



The Mental conflict and Social structure in *Anna Karenina* - A Brief Study

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Abstract:

This paper explores the undesirable effects faced by humankind when emotions overpower rationality. Emotions have a significant effect on human thinking, decision making and affects logical reasoning. Generally, decision making is considered as a rational process in which the reason analyses the finest channel to achieve the result. When emotions surpass the limit, the aftermath will be adverse. This paper analyses such adverse effects of human actions when emotions vanquish logic in the novel *Anna Karenina* by Leo Tolstoy. *Anna Karenina* is a realist novel published in the year 1878. This paper further explores *Anna Karenina*'s emotional conflicts and the lives of other characters in the novel who share the same path of *Anna Karenina* but at different degrees. The character, *Anna Karenina*, the embodiment of emotions fails to keep her emotions aside and makes impulsive decisions throughout the novel which will eventually lead to the end of her life.

Keywords:

Rationality and Mental Conflict, Social Structure, Infatuation, Will Power

Introduction:

Leo Tolstoy, the greatest writer of Russian Literature is best known for his novels *Anna Karenina* (1875-1877) and *War and Peace* (1865-1869) which are regarded as the exceptional novels ever written and are often cited as the most successful portrayal of Realism. Leo Tolstoy is considered to be the Master of Realist Fiction. *Anna Karenina* is regarded as the most perfect example of realist novel. Leo Tolstoy himself called his novel *Anna Karenina* as a "True Realist Novel". A realist novel portrays everyday life without sophistry contrary to what other lofty novels chase. The life of Leo Tolstoy has two phases, as the author who writes titanic novels that defines realist fiction and as a prophet of social vision and as a moral teacher who preaches Non-Violence and influenced Mahatma Gandhi. In Leo Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina*, the character *Anna Karenina* falls prey to her emotions, abandons her family for her extramarital affair, goes insane and throws herself into the train and dies. Leo Tolstoy's *War and Peace* focuses on Napoleon's invasion of Russia in 1812 and three well known characters in literature: Pierre Bezukhov, Prince Andrei Bolksky and Natala Rostov. According to Ivan Goncharov, a Russian novelist, *War and Peace* is a novel that made its author "the true lion of Russian Literature".

Glimpse of the Novel:

Anna Karenina, wife of Alexei Alexandrovich arrives at Moscow to settle the dispute between his brother Stiva and his wife, Dolly. At the rail station she meets Vronsky, a flattering military officer. They both fall in love. *Anna Karenina* confesses his love for Vronsky to her husband, Alexei. By the time, she confessed she was already pregnant with Vronsky's child. Anna refused to divorce Alexei because she did not want to give up her son. After giving birth to a child, Anna and Vronsky moves to Italy. Vronsky is being uncommitted to Anna which makes her desperate. The couple comes back to Petersburg. Anna tries to meet her son and makes her appearance at the Opera, despite Vronsky's objection and was humiliated. Anna blames Vronsky for lacking sympathy with her suffering. Anna feels Vronsky's urge to be independent. Vronsky feels burdened by Anna's demand for love. Alexei Alexandrovich overcomes his humiliation and loneliness with the help of Lydia. Realising that she cannot pursue her love, Anna throws herself into the train and dies. Vronsky volunteers for Russo-Turkish war.

Kitty, sister of Dolly is already in love with Vronsky but was rejected by him. Having unable to bear her rejection, she falls sick. Meanwhile she was also proposed by Levin, friend of Stiva whom she rejected. Kitty then goes to German spa to cure her illness and returns back to Russia with good health. Disheartened Levin goes back to his country estate hoping to find purpose of his life even without marriage. His brother, Nikolai's tuberculosis makes him realize his fear for death. He also finds that he is still in love with Kitty. Levin gets a chance to meet Kitty again, they both fall in love and eventually get married. Kitty then becomes pregnant and they give birth to a boy. Levin realizes the goodness in every individual and finds himself at peace.

