

Konstantin Levin's Rustic Life As A Remedy To The Urban Born Philosophical Questions And Amorous Suffering

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Abstract

Leo Tolstoy has had enough attention from the world for his unmatched literature to need a detailed introduction to be recognised. He was born in 1828, and wrote his masterpiece Anna Karenina in 1878, and War and Peace in 1869. Tolstoy later called 'Anna Karenina' as his first true novel. In the process of writing, 'War and Peace' was different from what is called a novel. In 'Anna Karenina', besides the life-journey of eponymous Anna, the autobiographical character of Levin is also given equally important treatment. Levin engages in farming, and it is one of his foremost goals to succeed in good farming. He engages in polemics about the science of farming with his contemporaries. Leo Tolstoy himself was an avid farmer, having rejected the aristocratic lifestyle. He read all the new developments in agriculture, and tried them at his large estate Yasnaya Polyana. Levin leaves the Zemstvos, or the local councils, saying that they were not enacting the new changes at the individual levels, but at state-wide level. Levin's story is given about half of space in this big novel of more than 1000 pages, and the numerous details of his life serve to very well accentuate his beliefs and experiences as a farmer.

Key-Words Realistic, Aristocracy, Rural, Estate, Farming, Muzhiks, Zemstvo, Rejection, Satisfaction.

Introduction

Konstantin Dmitrievich Levin spends most of his time in country environment, attending to his farm land, which is in thousands of acres. Much of this land is a wasteland, and he devotes a lot of care and time to increase the yield. There is a realistic description of this progress and the methods he uses along the way. There is even philosophy mixed in his thoughts about adventing his agricultural success. He begins to write a book about farming, but has to leave it in the middle of things because of his suffering over rejection from Kitty Shcherbatsky. Yet, it is his farming world that gives respite from that pain. Stepan Arkadyich even mentions his happiness' causes:

"No, you're a lucky man. You have everything you love. You love horses – you have them; dogs – you have them; hunting – you have it; farming – you have it."

He has two brothers, Sergei Koznyshev and Nikolai Levin both of whom do not help him in his plan for farming. Sergei Koznyshev has left his own portion to Levin's care, having even left it undivided. But it is not a burden to Levin, as he enjoys his farming activities very much. This is no secret that Levin was inspired by Tolstoy's own life's incidents and perceptions. Leo Tolstoy, though he was a big aristocrat of reputation, looked down upon the undeserved benefits reaped by aristocracy. He was a socialist, even though he underwent a grand moral crisis in 1870s, after having written both 'War and Peace' and 'Anna Karenina'. Leo Tolstoy even wore traditional peasant or muzhik dress for his life after a certain point, having rejected the ornate aristocratic regalia.

Levin even searches for the answers to farming problems in the great philosophers and discusses it with many big farmers around his society, because the farming involves intimate interaction with muzhik. Those muzhiks were very recently the property of landlords. They had very recently been emancipated by the Tsar. Levin, not as a landlord, but as a human being couldn't bring himself to feel as the master of these 'souls'. Though he irritates himself over the meagreness of profit he earns compared to other farmers, yet he can't overcome sympathy for those who do the work on his land. Having discussed the possibilities of advanced methods of farming, he tries the German and English inventions in agricultural machines on his land. The muzhiks reject his choices, and instead work by their own methods. They leave the machines in the fields, and at other times do not get them repaired. Levin frets a lot about it.

"Where are the people?' 'Five are making compote' (he meant compost). 'Four are shovelling oats – lest they go bad, Konstantin Dmitrich.' Levin knew very well that 'lest they go bad' meant that the English seed oats were already spoiled – again what he had ordered had not been done."

That is why farming is shown as a solace for the pangs of his love, because he gets lost in the farming works. This world of his farming can also be taken as a symbol of the Russian spirit, through being very different from the world of Kitty, Anna, Vronsky and Shcherbatskys. Nikolai Levin, Konstantin Levin's brother, even mocks his breach from zemstvos. He says the landlords are full of the native Russian spirit, and they work for the enjoyment, rather than for progress. In the beginning of the novel, Levin visits in St. Petersburg the home of Shcherbatskys in hope of proposing and winning Kitty's hand. Even before the ball, he is looked down upon by other aristocrats for his rustic dress and manners. Levin himself looks down upon their such refined behaviour. He is in utter confusion and pain in St. Petersburg, and soon returns to his lands with the heavy burden of the insult of rejection by Kitty. He plans for the harvesting in detail, and is almost euphoric when he sees the swathes of crop mowed by him in a big group of muzhiks. He eats with muzhiks, also sharing with them. He feels satisfied, but he is still searching an answer to the question of the meaning of life. It is here among muzhiks and farmland, and not in books of philosophy and in Moscow or St. Petersburg, he finds the final answer to his questions. A muzhik

mentions to him that another farmer is a blessed man. He says that he lives by helping others, while having a faith in God. Levin is shocked by the simplicity of this great philosophy. He at once begins to visualise his life. He plans of a happy married life with Kitty while behaving with his neighbour as suggested by Jesus Christ.

