

TURGENEV AND RUSSIAN NIHILISM

Dr. Forum Patel

Campus Coordinator (SPEC), Assistant Professor, Sardar Patel Institute of Applied Science,
Sardar Patel Education Campus (SPEC) Bakrol,
Anand, Gujarat, India.
foram.digitalaura@gmail.com

Abstract

Since Turgenev attempted to undermine the political authority and class hierarchy, his nihilism was largely political, social, and psychological in nature. Turgenev's Bazarov (a prototype of Nihilists) was successful in getting people to wonder and be critical of society and tradition, making many people uncomfortable as they played with nihilism. The terrible question of whether existence has any meaning is immediately prompted by the demise of God and the rejection of Christian principles. Turgenev decided to shed light on aspects of life through the conclusion since this inquiry and the accompanying credence toward a universe devoid of meaning and moral precepts had the propensity to generate sentiments of extreme depression and despair. The paper throws light on Russian nihilism in regard to its treatment in Russia and in the hands of Turgenev in literary world. It also discussed the before and after effect of the Russian nihilism and how Turgenev enters into picture that made a huge impact on Russian literature.

Keywords: Russian Nihilism, Turgenev, Russian Literature

INTRODUCTION

Since the exploration of nihilism and its effects on civilization by intellectuals and authors like Nietzsche and Turgenev, it has been more than a century. Nihilism has, as he predicted, had a significant impact on 20th-century society and morals. Its ominous tone has given rise to a lot of fear, rage, and worry. Interestingly, Turgenev foresaw many of the elements of postmodernity as a radical skeptic who was fascinated with language, knowledge, and truth. The fact that he thought we could finally overcome nihilism at a tremendous cost is important to notice. The chosen topic's actual significance is a result of this. We might then figure out the best way for humanity if we make it through the process of eradicating all worldviews.

Nihilism offers the framework for a philosophy of knowledge in the contemporary day. Nihilism's methodology can be summed up as an anti-methodology that is used to create and destroy knowledge. This implies that knowledge is an unstable construct, which goes against the widespread belief that knowledge is unchanging and factual.

Only if we do not view societal issues as self-sufficient in the context of global culture can we continue to be satisfied with lyrical poetry and maintain that tragedy is the ultimate form of art. This can occur if we only focus on the individual or if we neglect societies that aren't our own. Thus, Turgenev, the author, is also the greatest Russian European, not a representation of the pan-Slavic notion, which amounts to an egocentric statement of the culturally difficult nature of the relationship between a nation and mankind as a whole and a nation's ability to naturally integrate into humanity through its actual cultural contributions, rather than through coercion, is truly its greatest accomplishment. Turgenev did succeed in assimilating the Russian people into western civilization. But he is only a human person, and part of his greatness comes from realizing that. And a nation's ability to naturally integrate into humanity through its actual cultural contributions, rather than through coercion, is truly its greatest accomplishment. Turgenev did succeed in assimilating the Russian people into western civilization. But he is only a human person, and part of his greatness comes from realizing that.

OBJECTIVE

Nihilism is not a notion that appeared out of nowhere in contemporary philosophy. Nihilism is a philosophy that is becoming more popular in Russian culture and academics, and Bazarov is an exponent of it. The researcher is interested in discussing the impact of how crude scientism can ignore the necessity of such trust and beliefs. Turgenev is showing the effect of being a nihilist, or how it affects the pillars of civilization, which are based on the strength of beliefs and foundations of such realistic popular minds with their greater history of success.

In particular, the hunt for a different interpretation of this relationship preserves the significant and far-reaching discoveries of radical nihilism by Nietzsche, which is preceded by Turgenev's exploration of selfhood. In conducting the research, the researcher attempted and covered the following goals:

- To critically evaluate the philosophy, genesis, and practice of nihilism.
- To compare the elements of Russian nihilism and their treatment in the works of Turgenev.

