RAISING SOCIAL ISSUES IN THE SHORT STORIES OF ANTON CHEKHOV

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ABSTRACT
Anton Chekhov started writing short stories in the form of anecdotes. He developed the technique of the stream of consciousness in his stories, later adopted by James Joyce, Virginia Woolf and many others.

His stories show that no matter how meticulously we go through the characters, the human condition remains mysterious. Chekhov was a practising doctor, an environmentalist, a researcher and a philanthropist. Many modern short story writers believe Chekhov to be the originator of the modern short story. Raymond Carver believed that Chekhov was the greatest of all short story writers.

His stories deal with different shades of human psychology in different conditions. These stories include "Bet", "The Lottery Ticket", Lady with the Lapdog", "Husband", "Excellent People", "Fat and Thin". Chekhov's stories are as wonderful and significant today as when they first appeared.

KEYWORDS: Anton Chekhov, Anecdotes, Consciousness, Realism

In this era of literature short story has emerged as a prominent form of storytelling. Its single and compact plot structure keeps reader spellbound. Anton Pavlovich Chekhov (1860-1904) is known as the great specialist of the short story among all genres. Born in Taganrog, Russia in a lower middle class family he started writing anecdotes to support his family and education. He is best known for his innovation of the stream of consciousness technique in his stories, which very much inspired modern short story writers like James Joyce, Virginia Woolf and others. His writing is marked by a profound and meticulous study of the human condition in various circumstances. He was different in his genre because of his impressionistic portrayal of the true realism of the human soul.

Realism has been expressed through symbolism. He also draws the attention of the audience, thus stimulating moral thought, and stirring reaction. Realism is also defined as art-imitating life that is source. This is a fitting account of Anton Chekhov's stories, for they tend to show the stagnant, helpless quality of Russian society in the latter part of the 19th century. We should observe the remarks "The suffering we see around us these days - and there's plenty of it - is at least a sign that society has reached a certain moral level." Hence, while the portrayal of life here seemed 'gloomy and pessimistic', it was still good for theatre in that it presented issues which audiences could identify with. It was also the more intellectual theatre when the story writer could express their views, compared with the conventional dramas that won him English readers and made him famous unknown to the world until World War I. It was Constance Garnett's translations that won him English readers and made him famous worldwide. George Bernard Shaw was one of the first non-Russians to praise Chekhov's plays. He subtitled his Heartbreak House "A Fantasia in the Russian Manner on English Themes" and observed resemblance between the quandary of the British landed class and that of their Russian counterparts as portrayed by Chekhov. "The same nice people, the same utter futility". Despite his early death, Anton Chekhov left a large corpus of short stories. He was awarded the Pushkin Prize in 1888 for his volume of short stories. In the 'Twilight’ his talent was acknowledged by J M Murray as early as
1920 as 'a standard by which modern literary effort must be measured'. Chekhov is known as a pioneer of the plotless story. He developed a number of technical innovations in the art and craft of short story. Chekhov never had any philosophical theory of life to explain. His great talent lay in his day to day depiction of life around him. He believed that 'literature is called artistic when it depicts life as it is.' He did not present life as completely white or completely black, rather he put gray shades in life. He maintained a fine emotional balance between characters, simultaneously tragic and comic, pathetic and ridiculous.

Chekhov’s modern translation that brought him fame worldwide was the rendering by Ronand Hingley, The Oxford Chekhov *. Among the greatest of his mature stories are 'Ward No. Six', My Life', 'Lady with the Lapdog', 'Difficult People', 'Husband', 'Fat and Thin' and others. All stories are characterized by their subtle blending of realism and naturalism and unique combination of comedy, tragedy, and pathos.

'Bet', the famous story of Chekhov argues between the question of which is better, a death penalty or a life in prison; undoubtedly life is superior in all conditions over death. And it is knowledge that makes life meaningful, that is why realizing the power of knowledge the young lawyer denounced the two millions and wrote to the Banker:

To prove to you in action how I despise all that you live by, I renounce the two millions of which I once dreamed as of paradise and which now I despise. To deprive myself of the right to the money I shall go out from here five hours before the time fixed, and so break the compact….'*

A same incident, what can be important for one can be unimportant for another is beautifully shown in the story An Incident.

While Vanya and Nina are deeply hurt with the kitten’s death, their mother is worried about their dirty looks and their night gowns. Children consider the death of the kitten no lesser than the death of a human being, while their mother takes it in an easy manner as a part of day to day life.

Modern problems like monotonous life and infidelity are the central theme of the story 'Lady with the Lapdog', it starts with an affair that begins usually but ends in an unforeseen way.

'Husband' is the story of a jealous husband who feels envious when he watches his wife dancing merrily with a soldier.

'Fat and Thin' shows the duality of human relationship, finely explored in the interaction of two grown men, who were once schoolboys together.

That man is mysterious in all conditions, is beautifully shown in the story 'An Enigmatic Nature', when a budding young author meets a pretty lady on a railway carriage; several shades of his enigmatic nature are revealed.

Raymond Carver who wrote 'Errand', the short story about Chekhov’s death, strongly believed him to be the greatest of all short story writers and put his remark- “Chekhov’s stories are as wonderful and necessary now as when they first appeared. It is not only the immense number of stories he wrote – for few, if any, writers have ever done more–it is the awesome frequency with which he produced masterpiece stories that shrieve (sic) us as well as delight and move us, that lay bare our emotions in ways only true art can accomplish”.

References:-
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4. Ronand Hingley, The Oxford Chekhov (9 vols, 1964-80)