The rural pastoral setting also is a causative factor for philosophical debates about serfdom and equality among the educated elite. Many of them lead a jovial life, but some are serious about their farm work. They tell Levin the changes they have implemented on their lands. They discuss about the validity or unworthiness of Zemstvos, the committees of landlords and the affluent for the interflow of new advancements, the rules for behaviour with peasants, the customs almost tipped toward the benefit of aristocrats. Levin has already stopped going to these meetings when the novel begins. After rejection, he returns to farming, and expects this pain to pass away too, like others in his past. Yet even in three months, it does not abate. Still, the environment is not without effect on him, as the novelist writes:

"Painful memories were screened from him more and more by the inconspicuous but significant events of country life."

The novelist also writes about his experience thus:

"Though many of those plans with which he had returned to the country had not been carried out, he had observed the main thing – purity of life.

Though he isn't able to ward off his solitude, he gets to feel satisfied otherwise completely. As a beautiful spring sets out, he becomes immersed in the science of farming. He discusses it with Agafya Mikhailovna, and he starts his book on farming. His passion for farming suggests that, like him, farmers should read about and explore the newest advancements in farming around the world. In his book, he proposes that the most important thing ignored in farming researches is that the character of the worker is as significant a determiner as the climate and soil.

"...and that, consequently, all propositions in the science of farming ought to be deduced not from the givens of soil and climate alone, but also from the known, immutable character of the worker."

Here, like in much of Dostoyevsky's literature, the native spirit of Russia is echoed to be influencing the worker's behaviour.

There is a scenic description of Levin's estate when he travels through the estate in springtime, enjoying the joyful spirit of the cattle, workers and the land bursting with spring greenery. The streams look dazzling, and he feels a deep satisfaction that his healthy body provides him with. Yet he is also vexed at the harrow not being ready. The carpenter hadn't repaired it in time. The agricultural world of Levin is quite emphatically juxtaposed with the urban and palatial lives of Anna and Vronsky and Shcherbatskys. Leo Tolstoy uses the unmatched style of intimate realism, which carries us into the mind of Levin. Levin sees the kand around him and plans things.

He also tells others the things to be carried out. An elaborate, real place and its activities are created almost concretely as the novel progresses. Levin takes not only the charge of supervisor, but also a planner, worker and manager. The engine running his estate's life. He plans the big and the small details of his estate:

"The carting of manure had to begin earlier, so that everything would be finished before the early mowing. The far field had to be ploughed continually, so as to keep it fallow. The hay was to be got in not on half shares with the peasants but by hired workers."

Konstantin Levin is irritable, yet he doesn't get sullen with the workers who tend to do the work their own way. He gets irritated by the steward Vassily Fyodorovich when the latter expresses in the tone common to all workers that all the horses have gone weak, Levin is irritated by the tone suggesting that however Levin may try, the yield and work of the farm will be 'as God grants'. He has already decided to work hard to change the gains in his favour, yet despite the suggestion of those decisions' being thwarted, he doesn't lose his happy state of mind:

"If Levin felt happy in the cattle- and farm-yards, he felt still happier in the fields."

He goes to supervise the clover-sowing through the woods on the estate, and is happier in the fields. His happy mood leads to various plans being thought as he moves onward on a horse. He thinks of enhancing the farming quality by digging ponds, planting willows, cultivating grass for fodder, the manuring of the fields:

"The further he rode, the happier he felt, and plans for the estate, one better than another, arose in his mind: to plant willows along the meridional lines of all the fields, so that the snow would not stay too long under them; to divide them into six fertilized fields and three set aside for grass; to build a cattle-yard at the far end of the field and dig a pond; to set up movable pens for the cattle so as to manure the fields. And then he would have eight hundred acres of wheat, two hundred and fifty of potatoes, and four hundred of clover, and not a single acre exhausted."