SIGNIFICANCE AND RATIONALE OF THE STUDY

One of the most contentious and disputed topics in the scope of world literature has always been the history of generations. Since the beginning of literary literature, this theme has been a central motif. In the history of humanity, intergenerational conflict has been regarded as a natural phenomenon. It only makes sense that when human experiences are translated into literary genres like novels, the tensions and confrontations of multiple generations rather than just one are shown. Every generation evolves in terms of its own sociocultural ideals and tenets. Additionally, they have their own unique perspectives on the social experiences of their own times. Therefore, it can be claimed that these conflicts in real life frequently find their way into literary works, particularly those written by Russian authors who emphasize the philosophy of human existence. Due to the unique nature of the human self, conflicts have existed among humans since the dawn of the human race. How we handle the various aspects of conflict, which are fuelled not only by animosity but also by interests and ideals that appear to be incompatible, is crucial to our ability to survive in this environment. They are all pertinent and pervasive issues in the work that was picked.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The data mainly includes literary works, books, journals, research papers, articles, and subject-based discussions on authentic websites. The texts of Ivan Sergevitch Turgenev are read and re-read so as to get illuminated their inherent political, moral, and spiritual philosophy against the backdrop of the intensification of anarchist and nihilistic activities in their contemporary worlds.

RATIONALE

5.1 The Russian Literature:

The literature of Russia or its émigrés, as well as the Russian-language literature of several independent nations that were once a part of Russia, the Soviet Union, or both, are referred to as Russian literature. Even the most basic critiques of contemporary English literature are bound to include some reference to Russian influence.

The origins of Russian literature can be drawn to the Middle Ages when epics and chronicles in Old Russian were collected. Literature turned more important during the Age of Enlightenment, and beginning in the early 1830s, Russian literature endured an astonishing golden age in poetry, prose, and drama. Russian literature split into Soviet and white émigré subgenres following the 1917 Revolution. The Soviet Union imposed ideological censorship while simultaneously ensuring universal literacy and a highly developed book printing industry. Nearly all of the literary subgenres that are known today can be attributed to Russian authors.

5.2 Concept of Nihilism:

Nihilism derives from the Latin word "nihil," which means "nothing." Its meanings include a doctrine among the Russian intellectuals of the 1860s and 1870s, opposing all authority in favor of individualism, and the rejection of all distinctions in moral value, constituting a willingness to disprove all prior theories of morality. Nihilism is the idea that nothing can be known or conveyed, and that all values are unfounded. It is frequently linked to a severe skepticism that abhors existence as well as extreme pessimism. A true nihilist would have no beliefs, no allegiances, and no goals other than perhaps they want to destroy.

In its most basic form, Nihilism is the conviction that no values have any foundation and that nothing can be known or communicated. Extreme pessimism and a radical dubitation that denounces actuality are constantly associated with it. A true nihilist would have no beliefs, no ties, and nothing other than perhaps the desire to destroy. Nietzsche, who argued that its corrosive effects would eventually destroy all moral, religious, and metaphysical convictions and precipitate the greatest crisis in human history, is most commonly associated with nihilism, despite the fact that few philosophers would claim to be nihilists. Artists, social critics, and philosophers have been captivated by nihilistic themes like an epistemological failure, value destruction, and cosmic purposelessness throughout the 20th century. In their efforts to reduce nihilism's destructive potential, the existentialists, for instance, helped popularize its tenets in the middle of the century. By the end of the century, an attitude of indifference, frequently associated with anti-foundationalism, replaced existential despair as a response to nihilism.

Nihilism, like many other philosophical terms like 'realism,' 'positivism,' and 'pragmatism,' has come to mean more than one idea. In the following, two definitions of the term are distinguished: nihilisms one (1) and two (2). Consider the following to get a sense of what it means to be a nihilist. Concerning witches, phlogiston, and the ether, we are all nihilists. What are they all connected to? They do not appear to be real to us. To be a nihilist1 with regard to x is to deny that x exists. However, it should be obvious that one cannot be a nihilist as a simpliciter. A person can be a moral nihilist (who denies the existence of moral properties), a theological nihilist (who denies the existence of deities), a doxastic nihilist (who denies the existence of beliefs), or a

nihilist (who denies the existence of any other purported property or object); however, in order to be a nihilist, a person must deny the existence of something specifically. Even if one holds global nihilism, or denies that everything exists, the global modifier is still required.

