

CHAPTER V

CONTEXTUAL RELEVANCE OF CHEKHOV

AND PREMCHAND

In the third and fourth chapter of this thesis, the short stories of Anton Chekhov and Premchand have been analyzed keeping in the mind the problems and suffering of subalterns of Indian society. Both the writers under interrogation were able to foresee the problems of the society, in which they were living, to be faced by the people in future. They not only took up the problems of their time but also their effects on the social environment. Though every writer takes situation in his writings from the environment but the influence and implications of great writers like Anton Chekhov and Premchand become universal because such a great understanding of basic human nature was rare. In a letter to Harry T. Baker, Frank Goewey Jones justly said that he who is able to see the life steadily and whole may tell what he has seen in very simple language with profound effect (Baker 29). It is their understanding of basic human nature that makes them and their writings to appeal not only the local readers but the readers throughout the world.

Premchand raised some of issues and problems which were not much prevalent at that time but which are taking serious turn today and demanding their immediate solutions. During the study it appeared that in the attitude of both Premchand and Chekhov in dealing with the problems of their respective societies, there were many similarities. Though there are a few differences in their opinions and problems of their respective societies. These differences are but natural in the writings of two writers lived in different cultural, social and

geographical surroundings. Despite all these differences there appears a broad consensus in the short stories of the two writers regarding the problems, sufferings and their alleviations. There can be no doubt in that if the problems are area specific the solutions of the problems will also be area specific keeping the environmental and cultural factors, and resources of the area. But the basic principles working behind these solutions are the same because basic human nature always same and it will remain the same. One of such factors is faith or religion. This is a factor which can't be pulled out completely from the mind of a human being. These influence each and every person in one way or another. In their known fictional writings Premchand and Chekhov seem following the middle path but the influence of the faith of their characters' gets reflected in their short stories. This very faith helps them to come out of the situation or courage to face them.

Neither Premchand nor Chekhov was ready to tenets of a particular religion or faith but were eagerly ready to accept what was better and helpful in relieving the pain and misery of mankind and progress of civilization. Despite their refusal to follow the traditional religion they possessed strong ethical and spiritual qualities. Chekhov wrote in his Notebook in 1897: "between, there is a God and, there is no God' lays a whole vast tract, which the really wise man crosses with great efforts. A Russian knows one or other of these two extremes, and the middle tract between them does not interest him; and therefore he usually knows nothing, or very little" (qtd. in Walter 34). In 1900 he wrote to a friend, "I am not a believing man, but all the beliefs I consider his [Tolstoy's] the nearest and most akin to me." (qtd. in Walter 34)

In the similar way Premchand believed that human life is more important than any religion. Premchand expresses his ideas without any type of sugarcoating like a writer who believes completely in humanity. He was very upset about the ignorance of the people who under the influence the communal feelings disturb their peaceful life and it neither benefits religion nor the man. He wrote while explaining it that when one says all the people worship only one god, then why Hindu wait for the Muslims to respect their religion only then they will respect their religion. If to respect other religion is good, it is good in every respect (Srivastava 54-55). This line of Gandhiji's favorite religious song is apt in this regard: "Ishwar Allah Tere Naam, Subko Sanmity De Bhagvan." (Srivastava 54-55)

Such kind of thinking in the field of faith and religion and that too in India is certainly the sign of progressive thinking, and progressiveness is always area and time specific. The problem of disbelief among the Hindus and Muslims in India appears time and again in the form of communal riots. It is only because of misinterpretation of religion by the vested interests and creation of fear 'Psychosis' among the common people. Not only in religions riots but also in cast riots such kind of felling appears among the people. The communal riots of Bhagalpur, Meerut, Mujafarnagar, Godhra are the result of such psychology of religion and cast in the minds of people. So many innocent people were killed in the riots after the demolition of Babri Masjid and terrorist attacks in Kashmir in the name of the religion. It is often said that the time is the best dealer but can anyone bring back the near and the dears of the people who are snatched from them by the riots. They cannot forget that the riots have snatched their dearest things and the people allowed it to happen. It

is often seemed that women are affected most in the riots. The plunderers think that they have destroyed the self esteem of the opposite community by raping their woman and the women and children always remain in constant fear that such a thing may happen again any time.

Premchand was very well aware of the sociology of the riots. Commenting on the riots in 1931 he said that why people's attention does not go towards these massacre which cause irreparable losses to the nation and the society. Premchand warned Indian people for their communal outlook. In 1932 he said that outwardly how much they sought nationalism but inwardly all of them are communal. Whenever communal riots take place, immediately they become eager to know how much people of their community are killed and many of the others. If the numbers of the death of their community is more they become desperate and in contrary if the number of the death of other community people is more, they feel satisfied. This tendency is very dangerous for the health of nation as well as for the society. One will have to nip this tendency otherwise the dream of one united and progressive India will remain only a dream.

Premchand knew that the problem of social disharmony will arise time and again in India because he understood psychology of people as well as the psychology of the Indian politicians very well. That is why he had to say with great pain that it is unfortunate that today the people do not take religion as too of belief and the way for good behaviors but it is made as the tool for fulfilling these political self interests. The condition of such people is like those mad men who want to get everything for themselves and nothing for others. The day competition of surpassing other religion is removed from the religion that

very day nobody will feel alerted about the conversion of the religion. Premchand knew that one can be strong if one is able to demolish the wall of jealousy between the sects and communities. In any era no force can be stronger than the force of unity. So it becomes clear that Premchand was very intelligent and sensitive and an oracle who has foreseeing the situations of the coming time. India is a country and as a society cannot progress without communal harmony and unity among the people of different religions, sects and communities.

