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**PERUSAL ON A FOLK NARRATIVE: *HOW MUCH LAND DOES A MAN NEED*
BY LEO TOLSTOY**

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ABSTRACT

Is it enough to evaluate a literary work only as stated by its content? Certainly not. To be aware of the work concerned, one must have abundant comprehension. It is foremost to be conscious of its literary features and context. This perusal focuses on the parable, *How Much Land Does a Man Need?* by the Russian author Leo Tolstoy, who spread his new faith in religion through his short stories. The title refers to a rhetorical question, a question that does not anticipate the reaction. Readers consider it a masterpiece because of its approach and ease of reading.

Key Words: literary features, parable, rhetorical question, and Leo Tolstoy.



Count Lev Nikolayevich, Graf Tolstoy, generally known as Leo Tolstoy, was born on September 9, 1828, in Tula Governorate, Russian Empire. He is renowned for his writings, which include novels, short stories, and essays. War and Peace and Anna Karenina are two of his fine novels. The best instance of a novella is The Death of Ivan Ilyich, is his literary contribution. In his last years, he used to write based on religious principles, which he apparently showed through his short stories such as How Much Land Does a Man Need, God Sees the Truth but Waits, and A Prisoner in the Caucasus, which are regarded as parables (educating moral standards). He died of pneumonia at the age of 82 on November 20, 1910, in Ryazan Governorate, Russian Empire.

The chosen short story, “How Much Land Does a Man Need,” is written during his last years of literary career, in which he loses faith in the church’s propagating dogma, is expelled from the Russian orthodox church, and starts to spread his own faith, which includes tenets: loving enemies, abandoning anger and lust, not resisting evil, and taking oaths. The short story revolves around one of his tenets, 'Do not lust' which implies that it is unhealthy to have an insatiable thirst for impermanent things since it ruins life. Pahom, the protagonist of the story, runs his life hard with the only aim of possessing more and more lands. It is a fact that greed eventually ends only in death. Similarly, Pahom knows the truth when he breathes last and accordingly loses his life because of greed. Like this art’s center theme, the 1965 movie Neerkumizhi’s song also conveys the same as: “Aadi Adangum Vaazhkaiyada, Aaradi Nilame Sondhamada” (Suratha 1:31:50).

As his former works depicted the rich group, he pens these sorts of short stories to reflect commoners. The short story How Much Land Does a Man Need was published in 1886 in Russian, which was translated into English by Louise and Aylmer Maude in a collection named Twenty-Three Tales (1906). It is set in a Russian village during the 19th century. The work operates in the Russian form style of skaz, meaning to tell which is an imitation of an oral dialect of story telling in a written format. The selected story is written in third-person narrative and conveyed in the past tense. The story has IX parts or scenes. The title raises a question for which the author answers in the final line.

The story is also regarded as a folk narrative. According to Prachishri Mishra and Swayam Prabha Satpathy, “Folk narrative (tales) is the reflection of culture for a particular group of people; it’s an amalgamation of the traditions common to a particular culture, subculture, or group” (1). West German Film Scarabea is the recreation of this short story. It was directed by Hans Jurgen Syberberg in 1969. Martin Veyron adapted this story and recreated it into a graphic novel. Katha Sagar’s Zameen episode is based on this story.

The story takes place in a Russian peasant village. Pahom is a peasant and a member of a commune. One day, Pahom's wife and her elder sisters discuss village life and city life. His elder sister boasts about city life; on the other hand, his wife defends her lifestyle. Pahom overhears the conversation, commenting that if he gets a lot of land, he should not fear even the devil itself. Unfortunately, the devil listens to him and accepts this as a challenge.

Afterwards, a small landowner who lives on good terms with the peasants in the village decides to sell her lands. An inn keeper bargains for it. The peasants are alarmed, as they know if the hand is exchanged with the inn keeper, he will punish them with fines. So, the peasants of the commune offered a better price than him and decided to buy the land individually. Pahom purchases a farm of 40 acres, pays half the price with a lot of sacrifice, and undertakes to give the remaining amount within ten years. After his fortunate harvesting, his tolerance is tested by his villagers. He hears news about the Volga commune and connects his family with it. He becomes rich but has some issues with renting the land.

