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VOICE OF GOD IN THE LIVES OF PEOPLE**
A Study of Leo Tolstoy's Language

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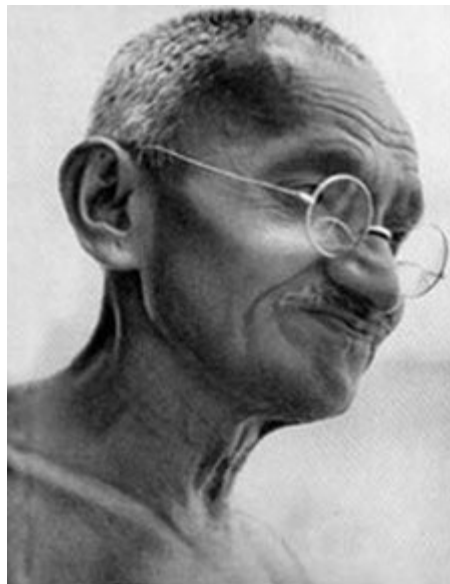
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The Simple Pleasures

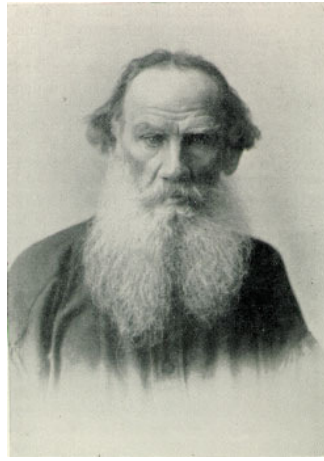
INDIAN FASCINATION FOR LEO TOLSTOY



Indian fascination for Leo Tolstoy began in great strength with the arrival of Gandhi from South Africa in 1915. He settled down in India finally and began his experiments with

Truth through Satyagraha. While in South Africa, his ideas and methods had already been firmed up (Thirumalai 2005). In South Africa, Gandhi established the Phoenix Settlement in 1904 inspired by the reading of John Ruskin's *Unto This Last*, and then afterwards he founded Tolstoy Farm to practice simple living in a community context. Since then, generations of young Indians have read Tolstoy's works with great admiration, longing for a simple way of life, based on Gandhian and Tolstoyan teaching. His works have been translated (and re-translated in some languages) in many Indian languages. His stories apart, his ideas of simple living continue to attract young people to him.

SOUL OF THE MODERN WORLD?



Chesterton, et al. wrote that Leo Tolstoy might be viewed “as the soul of the modern world seeking to replace in its love of humanity the life of those old religions which science is destroying day by day. In this sense Tolstoy will stand in European literature as the conscience of the modern world” (Chesterton, Parris, and Garnett 1903:36).

While Chesterton specifically wrote, “Everything in the world, from the Bible to a bootjack, can be, and is, reduced by Tolstoy to this great fundamental Tolstoyan principle, the simplification of life” (page 5), he was also critical of Tolstoy: “The truth is that Tolstoy, with his immense genius, with his colossal faith, with his vast fearlessness and vast knowledge of life, is deficient in one faculty and one faculty alone. He is not a mystic: and therefore he has a tendency to go mad. Men talk of the extravagances and frenzies that have been produced by mysticism: they are a mere drop in the bucket. In the main, and from the beginning of time, mysticism has kept men sane. The thing that has driven them mad was logic” (Chesterton, Parris, and Garnett 1903:6).

Chesterton, in particular, was not happy with the kind of (Christian) anarchism that Tolstoy's ideas and writings could bring about. Without specifically mentioning Tolstoy, Chesterton wrote, “A sect of men start with no theology at all, but with the simple doctrine that we ought to love our neighbour and use no force against him, and they end in thinking it wicked to carry a leather handbag, or to ride in a cart. A great modern writer who erases theology altogether, denies the validity of the Scriptures and the Churches alike, forms a purely ethical theory that love should be the instrument of reform, and ends

by maintaining that we have no right to strike a man if he is torturing a child before our eyes. He goes on, he develops a theory of the mind and the emotions, which might be held by the most rigid atheist, and he ends by maintaining that the sexual relation out of which all humanity has come, is not only not moral, but is positively not natural. This is fanaticism as it has been and as it will always be (Chesteron, Parris, and Garnett 1903:6).

RELAXED TOGETHERNESS AND MORAL OVERTONES

Leo Tolstoy has used language to appeal to human emotions. He uses it to connect people and bring them together in an atmosphere of relaxed togetherness. It is in this context that he intersperses his language with moral overtones.