The report of National Crime Record Bureau certifies the relevance of Munshi Premchand and Anton Chekhov. This report reveals that 66042 cases of the riots were recorded in year 2014 which is 2.3% of the total IPC crimes. The rate of crime is 3.5%. Charge sheets were framed in 1.5% cases and conviction rate is 17.2%. (NCRB Web)

This statistical data points out that in India there is much need to be done in order to make people aware about the harms of communal disharmony. Premchand recognized the seriousness of the problem not only for his time but also for its future implications. Premchand expressed his views on the issue of religion and effect of religion on the psychology of the people and their day to day life. It is true that religion despite all kind of propaganda will never be removed from the minds of people. Soviet Union Disintegration on the bases of religion like that of India and Pakistan certify this conception. These two great writers were aware of the fact that religious feelings may get subdued with the passage of time but will never vanish. That is why these two writers try to search some points of agreements instead of

advocating the removal of religion from the life of the people while performing their duties for the nations.

Chekhov also expressed his opinions frankly in the matter of religious dogmatism and prosecution of innocent people. In Dreyfus's case in 1894, the French Jewish army officer was found guilty of treason and was sentenced for life imprisonment. French novelist Emile Zola wrote an open letter in French newspapers in January 1898 accusing military of convicting of innocent man. Zola was convicted of criminal libel and he had to flee to England. After a lot of controversy and public rancor Dreyfus was pardoned and released in 1899, but not fully exonerated till 1906. Chekhov wrote in January 1898 to a friend:

The immense majority of educated people on Zola's side and Dreyfus is innocent. Zola has gained immensely in public esteem, his letter of protest like a breath of fresh air, and every Frenchman has felt that, thank god! There is still justice in the world, and that if an innocent man is condemned there is still some are to champion. The French papers are extremely interesting while Russian is worthless. (qtd. in Walter 67)

From the above discourse it emerges that the feeling of faith and religion were always there and will remain forever. No one can crash these feelings of people. The last way is to allow the people to follow these faith with and fear and pressure and to search for some common point on which all the people following and believing different faith may contribute in the progress of nation and humanity in general.

The narrator in the story "An Anonymous Story" who is the chief character also in the following statement characterizes Chekhov's own beliefs:

Listen. I have passed through so many experiences in my time that my head goes round at the thought of them, and I have realized with my mind, with my racked soul, that man finds his true destiny in nothing if not in self sacrificing love for his neighbor. It is towards that we must strive, and that is our destination! That is my faith! (qtd. in Walter 34)

He was also aware about the people's duty toward the coming generation that they should provide them a better world so that they may remember them for their deed and contribution in making of it. In the similar fashion Premchand also expressed his notion of maintain the diversity of religion and sects and believing all of them under the single umbrella of nation and progress which will be beneficial for all of them and humanity and civilization as well. Premchand said that Hindu and Muslims were never like a mixture of sugar and milk and never will they be. Their different identities should be maintained and it will be maintained. What is needed is that there should be tolerance among their leaders with the progressive thinking. In the story "Panchayat: The Voice of God" Algu and Juman Seikh live with a very close friendship and have full faith on each other. In the *panchayat* there is no issue of religion. When the issue of Juman's aunt comes to *panchayat* it is decided on the basis of merit and all the parties accept the decision of *panchayat*. There is a need of such kind of harmonious relations among the Hindus, Muslims and other communities.

Chekhov wrote most his of short stories during the period of 1880 to 1904, when Russia under the despotic rule of Tsar and Aristocratic feudalism. The conditions of women were miserable and they were not independent even in an independent country. Chekhov treats the women in his stories

sympathetically and gives them full opportunity and space in his writings. Premchand started his writings work near 1900 and it continued till his death in 1936. In Indian society women were facing dual slavery. On the condition of the woman, Suryakant Tripathi Niraala rightly stated that during British rule Indian women were the slave of the slaves. It was the time when the women were getting pressed in the grinder of feudalism and colonialism. It is not difficult to find in the history of the world that the society which had been under the rules of the other, the women of that society has feared the burnt the most. In the feudal system to establish the sovereignty over the enemy, the abductor of their woman was the most favorable tool. India is not free from this mindset. When Walter Benjamin said that slavery whether it is social, political, or physical it is a curse. A slave can never be happy and this pain of woman was well recognized by Premchand and expressed it in his short stories. He was also aware that Indian society or any other society cannot progress leaving behind the half of population suffering and leaving the second grade life. Premchand in his stories made the woman to stand against the social norms and traditional responsible for the bondage of the woman. He wanted them to be equal partner in the progress of the nation, society and family. In the story "Someone to Lean On" Anup the wife of Mathura refuses to marry his brother-in-law whom she had reared up like her child. She advises to her mother –in-law to search a girl for Vasudev. Premchand knew the result of mismatch marriage that is why he makes Anup to say: "I have thought that a woman cannot exist without a man, but I found that I have passed these years with my honor intact. When I have passed through the days of adolescence, why should there be any worry for future? (Premchand 56)

Premchand was of the views that people will have to provide good education to the girls for bringing them to such a level that they may take care of themselves. Once talking about the dowry system he said that the solution of this problem is that girls should be provided good education and to be set free to make their own destination in the world like the boys. People should have faith on the girls as they do not care about the devastation of the boys from the right path. (Srivaastava 14)

Two things are very much clear here, one is the rage against the inhuman tradition of dowry and resolution to eradicate it, second is the mindset of men to see women within the four wall of the house by making accuse of her physical weakness. He has been afraid to the women may take control of the area of their dominance if they come out of the house that is why they exist of the woman form the boundary of house was banned. Premchand know it that the difference of men and women is more cultural than the natural. These ideas of Premchand are very much relevant and proving to be true as women in all fields of human activities are working in all types of organizations, institutions, and managing their households and frankly responsible more effectively than the man. Premchand was a writer of renaissance in India and effort of his efforts and his predication are becoming reality which we are also to see on the surface. In 1931 Premchand wrote in his essay "The Right of Women" that men started to capture the rights of women last the weave of nationalism and wisdom will remove all the difference and out mother will achieve their due respect in the society.