To be a nihilist² means to believe that life has no purpose is pointless, or is not worth living. To put it another way, it would appear that nihilism² is nothing more than a variant of nihilism¹, in which the adherent denies the existence of ‘meaningfulness in life.’ There is a flaw in this description of nihilist²: A negative practical attitude toward life is a hallmark of nihilism². The melancholy nihilism² may come to her (melancholy) nihilism² stance in the cultural imagination because she (melancholy) holds a nihilism-1 view about gods or morality, but these types of nihilism are distinct. For instance, it is possible to deny that life is worth living while rejecting theological nihilism-1; because one believes that life is a meaningless experience and is the plaything of an omnipotent being who demands obedience, one might hold this combination of views. Alternately, moral nihilism¹ can be accepted while continuing to view life as fully valuable; because one finds the metaphysics of morality to be completely irrelevant to our actual lives, one might have this combination of views. This is something that distinguishes the theory of ‘nihilism’ on a general basis; however, the discussion that follows provides a comprehensive analysis of the philosophy of Nihilism.

DISCUSSION

Nihilism came to be associated in Russia with a revolutionary movement that opposed the state, church, and family and was loosely organized from 1860 to 1917. Rationalism and materialism were emphasized as the sole sources of knowledge, and individual liberty as the ultimate objective by the movement. Nihilists denounced God and religious authority as antithetical to freedom by rejecting man’s spiritual essence in favor of a solely materialistic one. By the late 1870s, anyone associated with covert political groups advocating terrorism and assassination was considered a nihilist. The movement eventually degenerated into an ideology of subversion, destruction, and anarchy.

The term “nihilism,” which was used to describe a revolutionary movement in Russia, comes from the Latin word “nihil.” Although Turgenev does not appear to have first used the term to describe Russian thought, he certainly popularized it in his book *Fathers and Sons* in 1862.

The term had been created in the eighteenth century and was used to describe critics like Jean Paul Richter and Louis Sebastien Mercier. Nadezhdin, who applied the term to Russian writers, reportedly used it for the first time in Russia in 1821. Turgenev probably used the word “sceptic” to describe pessimistic philosophers like Schopenhauer and Bruno. Others then gave the word a similar meaning as a result. Thus, “Berni is trying to make sly fun of the skeptics, or as he expresses it, the nihilists” was stated in a review of a work by Professor U. Berni of the University of Kazan that appeared in *Sovremennik* in 1858 (Berni, 1858).

The publication of Turgenev’s novel, which was interpreted as satire on the upcoming generation of Russian writers, sparked an immediate outcry whose bitterness served as a reminder of the violent divide that existed among the intellectuals of the time. The remainder of the century could be heard from its echoes.

It’s important to look at some of these so-called “nihilist” points of view from the 1960s. If we move away from the exaggerated viewpoints that Bazarov presents in *Fathers and Sons*, we should emphasize that such aphorisms as the following are currently applicable: ‘Love is nothing more than sexual attraction.’ (52), and ‘what is natural is moral’ (92), which reads, ‘Man is an animal.’ (101), and ‘The belly is the centre of life’ (157), and that ‘photography is higher than art’ (172), and ‘The end justifies the means’ (164), as well as ‘Ten thousand heads for the good of humanity’ (190), it can be seen that one of these maxims expresses the anti-aesthetic viewpoint that Pisarev (1840-1868) would later present in such extreme form. Naturally, the attitude is not novel; it has frequently been reflected by other authors and times. However, the concept shocked literary society in Russia and inspired satire not only in Turgenev’s *Fathers and Sons* but also in Tolstoy’s *The Contaminated Family*, Dostoyevsky’s *Goncharov’s*, *Herzen’s*, and Tolstoy’s works.

Russian nihilism was based on the idea that there is no comprehensible meaning, objective truth, or value in the world. Many liberals in Russia had been dissatisfied for some time with what they thought was meaningless intelligentsia discussion. The Russian establishment was shocked when the nihilists challenged all traditional values. After getting involved in the fight for reform, they went from being merely philosophical to major political forces. The Decembrists’ previous action, which occurred in 1825, and the financial and political difficulties brought on by the Crimean War, which caused a large number of Russians to lose faith in political institutions, facilitated their path.