The pangs of amorous solitude take up a lot of time in Levin's schedule. When his friend Stepan Arkadyich arrives at his estate to spend some time, he is all the more happy. Yet he can't keep from thinking about Kitty. One night, he sees Kitty passing by his fields in a troika, and feels the effect of both the lands and the love. He feels sad, but later his attention's occupation by the various activities on the estate lends him a mood of sufficiency. He adopts a new attitude as the spring blossoms over the land. The lush greenery marked by the fertility of the land and the unpolluted country air stimulate a happiness in him. His mind becomes as active as the mind of Anna Karenina when she is overcome by the suffering over her son's separation. She thinks as if in a trance just before she commits suicide. It is the opposite state of mind, but both minds are thrown into activity.

"And on that beautiful spring day he felt that the memory of her was not painful for him at all."

Stepan Arkadyich goes with him hunting, and there are the realistic portrait of hunting, which inspired Hemingway with his descriptions of bull-fighting, fishing, and hunting in Africa. Levin's behaviour is tinged by the poetry-like spirit about farming and learning in general. Stepan too discusses his objects of passion. Levin tells him about the progress of his book, his knowledge gained from reading eminent philosophers and writers. Levin goes on more and more accepting himself and finding a new joy and Stepan Arkadyich too behaves tenderly and diligently with Levin. Later Levin goes for hunting with Stepan Arkadyich and Laska, his dog. They talk about the attraction of country life and Levin's happiness. When Stepan Arkadyich calls him happy because of his lifestyle, Levin neatly sums up his attitude toward his tenets for life:

"Maybe it's because I rejoice over what I have and don't grieve over what I don't have..."

Levin as a farmer helps Levin the man in many attributes. Leo Tolstoy, though heavily learned man, propounds the importance of working with one's hands and body for a well-balanced mind. Levin generally dislikes those landlords who do not involve themselves, if not work shoulder to shoulder, with the muzhiks. Levin's bodily satisfaction makes itself conspicuous to him when he mows the acres of crop with muzhiks till midnight. He looks upon his work, the mown swathes, with satisfaction, and is made happy by the moonlit night. Later in the novel, when he has been married to Kitty and her sister comes there with her children, Levin has to teach the child Grisha. At one point, he gets irritated by the pretentious behaviour from all of those around him: Varenka, Stepan Arkadyich, Sergei Ivanovich, Vasenka Veslovsky, Kitty's mother, and even Kitty. Even in such mood, he finds solace in his work. He turns to his managerial plans for the estate. He feels disgusted by their ignorance toward the work matters which sustain their lives.

"'It's all a holiday for them,' he thought, 'but these are no holiday affairs, they won't wait and without them life is impossible.'"

Toward the end of the novel, Levin introspects heavily as his spiritual conquest is ignited by the muzhik Fyodor's simple words about the landlord who behaves in a godly way. Levin thinks and thinks, inventing questions and answers from the inspiration from memories of common situations. He recalls children's behaviour during their being admonished by their mother, and he likens the children's destructive tendencies to grown-ups' interest for strange and new incidents, instead of for the planned and commonplace procedures.

"'We destroy only because we're spiritually sated. Exactly like children!

'Where do I get the joyful knowledge I have in common with the muzhik, which alone gives me peace of mind? Where did I take it from?'"

He answers this question as he expresses his hard-gained faith in the truth. He believes the truth is universal, all-encompassing and is already known by everyone. Knowing it was discovering it back in the simplest of things in one's knowledge. The root of all behaviour was present in everyone:

"In place of each of the Church's beliefs there could be put the belief in serving the good instead of one's needs. And each of them not only did not violate it but was indispensable for the accomplishment of that chief miracle, constantly manifested on earth, which consists in it being possible for each person, along with millions of the most diverse people, sages and holy fools, children and old men – along with everyone, with some peasant, with Lvov, with Kitty, with beggars and kings – to understand one and the same thing with certainty and to compose that life of the soul which alone makes life worth living and alone is what we value."

Conclusion

Leo Tolstoy was a chronicler of emotions, interactions and relationships at societal, familial and individual levels. In 'Anna Karenina', alongwith the arduous life-story of Anna Karenina, he laid down the autobiographical Konstantin Levin's journey from ignorance to doubt, and from their to understanding and happiness. Levin's life was inseparable from the rustic and agricultural world of his estate. He goes through studious, full of struggle, uncertain, painful as well as joyful phases of the journey. Yet the life persists on and he is led where he accepts the truth ever-present in him and everyone else. Leo Tolstoy called this novel his 'first true novel' because he was able to present not a slice of life but a complete, realistic journey from ignorance to culmination of the quest.

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