The level of understanding the relationship between men and women is matchless in case of Premchand. If man expects faithfulness from a man, a

woman also expects it from the man in no less terms. The faith on each other is the basis of vibrant and happy relations and of a happy family life. This basic concept of love gets reflected in the words of Jhunia in the novel *Godan*: “If the man will run after other run the woman will also run after the man unfaithfulness of man hurts woman as much as it hurts the man.” (qtd. in Srivastava 47)

But Premchand was not in the favour of the illegal and uninterested sexual relations because he was of the view that such kind of relations can make a family which is loose of the revolution of the human race. Premchand was in the favour of love marriages but not in the favor of illicit love relations. Premchand was of views that the love marriages are the only effective weapon which can break into the fortified caste system which is the major source of exploitation and discrimination. In the short story “A Servant to Nation” a politician who delivers a speech that all are equal and there should be no discrimination. He takes an untouchable youth into the temple and gets the applause of the people for his selfless service to humanity. But when his daughter Indira asks his father’s permission for marrying the boy Mohan whom his father embraced and took into the temple, his reaction the narrator describes in these words “The servant of the people looked at her with the eyes of doom and turned away.” (Premchand *The World* 181)

Premchand was aware that when girls will get educated and well think of choosing their life partners of their choice such kind of problems eradicate. Today one can see in the media reports the cases of honor killings by the parents and family members of the girls. In the famous Manoj-Babli murder case, in Karora village of Kaithal district of Haryana in 2007, the couple was

mercilessly murdered by the family members of the girl for marrying against their wishes. So many cases occur in India.

So it is evident that Premchand is still relevant in present context. K.L. Sharma in his research paper “Explaining Multiculturalism” while discussing the cultural intolerance says: “Fatwahs and dictates on paintings, films, books, posters and artistic creations are inductive of cultural insulation. What Khaps are doing in one or two states in relation to inter-caste, in intra-gotra and inter-religious marriages not only negate multicultural social relations, acts such as fines, ostracisation and even killings belie human dignity and freedom. A bounded society leads to cultural wars, and multiculturalism brings about respectable coexistence of individuals, families and social groups. (Sharma 4)

In his essays and article Premchand takes favour of love marriages and on the other side he calls the desire of women to live independently just the blind following of the western mode of living. Premchand appears right when sees the increasing number of psychic problems and mental disorder in the world because of the breakage of the families. According to WHO’s World Health Report 2001, 450 million people in the world are suffering from mental disorder in the world and breakage of family is one of the major reasons for those disorders because people are not getting the mental solace and security. (W.H.O. Web). The percentage of mental disorder is much higher in western countries in comparison to India. In India family system is still working effectively. Premchand knew it also that the influence of western mode will affect India also and so he has raised this problem in advance in his story “Miss Padma”. In this story Padma wants to live independently and enjoy the life without any inhibition to free sexual relations but she cannot do so

because she finds all her lovers just interested in sucking her youth like the bees who suck honey from the flowers. She wants to have complete possession of the man so she starts living with Mr. Prasad without marrying him. He cheats her by taking all her money out of her bank account and runs away with a college girl. Padma feels dejected and becomes depressed whenever she observes a happy married couple.

Premchand considers the desire of woman to live independently is the result of blindly acceptance of western model of living and thinking, whether it is the case of new bride of story "Manovarti" or Neela and Meena of the story "Jadu". This sentence of Premchand about Malti of his novel *Godan* that she is like a butterfly from outside and a bee inside is the limit of his concept of the woman. Premchand was sure that the woman is the foundation of a civilization on which whole structure is standing. He says that woman is like the earth. There is limitless power of tolerance in her. Man is incapable of it. The woman can sail the boat of the man across the sea of life. One can love independent and free women but he cannot marry them. If the woman gets the traits of the man she becomes a whore. Here appears the difference in the opinion of Premchand and Chekhov. Chekhov advocates the woman's choice to live their life in their own way. He even justifies the extra material relations of women who are dissatisfied with their partners in their married life. It indicates the cultural and environmental differences of the two writers appearing on the surface in their respective short stories. Chekhov depicted variation in male and female love. One finds many varieties within each category. He was against Tolstoy's dogmatic opinion about love and sex.

Chekhov criticized Tolstoy's portrayal of love and sex in a letter in 1890 in his novel *The Kreutzer Sonata*:

His statement about syphilis, founding hospitals, the aversion of women for the sexual relation, and so on, are not merely open to dispute but show him up as an ignorance who has not, in the course of his long life, taken the trouble or read two or three books written by specialists. (qtd. in Walter 57)

When Tolstoy added an afterword to his novella in which he said that celibacy is preferable to marriage and a Christian will never desire marriage but will avoid it, Chekhov called this a few words fanatical and stupid.

