about one woman's awakening; it is a testament to the enduring strength of women in the face of adversity. By examining the protagonist's journey through both Eastern and Western lenses, the novel reveals the complexity and richness of women's roles in society. It challenges readers to reconsider stereotypes,



embrace solidarity, and acknowledge the indispensable contributions of women to social progress.

Through literature, voices like that of the mother continue to inspire hope and action for a more just and equitable world—across cultures, across time.

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