VOICES FROM WITHIN

Voices are broadly classified into two types - the inner voice (conscience) and the ordinary human voice, comprising opinions. In general, conscience is a very sensitive moral evaluator - especially in children and young people. While culture and religion of a community play a crucial role in characterizing what constitutes a moral code for them, there are also universal principles and understandings that underlie such codes. For example, within Christian Biblical understanding, if people did not sin, they would not need any external guidance, and conscience alone could precisely direct their behaviour. The necessity for written law arose, from the Christian perspective, from original sin when man, dimmed by passion, failed to hear clearly the inner voice. In the present condition, both the written law and the inner natural law of conscience are needed.

In daily relationships with people, people subconsciously trust the conscience more than written laws and regulations. Indeed, it is impossible to have laws for every imaginable situation and to foresee how to preclude any attempts at breaking them. After all, shrewd people manage to twist and manipulate even the clearest of laws.

So, conscience works inside every person with an object of urging people to do what is morally good and just.

It happens sometimes that a man in turmoil, caught in the swirl of strong passion or overwhelmed by fear, appears not to hear the voice of his conscience and so the inner voice is suppressed and is a voiceless entity. But later, he feels the pangs of conscience doubly strong.

THE SECOND VOICE

The second voice presented reflects the impressions of people. Besides impressions, words create images and expectations. They can make or mar relationships. They can influence people greatly.

Since words determine actions, there is a powerful connection between the words people use and the results they get. Different words evoke different feelings. Well-chosen words can motivate, offer hope, create vision, impact thinking and alter results. Words have power over people's thoughts and actions.

Infinite shades of meaning can be inferred from words spoken by people. Words have the power to manipulate people's thinking and behaviour. These powers have been defined as fallacious arguments. Their tremendous power lies in the fact that they elicit emotional response in those who hear them. Their danger lies in the fact that decisions based on them are not based on truth, commonsense, logic, legality, one's best interests, etc.

MANY VOICES, AND VOICELESS PEOPLE

The world reverberates with many voices. Voices cry out for help, recognition, and attention. The novel, *War and Peace* (originally published in 1869; Tolstoy 1993) has in it similar echoes, which challenge the very significance of life.

This paper dwells on the implication of these voices and the silver lining in the cloud of despair. The voiceless characters vent their grievances against the injustice they face in society.

The focus of this paper is to present the voiceless people of Leo Tolstoy's novel, *War and Peace*. These voiceless people are not given importance by society, due to reasons like a mean background, assumed lowly birth, uncouth manners, arrogance, pride, etc.

PIERRE AND PRINCESS MARY

The voiceless people in *War and Peace* are Pierre Bezhukhov and Princess Mary.

Pierre is portrayed as a person who was always pushed to the fringes of society. People who are shunned try to get noticed. This is exactly what Pierre strove to do. As one of the

invitees in Anna Pavlona's soiree, Pierre was excited to have found a platform to express his views on politics. He felt quite important and honoured in Anna Pavlona's soiree.

THE IMPORTANCE OF ETIQUETTE

Etiquette plays a very important role in lending a voice to people. An eminent authority on etiquettes, Emily Post writes, "People of position are people of position the world over—and by their speech are most readily known. Appearance, on the other hand, often passes muster. A "show-girl" may be lovely to look at as she stands in a seemingly unstudied position and in perfect clothes. But let her say "My Gawd!" or "Wouldn't that jar you!" and where is her loveliness then?" (Post, 1922). So, even in the twentieth century, voice and etiquette were seen to go together. In our tradition-bound Indian society, failure to follow etiquettes relating to terms of address and reference becomes a serious offence.

PIERRE'S INABILITY TO FOLLOW ETIQUETTES

But, on matters of etiquette and propriety, Pierre had failed miserably. During the party, Pierre was ungainly, stout, about average height; he did not know how to enter a drawing room and still less how to leave one. He did not know how to say something agreeable before going away.

MONEY MAKES ALL THE DIFFERENCE IN THIS WORLD!

Pierre was despised as long as he was a non-entity. But as soon as word spread that he would be inheriting Count Bezhukhov's fortune, everyone wanted to know him personally. Pierre did have a voice when things turned in his favour. People began to cast significant looks at him with a kind of a Pierre found people giving him a patient hearing to all that he had to say on different matters.

For the first time, Pierre found himself relating to the aristocratic society in which he lived. Pierre was given recognition as the Count's legitimate heir and after the Count's death, Pierre was better known as Count Pierre Bezhukhov, a title which catapulted him to one of the highest ranks in society. He had to sign papers, present himself at the government office, the purpose of which was not clear to him. He had to receive people who formerly did not even wish to know him. Everyone was disposed to treat the young heir in the friendliest and most flattering manner.