Sex is primarily connected with romantic love and Chekhov's training and experience as a doctor of inspection of the prostitutes on government assignment provided him with more realistic understanding of sex and sexuality than that of her men of his time. Dealing of love and sex in the short stories of Chekhov seems matching with Karlinsky's observation that "for Chekhov sex like religion is also a morally neutral quantity, whose moral and ethical implication depend on the circumstances and the attitude of the people involved" (qtd. in Walter 57). This approach was named "Situation Ethics" in 1960. Karlinsky further wrote that there is not even a vestige of dual sexual standards in the mature works of Chekhov. In his *Notebook* Chekhov wrote that "To demand that the woman one loves should be pure is egoistical: to look for that in a woman which I have not got myself is not love, but worship, since one ought to love one's equal." (qtd. in Walter 58)

In the short stories of Chekhov it is often found that many of the male and female characters remain unfaithful to their spouses. Unlike Tolstoy,

Chekhov is more interested in realistic portrayal of characters than making them sufferers for their transgression. In the stories “Agaphia” and “Peasant Wives” the protagonist peasant women are guilty of adultery but Chekhov does not talk about the consequences of the deeds of adultery in “Agaphia”. Masha in “Peasant Wives” is sent to Siberiya for poisoning her husband. In the “Grasshopper” Olga realizes that her husband was much better man than her lover for whom she had been unfaithful. In *The Lady with the Dog* both the lovers perform infidelity with their counterparts. Gusov, the male lover, had been unfaithful to many women and calls the women as the ‘inferior race’ but he comes to true love in case of Anna, the lady of upper class, who reciprocates his love and feelings. Andrew G. Colin says about the tragedy of Chekhov's stories that there are no murders no suicides and even there is no illness and poverty but there are spiritual murder spiritual suicide in plenty. (Chekhov *The Woman* xiii). Chekhov’s depiction of various cases of infidelity does not mean that he approves unrestrained sexual behavior. In a letter to his brother Nikolai that “cultured people seek as far as possible to restrained.....than instinct (Walter 58). Rayfield seems probably correct in indicating Chekhov’s fluctuating attitude about woman, marriage, sexuality and prostitution.

Not only Chekhov but Premchand also remains sympathetic towards women and prostitutes if they are forced to be so by circumstances. In his novel *Seva Sadan* Suman says that she knew that it is an immoral act. “But I was helpless and there was no other way to perform. I tried to earn two ends meal by stitching the cloth but the bad element tortured me and I had to jump into this well” (Srivastava 26).

It is evident that Premchand and Chekhov are relevant and effective in today's context because in today's context prostitution is taking a form of industry and helpless and poor women and girls are forced to jump into this well. According to the report of Indian Ministry of Woman and Child Development 2007 there were three million sex workers in India. 35.47% of them enter in this profession before the age of 18. The report also tells that the number of prostitute rose 50% between 1997 and 2014. The above report clearly indicates that the works of these two writers are more relevant in today's context than their own times. (Ministry of Women Web)

These words of Kunwar Anirudh in *Seva Sadan* are the words of Premchand and very relevant in the present context that "we have no right to understand prostitutes as low. We take hush money day and night, their own interest, and suck the blood of poor, cut the throat of helpless people; we are not in a position to consider any part of society as low. We are the lowest and mean sinner and immoral and cruel, who think them educated, civilized, liberal and true" (Shrivastava 56). Premchand rightly said that the problem of freedom of woman is the problem of economic and social freedom.

Premchand gave due regard to Russian society because women were independent there and were not sold in the market. But what happened after disintegration of Soviet Union and establishment of capitalist system forced the Russian women to jump into this well not only in their own country but in other countries of the world. So the writings of Chekhov and Premchand are relevant in present context in the sense that this weak section of society will find the solution of this large and inhuman problem by following the way and precepts of these two great sages. Premchand wished to give solution of the

problem but historical limits were hurdled in the way. The question of freedom of woman and keep her respect intact was the part of social and political problems of the country.

Premchand and Chekhov raised the issues of discrimination in the society by the upper caste people in India and upper class people in Russia. Untouchability was the problem of Hindu society and such system of planned discrimination and exploitation is found nowhere in the world except India. After understanding the political dependence and its causes Premchand realised that man is more important for man than any caste or religion. Communism in any form is dangerous.

Premchand was surprised about his own society and even by his religion and caste. He has no doubt that this tendency is not only harmful for Hindu society but for the whole country. In his essay "Our Duty" Premchand wrote clearly in 1932 that people's duty will be fulfilled only then when they will be able to destroy this menace of untouchability completely. He was so much enraged that he further wrote in this essay that if any system can say honestly that untouchability is justified from religious point of view. Self interest is the only cause behind it. This vested interest may satisfy one for some time but it will dig out even deepest foundation. The Hindu society is playing with the toy of vested interest is actually dynamite which will destroy everything. So wisdom lies in throwing it as early as possible otherwise it will not give time even to repent. Premchand's this view was adopted by Indian political system after the independence which shows that how much he could see in advance. A writer who is able to realize and express the truth of his society and time and also puts forward his reasonable advice frankly is great.

In other words one can say that a writer who is able to see the future of society in the truths of his time and society of great in the real sense.

When Premchand was writing on this burning problem of the society, at the same time it was faced by Gandhiji who was fighting on the political front. Gandhiji said “If untouchability is part of Hindu religion, then, I have no hesitation in saying that it is full of inhumanity and it is not a religion. It is my firm belief that Hindu religion is not such. Till then, I will not consider the Hindus ‘Hindu’ when they will treat their *chamar* and *bhangi* sweepers and tanner Hindu bothers like their real brothers” (Shrivastava 97). In this statement of Gandhiji makes it clear that religion is important but not important than the equality.