Then, he comes to know about the land of Bashkirs, for whom Pahom is rewarded with an offer of receiving as much land as he wants for the price of 1000 roubles with a condition. The condition is that Pahom has to cover the land he wants by walking, but he should be in the starting place before the sun sets. Pahom gives it a try. Because of his excessive desire to seize the land, he hurts his health, then finally dies. His covetousness snatches his soul from his body. The skimming process may be so deceptive that the reader thinks that it is a moral lesson alone. Though it is a short story, the author employs numerous literary techniques. It is crucial to analyze the work of art from a literary perspective. The historical context of the story

is that it is nearly the time when the 1861 'Emancipation Act of Emperor Alexander II' came into effect. The act ended the serfdom system, under which each peasant was provided with a particular criterion of land. In view of the fact that many peasants become prosperous and start showing off other peasants, this makes them envious. Pahom is a poor peasant who compares himself with others and loses his heart content.

Since it handles one of the main mottos from the Bible, its antagonist, a person who gets the protagonist into trouble, is the devil, the representative of all the evils. It sits behind the oven and listens to Pahom's words. The devil wants to prove its power by making Pahom forfeit his life. He disguises himself as an unknown peasant, the dealer, and the chief of Bashkirs by the way he leads Pahom to his (Pahom's) death. In the beginning of the story, Pahom's wife and her elder sister, who married a tradesman, go on to discuss humans' lives in city and village. The two women dignify their own lives and show contempt for each other. The conflict arises when Pahom listens to the women's chatter, starts to think about the advantages of having land, and says his hubris statement. The land lady, who owns three hundred acres, engaged her steward, an old soldier, who levies fines for peasants, even if not intentionally. In order to create Pahom's destruction, the devil rings alarmed from the innkeeper who is going to buy the land lady's land and whom the peasants believe will worry them more with fines than the land lady's steward. Pahom compares himself with his neighbor, who bought 50 acres and registered for 40 acres by selling colt, half of their bees, and hiring out one of his sons as a laborer, getting his salary in advance, and borrowing the rest from his brother-in-law. He pays half the price down and promises to pay the remaining amount within ten years. The devil gives him trouble in the commune from other peasants, which causes Pahom to go to the district court and makes him move to Volga commune. On account of falling into the pit of boasting, the devil supplies him with a good harvest but generates the other issue that forefronts his loss of life.

Bashkirs in this work of art are described as people who live in tents on the steppes by a river. They are stout, ignorant, and good-natured. They bestow Pahom by giving him as much land as he wants, with conditions on the price of one thousand roubles a day. They don't know Russian language or do any work, instead enjoying nature. They make their living by being

rapacious people like Pahom, who is deprived of money and existence. Tolstoy weaves themes such as city life vs. village life, self-dignity, ambitious thoughts, poor man's plight, self-centered personality, insatiableness, lack of awareness about life, change of behavior, and questing for material possessions, which present the story that guides the reader into the commune entity.

The author uses symbols such as land, the disguised devil, the sun, kumiss etc., which represent material possessions, death, mortality, and the joy of the community. The work contains several literary devices, such as imagery (Pahom's dream), parallelism (while comparing Pahom's health state to the sun), paradox (the man's desire would become opposite at the end), foreshadowing (Pahom's death foreshadowed through his dream), realism (the woman's speech), and dynamic (the main character develops through moving). A rhetorical device, dramatic irony, is used in which the reader knows that he is going to his end, but Pahom thinks that he will go through development.

The plot construction is sequential since it has conflict (the problems arise), resolution (the issues get solved), exposition (the devil decides to give him land), rising action (Pahom's dynamic quest for land), climax (the task in Bashkirs' land), falling action (Pahom's reaching), and denouement (the effect of greed). The use of words in the English translation of the story is expertized; instances such as piqued, disparaged, turf, etc. The use of adages such as "Loss and gain are brothers twain.", and sentences like "you will die as you are living"; "If you don't return on the same day to the spot whence you started, your money is lost."; "An hour to suffer, a lifetime to live."; "I have lost my life."; "Six feet from his head to his heels was all he needed." are to be cherished (Tolstoy, prt. I to IX). The response to the interrogation "How Much Land Does a Man Need," is that the man requires only six feet from his head to heels. Erich Fromm's statement, "Greed is a bottomless pit which exhausts the person in an endless effort to satisfy their needs without ever reaching satisfaction," from *Escape for Freedom* strengthens Leo Tolstoy's moral lesson (Fromm, Ch. 4). The above-mentioned are a few features of an assessment of a literary work. Despite the fact that the writer embellishes the work, his focal point is to reform society's behavior through his ideas. Therefore, the reader should appreciate the literary art as well as walk behind its path.



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