Rationality and Mental Conflict:

The tragic end of *Anna Karenina* is the result of her inability to think rationally. Anna could not stop herself from falling for Vronsky which is a voluntary action and the destructive path that Anna chooses for herself. Every time she chooses Vronsky, she chooses madness; Every time she worries about her son, Seryozha she worries about the decay of her own conscience. Seryozha is the embodiment and incarnation of Anna's conscience and highest self. The reason why Tolstoy killed *Anna Karenina* is that, to indicate the impending danger of exaggerating one's emotions and being irrational. Anna who could not stop herself from falling for Vronsky also could not stop herself from falling into the train. Both the actions cost her life and required only mere rational thinking which could have saved her. Lending ears to the emotions can be the most dangerous act. Anna could not differentiate between love and infatuation which is the pinnacle of Anna's irrationality and root cause of her destruction.

Flipping the coin, the other side, the charmer Vronsky is the personification of irrationality, who pursues the act of courting, forgets that he is in love with a Mother. Vronsky wants an heir to his fortunes but forgets that Seryozha spends his life without his mother. For an uncommitted and easygoing man like Vronsky, Anna is just another girl. No love will decline but Vronsky's did, so it can't be love.

Social structure:

Anna Karenina is the product of 19th century Russia's societal construction. In 19th century Russia, women were mere care givers and served only reproductive purposes which are evident in the women characters of the novel *Anna Karenina*. Dolly is the mother of five living and two dead children. In Anna's case, she has no identity other than the wife of a high-ranking government official.

According to Richard Stites' book, *The Women's Liberation Movement: Feminism, Nihilism and Bolshevism* "The wife was obliged to confirm to her spouses' wishes while under his roof, to cohabit with him, and also to accompany him wherever he happened to go or be sent". Women were not given opportunities to explore their potentials. Women had no separate civil identity other than their husband's. Women were denied decision making authorities. Men dominated in every possible aspect's workplace, politics, community life etc. *Anna Karenina* and many other women like *Anna Karenina* are the victims of such a societal construction. Circumstances under which one is put through plays a crucial role in one's evolvement. Circumstances plot the individual's life.

Infatuation:

The successive momentary attractions create an illusion of love which happened in the case of *Anna Karenina*. It would have been a different story if Anna had seen another flattering and charming person like Vronsky just before her suicide. There are so many charming Vronskys out there but can Anna have so many affairs is a question. If having one affair is right, having multiple affairs should also be right; if having multiple affairs is wrong, having a single extramarital affair should also be wrong. So, the momentary passion that Anna has for Vronsky can never be named as Love, but only Infatuation.

Will power:

Will power is the ability to do the required action against all the odds. *Anna Karenina* surrendered herself to her emotions and the situations. She values her emotions more than her life, lacks will power, fail to fight through the odds - which is the very nature of life. She did neither fight with her emotions nor with the situations. Every living organism that is put on earth has to strive through some or the other obstacle. This can be explained more clearly with an example; if an ant slips into a river it will at least try to find its way to survive; if the chances of survival is impossible, it will only die fighting and will never want to die but if a wooden log falls into the river, it will be carried along with the flow of the river. Anna lacks the basic requirement of any living organism, which is to fight. Fighting is the proof of living. When one stops fighting, one loses the privilege of living in this planet. Nothing is more important than life.

Conclusion:

Life can be lived in so many ways by which it can be made delightful and purposeful. Being rational, valuing life more than anything, not letting emotions affect life's logical decisions, seeing things as how it really is - are few among the important conditions that a meaningful life demands. *Anna Karenina* magnifies her emotions, does not see things how it has to be seen, lacks will power, values her emotions more than the life and gives it all up. Life is to be artfully lived and not just for the sake of life. Only a good artist who fulfills the demands of life can make a beautiful art. A good artist lives, others just survive and some others die like *Anna Karenina*.

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