The question of entry of untouchables in the temples was a crucial question in Indian society during the last quarter of 19th century and in the beginning of the 20th century. As, Premchand was a sensitive and aware writer, that is why he discussed the issue widely in his writings. The entry of the untouchable in the temple was more important for the equality point of view than the religious point of view. He criticized the priests in the temple for their attitude towards the downtrodden and untouchables and used these hard words: “whether Hindu community is made only of the priests of temple and the *mehants* of the sanctuaries. If worshiper will not be there, whom they will make to worship. He further uses satirical language and says that if your Gods are weak to become untouchable just because someone touched them, then it is wrong to call them gods. (Shrivastava 101)

Premchand raises the issues very diligently in the story “Temple” in which an untouchable woman wants to worship in the temple with the hope

that it will erase her ailing. She is not only stopped from entering into the temple but also beaten so severely that her son dies after falling from her hands. What can be more ugly form of untouchability and exploitation? Here question can be raised again the progressive thinking of Premchand but it was a hard reality at that time that people had more faith on religion than the medical system. Sukhia in the story is illiterate and now going to the temple for recovery of his son from the illness which was not unnatural. Premchand's progressivism is in it if anybody wants to go temple for his faith he or she should be allowed to do so and it is best from a human and social point of view.

Premchand is still relevant because still there is several rural areas where still the untouchables are not allowed to enter into the temples. The ideas and true presentation of the issue made the people of country think on this inhumanity with a large section of the society. Government made many laws after the independence incorporating the ideas and suggestions of Premchand with the help of the Government legislations and awareness created by the writings of writers like Premchand. That's why in 1950 Indian Constitution was amended carrying with it in Article 25 allowing all the Hindus irrespective of the cast free access to temples. (GK today Web). The situation has improved a lot but still a lot is to be done in this regard.

According to National Crime Records Bureau report 2014, 47064 cases were registered by the police against non scheduled caste people for committing crime against the scheduled cast peoples and 11451 criminal cases were filed against non-scheduled tribes' people. In first case conviction rate is 28.8% and in the second case conviction rate is 37.9%. (NCRB Web)

These data clearly indicates that despite the improvement, there is need of more to be done. In such conditions the idea and suggestions of Premchand expressed in his fictional and non fictional writings are still very much relevant and there is urgent need of propagation of his idea among the people. If people will read Premchand's writings they will understand the root cause of the problem and motive behind it. The aware public will not come under the influence of the vested interests of people. So the writings of Premchand as well as of Anton Chekhov will put the communal and fanatical forces at the back foot. Zelliott seems agreed with Premchand when she says: "Set him the ancient past, origin stories those whom high castes view as 'untouchables' present a jati's ancestor as performing, with the most admirable of intentions, an act that nonetheless unjustly condemns his descendents to a defiling occupation. By asserting the essential goodness of the dalits, such story subvert the Brahmanical view that they are contemptible." (Bhagavan 138)

Today in different part of India different caste and communities are demanding reservation in government jobs. This is the result of the reservation provided to schedule castes and schedule tribes and other backward castes by government that social and economic condition and status of these castes and communities has improved. There is also a demand of abolishing the reservation because people of upper castes are not able to bear it that a person from lower castes becomes their superior in the office. Premchand knew it very well in advance that reservation in the jobs and education institution will not only improve the social and economic condition of untouchables but also be helpful in finishing the gaps between the higher and the lowers, when they will set together, eat together and live together in schools, colleges, offices,

hostels and housing societies. Premchand raised the demand of reservation for the Schedule caste and Schedule tribes when there was no issue and demand from any side during the British Rule. Premchand knew the condition of untouchables and tribes. In his article “The Pious Deed” on December 1932 he wrote clearly that “the real problem is economic condition. If we want to uplift to our schedule caste brothers we will have to create the resources which will help them in it. There is need of scholarship in schools and concession in the jobs.” (qtd in Srivastava 40)

Certainly those who have got job with the help of reservation are in better position now but still a large portion of schedule caste and schedule tribes population is living in miserable conditions as they used to live before. So preference should be given to those people who have not got the benefit of reservation instead of those who have already taken the benefit of the reservation. As it has been already said that Premchand had seen a dream of such an India in which there will be no slavery, there will be no discrimination and exploitation on the basis of caste, religion or gender. Premchand advocated and supported that every effort which would be helpful in the development and progress of the nation. That is why he wrote on January 8, 1934, that the days of dominance of temple priests are left a few and it is in the favour of the nation and society that tendencies of discrimination, denunciation and blood sucking should be removed. As already have been said that the first condition of nationalism is to dig out the roots of *varanshrama* system, difference of low and high and religious superstitions. Premchand’s social, political and religious awareness gets reflected in his essays, novels, and short stories. “Thakur’s Well,” “Deliverance,” “Price of Milk,” “Mantra” and

“Temple” are the stories which depict the miserable condition of untouchables in Hindu social system. These comments of Dr. Manager Pandey are very apt and appropriate regarding the two short story writers, Premchand and Chekhov, about the condition of the people in their respective societies when he writes that after reading Chekhov’s story “Ward No 6” Lenin said that whole Russian society seems converted into Ward No 6. In the similar manner after careful reading of Premchand’s story “Thakur’s Well” the readers feel that whole Hindu society is on the Thakur’s well and whole untouchable section of society is denied access to it.