The nihilists started by trying to get the aristocracy to support reform. After being unsuccessful there, they turned to the farmers. The Populist movement was the name given to their campaign because it focused on the common people rather than the aristocracy or landed gentry. It was based on the belief that ordinary people could peacefully and wisely lead the country.

According to the great sociologist Mikhailovsky, nihilism was just a growing pain: there was a genuine and very reasonable desire for work and practical action disguised as youthful fanaticism, rudeness, and exaggeration.

The significance of *Sportsman’s Sketches* (*Zapiski Okhotnika*) is not the subject of contention regarding Turgenev’s place in Russian literature. Even though the period preceding the peasants’ emancipation is depicted in these hunting notes—a period that has merely historical significance for Russian culture today—

they keep Turgenev from getting older. Khor and Kalinych, MalinovaiaVoda, or Raspberry Water, and other hunter's tales are classical works of general artistic merit, despite the fact that they no longer have the publicist value they once did during the struggle for peasant emancipation. In the social history of this battle, Turgenev satisfied a respectable scholarly mission, battling for social opportunity during a period that is presently thought back upon as the verifiable past. The hunter's tales are no longer relevant from the publicist's perspective. Naturally, Turgenev's publicist writings have historical value, but this is just a good tombstone, a foundation for an artistic monument.

CONCLUSION

Turgenev is almost certainly Russia's first novelist. Evgeny Onegin by Pushkin and A Hero of Our Time by Lermontov are still too lyrical and satirical to be considered Great Russian novels. The novels written by Reshetnikov can be discounted without affecting Russian art. Turgenev was, in fact, the first great novelist to write in Russia. His novels had a powerful impact because they brought up a cultural conflict and a conflict of worldviews. Nearly every new Turgenev novel was eagerly anticipated, and discussions about them began even before the books were printed.

This took place within Russia's cultural life and in Russia itself. However, what took place abroad? Before Turgenev, Russian literature had not been well-known outside of Russia or in Europe. However, prior to his novels, Russia's belle letters certainly contained material that was worth reading—Russian literature had not been lacking in artistic quality. However, to claim that foreign interest in Turgenev's novels and, by extension, Russian literature is accidental would be superficial. Perhaps novels are the first medium through which one acquires an understanding of national literature—the literature of a cultural community in relation to other cultural communities—in its universal sense. The novel may, in fact, serve as a mirror of a current national culture in the context of contemporary global history.

Russian literature entered world culture through the novels of Turgenev. Just like Russian culture, it became a global issue. This is not by chance. The hero who brought the Russian people and their national culture into the world of art and culture was Turgenev, and he has remained so ever since.

REFERENCES

- [1] Masaryk, Thomas, the Spirit of Russia, The Macmillan Company, New York, 1928.
- [2] Norman, the Russian Intelligentsia, Progress Publishers; Moscow, 1957.
- [3] Freeborn, Richard, Turgenev: A Study, Progress Publishers; Moscow, 1960.
- [4] Freeborn, Richard, Turgenev: The Novelist's Novelist, A Study, Oxford University Press; New York, 1960.
- [5] Yarmolinsky, Abrahm, and Turgenev: The Man, His Art, and His Age, Collier Books; London, 1961.
- [6] Clarrson, Jesse D., A History of Russia, Longman Publication; New York, 1962.
- [7] Body, Alexander F, Aspects of the Russian Novel, Chatto and Windus; London, 1972.
- [8] XDaniels, Robert, Russia: The Roots of Confrontation, Harvard University Press; London, 1985.
- [9] Carr, L. Karen. The Banalization of Nihilism: twentieth-century Responses to Meaninglessness, New York: State University of New York, 1992.
- [10] Bloom, Harold, Modern Critical View – Ivan Turgenev, Chelsea House Publishers; Philadelphia, 2003.
- [11] Turgenev, Ivan. Father