Pierre had definitely found a platform to air his views on different matters and his social standing helped him win over the beautiful Helen, who happened to be Prince Vasili's daughter. Helen heightened his joy and happiness and Pierre felt she complemented him wherever possible especially when words failed him on matters of interest. But this was not for long.

BROKEN MARRIAGE, BROKEN LOVE, AND THE CALL TO ARMS

Helen's act of betrayal drove Pierre into a state of silence and loneliness. The lifestyle in Moscow did not give the kind of satisfaction that Pierre was looking for. He did not like the aristocratic society of Russia. The voice, which was prominent among the aristocratic circles, suddenly fell silent. Pierre who needed a word of encouragement turned to philanthropy, free masonry without much success. Nothing gave him satisfaction. This was the time he decided to enlist as a soldier in the Russian army. As a prisoner of war, he had his own moments of solitude. "It was in these moments of solitude that he heard the voice of God." Having found inner peace and harmony, he was able to appreciate nature around him and marvel at God's creations.

FINDING PEACE IN SOLITUDE

Pierre's knowledge of languages, the respect shown to him by the French, his simplicity, his readiness to give away anything made him appear mysterious and superior to them. "I find it wholesome to be alone the greater part of the time. To be in company, even with the best is soon wearisome and dissipating" (150), says Thoreau in his *Walden*. Pierre had found peace in moments of solitude. He was surprised to find that his inner freedom, which was independent of external conditions, now had an additional setting of external liberty. He was alone in a strange town with no connections whatsoever. No one demanded anything of him or sent him anywhere. But still there was peace within him. The thought of his disloyal wife no longer tormented him. His quest for the meaning of life ended because he had peace within.

PRINCESS MARY

Princess Mary's cry too, was for recognition. She led a reclusive life and still expected people to give her due recognition. Having to live with a disgruntled father, she was starved of love. Her only stay was religion. Throughout the novel, Princess Mary is seen as a woman who lifts her voice in prayer, just following Luke 18: 1, "Men ought to always pray and not faint."

LIVING ACCORDING TO THE GOSPEL

Princess Mary's whole concept of living was within the framework of the Gospels, which speak about the love of God. The personality of Princess Mary is perhaps best revealed through her letter to her friend Julie. This is in response to Julie's letter in which she apprised Mary of the impending war in Russia and also about the latest gossip in town. Mary's response has religious overtones about it. She claimed that if she had not religion to console her, her life would have been sad. Mary went on to say, "If I were asked what I desire most on earth, it would have to be poorer than the poorest beggar"(116). Julie had offered to lend Mary a mystical book but she was not interested in reading such a book, because she would not be able to grasp its contents. She exhorted Julie to read the Bible.

Princess Mary's voice of comfort made Prince Andrew's life more meaningful. Mary exhorted her brother to be prayerful because she believed in the power of prayer. She felt

that if he dared to believe in a Mighty God, he would get the breakthrough she had been looking for.

ENDURANCE BORN OF GOD'S LOVE

Princess Mary's quality speaks volumes about her power of endurance. Her father, Prince Bolkonski's health began to deteriorate and his temper became much worse. It was Princess Mary who generally bore the brunt of his frequent fits of unprovoked anger. He seemed careful to seek out her tender spots so as to torture her mentally as harshly as possible.

Princess Mary had two passions and consequently two joys: her nephew Nicholas and religion. These became the prince's favourite subjects of attack and ridicule. He continually hurt Princess Mary's feelings and tormented her, but it cost her no effort to forgive him.

All the complex laws of man centered for her in one clear and simple law - the law of love and self-sacrifice taught by Christ, who lovingly suffered for mankind though he himself was God. She had to endure and love and that she did willingly.

SUFFERING, A SOURCE OF EDIFICATION

Suffering brought out the best in Mary and it adds a new dimension to the opinions she would be voicing in society. Charles Dickens in his *Great Expectations* (1860) says, "Suffering has been stronger than all other teachings." Princess Mary was also able to identify closely with those who suffered. Her condolence letter to Julie, condoling the death of Julie's brother who had died in the warfront, speaks volumes about her character. In the letter, princess Mary wrote,

Sorrow it seems is our common lot. Your loss is so terrible that I can only explain it to myself as a special providence of God who loving you wishes to try you and your excellent mother. Oh, my friend, religion and religion alone can comfort us. Religion alone can explain to us what man cannot comprehend (234).

Summing up, the voice of God plays a significant role in the lives of people. People who are sensitive to this divine voice find fulfillment in their lives. The voice of God is not audible in a materialistic society bent on achieving things to gratify their own selfish ends. It is audible only to those who are receptive to God. These voiceless people may look insignificant in the eyes of people but they definitely have a hold in society as they live out their lives by faith in God.

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