Premchand is known as a writer of rural life and farmers. He understands it very well that without solving the problems of untouchables, women, workers and farmers India cannot progress. There is no need to discuss here the condition of the farmers during the British region. They were grinded between the foreign rule and feudal lords and most their income was use to be taken away from them. In 1932, Premchand wrote in his essay “The Unfortunate Farmers”:

The profession of eighty percent of Indian population is agriculture. Many percent like carpenters, barbers and ironsmiths are dependent on it for their livelihood. Whatsoever income the nation has is due to the hard work of these labors and farmers. Our schools and educational institutions, our police force and army, our courts and legal institutions, all survive on the income of these workers. But the producers of food and the cloth strive for filling their bellies, shiver in the cold and die like flee. (Shristava 73)

Premchand was so much concerned about the miserable condition of Indian farmers. Lord Curzon estimated that annual income of the farmers was thirty rupees and it was taken to fifty rupees by applying another method in 1915. In 1930 the annual income of farmers was not more than twenty five rupees. By these data he brought the condition of farmers in the notice of British Governments and people of the country. Premchand was of the views that the progress of nation was not possible without the progress of the farmers and workers. He felt too much disturbed about the fact that a few people are sucking the blood of the eighty percentage of population of the country. He knew that the farmer remains under the burden of debt throughout his life. On the condition of the farmer he wrote in one of his article that who do not know that farmers are under the bundle of debt. Those who work hard day and night remain hungry and those who suck their blood enjoy the life. They are not able to do anything without the loan. Seed they purchase by the money taken on interest. They use to borrow bullocks form the cattle traders. On the occasions of marriage and death, pilgrimage, festival they have to take the loan to protect their esteem. The money lenders and feudal lords used to make the farmers work throughout their life by giving them loan of fifty to hundred rupees. In the story "One and Quarter Sher Wheat" Premchand depicts this horrified condition of farmer family. A farmer is made to work by the money lender throughout his life and when the farmer dies his son follows the suit. In such matters the people who show the farmer the fear of God, they themselves becomes greater than the God.(Srivastava 103).Nothing can be more heart rendering than these words of Premchand when he says that the miserable

condition of farmers can be described in the words. Further they themselves know about their helplessness or their God knew it.

Premchand was so much concerned about the farmer that he always kept on thinking about the ways and means through which they could be brought out of these flues. It should be kept in the mind that Premchand in his writings do not divide them into castes and religion but think about them as a section of the society. He demands consolidation of the land in his article in 1932. In the same year in another article "Hat Bhage Kisan" he said that the land is divided so rapidly that there is no limit of it.

In 1771 in South average holding of the land was 40 acres. In 1915 it remained 7 and half acres. It was three acres in Bengal and one and half acre in the joint Province. This one and half acre was also in the different directions of the village, so a lot of hard work of the farmer goes waste. If consolidation of the land is done then it will be easy for the farmer to cover his land with hedge, to make wall and keep a vigil. There are some scopes of increase in his income. Some influential and such people take benefit in it also even though it is a suitable system which proved its usefulness after the independence.

Premchand also did his efforts in the direction of the removal of feudalism. He questioned the usefulness of the feudal lords. If anyone is important in the feudal system it is the farmer and workers. So he takes the favour of both these sections of society. Premchand supported the five demands of Rao Krishan Pal Singh. He said while attracting the attentions of government on these demands that if government does not accept the demands of Rao Shab, it will prove that government does not think about the farmers. Besides the failure of government Premchand turns his attention to the main

reason of their plight that they are not united. Bholu in his novel *Godan* says that “we are the bullocks born to plough. We cannot see each other. If the farmers do not go to each other, then how will they love each other?” He further wrote in his article “Sakker Sammelan” that “the good day of country cannot return till all the professions are not nationalized till the fate of farmer is in the hands of capitalists, how much government may do the drama of control, no benefit farmer can get. I would give the farmer only one advice to organize themselves.” (Shrivastava 107)

Chekhov was a realist and believed in presenting the true picture of the society unlike Tolstoy who romanticized the rural present life. Chekhov in his short stories presents the miserable living conditions of the poor farmers and dehumanizing effect of hunger, poverty, and lack of medical and other facilities. The depiction of peasant milieu in his short stories makes it clear that he had better understanding of it than the industrial world. He starts with two stories “The House with the Mezzanine” and “My Life”, the depictions of rural peasant life and this trend continues in his stories “The Peasants”, “The Journey by Cart”. “The New Villa” and in the “The Ravine” he draws peasant characters excellently even in his early short stories like “Agaphia”, “Huntsman”, “The Stepee”, “Gusev” and “The Peasant Life”.

In his early story “The House with the Mezzanine” Chekhov examines certain intellectual and populist solutions of Leo Tolstoy that condition of peasant can be improved by education and sanitation. The story indirectly takes the peasant questions thorough its many discussion of solution of village problems. A familiar contrast of beauty and sense with prosaic and utilitarian attitude of life can be seen in this story. The artist in the story tells Lida that

medical aid to peasant is not so important because here it is not the question of saving of few lives but to realise:

...that all these Annas, Pelageyas must bend their backs from dawn to dusk, are ill from overly heavy labor, tremble all their live for their hungry and sick children, live all their live in fear of death and illness, are ill all their lives, fade away early...and die in filth and foul smells. And their children, as they grow up, live to the same tune. And thus hundreds of years pass by and billions of people live worse than animal...The whole horror of their position is in the fact that they do not have time to think of their soul...Hunger, cold, bestial , fear, constant work have, like snowdrifts, closed to them all roads to spiritual activity, to that very characteristic by which man is distinguished form the animal, and which is the only part of man's life which makes this life worth living.... (Winner 140)

When Lida argues about the highest moral duty of man, the artist remarks that she could no more expect her remedies to cure these problems than the light from her window to illuminate the entire garden. He further says that what is needed is the change on order to liberate farmers from eternal struggle for survival to live like human beings. The views of artist are actually the view of Chekhov himself, who was a grandson of a serf and seen the life of farmer very closely.

In the story "The Duel" the protagonist Misail Poloznev and Maslila had a romantic view of farming life. Misail loves his family and profession to become a simple farming labourer. But soon they become disillusioned. Maslila said before their marriage: "One must...harvest one's own bread; that

is, one must plow, sow, cut and thresh, or one must do something closely connected with agriculture, such as pasture cows, dig the earth, build huts” (Winner 143). Soon Masha realizes her mistake and says that it is trouble to live in the village. She leaves the village as well as Misail applies for the divorce.

In the story “The Peasant” Nikolay Chikildeev, a waiter in a hotel becomes numb and his goat is changed while serving hem and peas, decides to spent rest of his life in his native village because he thinks it better to be ill at hove and life is cheaper in the village. It indicated the irony of the story that idealized dreams are destroyed by the reality of peasant life: “In his Childhood memories he had pictured his home (the Russian is “native nest”) as bright, cozy, and comfortable. Now, entering the hut, he was positively frightened: it was so dark, crowded and flirty.” (Winner 151)

The hunger and the misery changed the attitude of the peasants towards death and express their hopelessness often. The family members tell the old peasants time and again that they have stayed overtime and they do not mind it. They also wait openly and eagerly for Nikolay’s death. In the end after the death of Nilolay his wife and daughter leave the village to return to city and seen begging before house of a rich man. Nothing can be more pathetic, ugly and heart rendering than this.

From above analysis it is quite clear that both Chekhov and Premchand were deeply attached to the farmer and tried their best to fight for upliftment of farmers in their real life and in these short stories. They demanded a complete upheaval in the system only then situation of the peasant can be improved. The condition of farmers is still almost same. According the

National Crime Record Bureau Report 2014, 5650 farmers did suicide and percentage of farmers' suicide is 11.2% of total suicides in India. (NCRB Web)

In such situations Premchand and Chekhov are relevant and their approach to the problems of farmers makes them worth reading in the present day context. It is also a reality that one can't expect the progress of nation without improving the conditions of the farmers.

Premchand stresses time and again that India cannot progress till the farmers and workers remain backward and miserable. Premchand takes most of his working men from the unorganized sector of rural economy not like that of Chekhov's factory workers. Upper cast Brahmins, landlords and money lenders force them to work like bonded laborers. The unemployed villagers who are not able to get work in the villages to go work in cities to work in the factories or in construction work of buildings.

In the short story "The Road to Salvation" Jhengur, the farmer starts working in a jute factory after his crops being destroyed in the fire and later Buddhu, who had burnt the crops of villagers joins him in the same city. Their condition is so much pathetic that they take solid food once in a day. In the similar way Pravin, the writer in the story "The Writer" takes tea without sugar and milk and wears clothes because he is a mill worker. Despite his extra income from his working in newspapers and magazines, every shopkeeper owes him. He and his wife are not to arrange two ends meals.

The plight of the workers to the unorganized sectors like agriculture and service sector in the cities was not much better than the farmers. The workers like tanners, labourers, carpenters, weavers, porches, washing man

and agriculture labourers etc. were depended for their livelihood on the good crops. If the crops are destroyed by natural disaster or by some other reasons these workers also used to get destroyed. Most of them had to work without and any payment for landlords, priests and money lenders because they used to give a little loan to them at the time of need. Such blood sucking parasites used to keep on adding interest and their working class people had to work throughout their life and after their death their children had to follow the sect. In the story “Deliverance” the tanner Dukhi dies working whole day with eating even a morsel of grain just to please the Brahmin to know the pious occasion for the marriage of his daughter. In the short story “Neyur” Premchand describes the working condition of labourers, their life style, their way of thinking and attitude towards the life.

In the short story “A Catastrophe” landlord of the village Pandit Udaybhan orders a gond caste woman to go out of village because she failed to porch the grains of the landlord properly and within stipulated time. He digs out her over and orders to leave the village. She challenges him saying: “How can I? After twelve years of working in a field as a tenant earns a share in it. I have grown old in this hut. Except for Yama, king of death, nobody is going to force me out of it (Shrivastav 47). In the similar manner Housani the sweeper, who is also husband of Alarakkhi another sweeper working for municipality becomes angry on cutting of salary time and again form Alarakkhi’s account as penalty. He says to his wife: “If he’s fired you, won’t we ask on what grounds? And who heard you abuse him? Can there be no justice that he can for anyone he pleases? If I’m not heard I’ll complain to the panchayat, I’ll beat

my head on the headman's gate...If our people stuck together like that would Khan Sahib ever dare fine as so much." (Rubin 155)

Like Premchand, Chekhov was also excessively concerned and painful on the condition of workers and farmers. His pain comes out on the surface in his letter to Suborein: "A Workman's labour is practically not paid for at all, and that is why I am well off. I am beginning to understand the delights of capitalism." (Winner 123)

There are many stories of Chekhov dealing with the growth of Russian Industry, the new bourgeoisie of the workers and life in the village. These stories explain the source of human frustration in the social system, where a great majority of Russian population lives in deprivation. Edm and Wilson rightly assume that they compose an analysis of Russia in miniature.

The story "A Woman's Kingdom", "Three Years" and "A Doctor Visits" are concerned with the industrialization and emergence of a new bourgeoisie. "A Woman's Kingdom" was published in 1894, presents before the readers the frustration of a woman factory owner who hails from the working class and wants to be in touch with the workers. But neither she is able to remain with the worker nor she belongs to the capitalist class. Her portions are indicated by the two floors of her house in which she lives. She meets with workers at lower floor and secures such guests at the upper floor and she keeps on hanging in between. In his story "A Doctor's Visit" Chekhov depicts the inhuman and pathetic working conditions of the factory workers in these words:

"Fifteen hundred or two thousand people are working without rest in unhealthy surroundings, making bad cotton goods, leaving on

the verge of starvation, and walking from this nightmare only at rare in the tavern, a hundred people work as overseers, and whole life of that hundred people is spent in imposing fines, in abuse, in injustice, and only two or three so called owners enjoy the profits, though they don't work at all, and despise the wretched cotton. (Chekhov *Short Stories* 207)

From the above analysis of the short stories and nonfictional writings of these two great artists, it emerges out that they were the true champions of the cause of workers and farmers. They are relevant even today because the situation of the workers has not changed much even today. After collapse of communism in Soviet Union and Balkan Countries, the ground is open and vacant for the capitalism to exploit the working force throughout the world. In such conditions the advice and depiction of these two writers becomes more important for saving the workers from the clutches of the capitalists.

According to Fourth Annual Employment Survey Report 2013-14 by the Labour Bureau Government of India 50% of person above the age of 15 years are unemployed in India. The report further states that 5% persons above the age of 15 years in India wanted to work but could not get the work. So in such a situation when labour force is surplus, definitely the capitalist will exploit them. (Labour Web) So there is an urgent need to look after the interest of the workers. So it is the duty of labour organization and government to enact laws in favour of workers and ensure their employment. The suggestions and depictions can be helpful in solving the problems of worker in the present context.

Premchand and Chekhov left no section of their society untouched. They raised the issues and problems of everyone in the society who failed to protect his or her rights. The story “Panchayat: The Voice of God” the widow having sons and Chekhov’s “The Peasants” etc are the stories in which he presents the case of old aged people dejected and misbehaved in their own house by their own near and dears and nobody listen their woes in the society.

Society is moving from joint family system to nuclear family system and the more trends of the live- in- relationship system. In such conditions the problems of aged people are increasing in many folds. They are not only dejected and neglected but also murdered in their lonely houses for the sake of a little money. In such situations the writings of writers like Chekhov and Premchand are proving even more relevant than their own times. National Crime Bureau Report 2014 fully supports this view. According to this report 18714 cases under IPC were registered for the crimes against senior citizens (NCRB Web). It shows the gravity of the situation. In such a critical situation the short stories of Premchand and Chekhov are more relevant in the sense that people may get a right direction about these duties and responsibilities towards the senior citizens. If these stories are made part of school and college curriculum, it could provide a great help in the solving the problem many such kind of problems in the society.

Chekhov and Premchand not only gave support to the old aged people in their stories but also to the children who are essentially subaltern in every sector of the society. Premchand in his stories “Idgah”, “The Price of Milk” and in many others and Chekhov in his stories “Vanika”, “Sleepy” etc. raise the issues of inhuman treatment with the children. The crime against the

children are increasing day by day, so fast that this problem is also expecting an early solution. Newspaper and Television reports keep the parents as well as children under constant fear that anything may happen at any time and children are not safe in their houses. This problem is turning serious day by day. In such a situation the stories of writers like Premchand and Chekhov are becoming more and more relevant. The National Crime Records Bureau 2014 certifies it. According to this report in year 2014, 89423 criminal cases were registered for crimes against children and conviction rate in these cases is 33.1%. (NCRB Web)

Despite these major issues and concerns Premchand and Chekhov also raised some minor issues in their short stories which the present society is facing as serious challenges. Such issues are like honour killings, family breakups, corruptions and crime against the animal etc. Premchand supported marriages across the castes and religion because he believed that only such marriages can be the only weapon to break the fortified walls of stratified caste system and religious enmity. In his story “A Servant to the Nation” Premchand indicates towards such kind of incidents in coming time. When the girl, Indira asks her politician father for the marriage with an untouchable boy Mohan, whom her father has made to enter into the temple. The reaction of the father is so furious and dangerous.

Premchand in his story “The Story of Two Bullocks” criticises the ill treatment with the voiceless animals. Chekhov in many of his stories shows that animals like human beings too have feelings and they can share them with human beings also. When in today’s materialistic world man has no time for their fellow human beings these voiceless animals become their companions.

The ill treatment with animals is not justifiable in any sense. Many of such cases of cruelty appear in media these days. A recent case of cruelty reported by India Today News in (Dehradun) dated in March 14, 2016 in which a politician is shown breaking the leg of police horse. A criminal case is filed against the erring MLA.

Premchand in his stories “Namak ka Daroga”, “Wife to Husband” and “Two Sisters” raises the issue of prevalent corruption in the society. Chekhov also raises this issue in many of his stories. The problem has taken a serious turn today. Because of prevalent corruption it has become almost impossible for the poor and uneducated people to get their works done in government offices. In this sense Premchand and Chekhov are more relevant today and it appears that they will remain forever because they touched the basic human nature in their short stories and basic human nature never changes.

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