



## **COMPARISON AND CONTRAST OF CHILD CHARACTERS IN R. K. NARAYAN'S FICTION WITH THE CHILD CHARACTERS OF ANTON CHEKHOV**

**DR. NILESH TARE**

Head, Dept. of English,  
Late C. M. Kadhi Arts College,  
Achalpur Camp. (MS) INDIA

### **ABSTRACT**

*R. K. Narayan is one of the best novelists and short story writers in the Modern age in particular in Indian writing in English. Many novels and short stories are in his credit. He delves deep into the child characters to mirror consciousness of the child. The readers can see the pranks of the children and they can identify themselves by recapitulating their childhood memories. The present paper focuses on, the comparison and contrast of his R.K.Narayan's child characters with the child characters of Anton Chekhov, one of the prolific writers in Russian literature.*

**Key words:** *Indian writing in English, Child Characters, Russian literature, prolific, consciousness.*

### **INTRODUCTION:**

R. K. Narayan is a prolific writer who has established a prominent place in Indian writing in English as well as in the minds and hearts of the readers of India and abroad. His every work is a thought provoking and lashes out the pitfalls of the society with his narrative arresting style, technique- a juxtaposition of tradition and modernity. He is one of the 'Trinity' of Indian writing in English, Mulk Raj Anand and Raja Rao. Who is credited with bringing literature in English to the world and regarded as one of the greatest writers in English.

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1P a g e



R. K. Narayan contributes his humor which is at once fresh and original to the Indian writing in English. The delineation childhood of R.K.Narayan is authentic because it derives from his own life. Besides enjoying his own childhood, Narayan closely watched the childhood of his daughter Hema, as he acts as a mother substitute after his wife's sudden demise. He succeeds to a great extent in giving her a great deal of company and amuses her. That's why many childhood scenes in his fiction are natural and lively.

Anton Chekhov is one of the best known writers in Russian literature. He is the person who develops Moscow's Art literature . "The cherry orchard" is his magnum opus. Though the guidelines for short story writing are given by Edgar Allan Poe ( An American short story writer ), Chekhov is considered to be the father of modern short story. Though his short stories are well written the plot in many tales is light. Sometimes it seems to be non-existent. His short stories like " Vanka ", " Children " and " At home " demonstrate the epistemic power of comic short story and also his artistic development into a master of ironic realistic development into a master of ironic realist narrative . He stresses the need for empathy and human understating in industrial age. He demonstrates humor in stories with a simple description.

Ronald Johnson, a Chekhov's scholar regards him:

*"A transitional author between nineteen century short fiction, which is characterized by the humorous anecdote and the romantic tale, and the modern short story, a form that enable the literary artist to explore the nature of the individual man in the modern world. Within the development of Chekhov own short fiction, many aspects of the rise of modern short story can be traced".*

Chekhov's works encourage new modes of literary expression. He plays a pivotal role in the evolution of short story. As a prolific writer he broader the parameters of the genre of the short story. His realistic style always craves for sympathetic understanding of human predicament. His stories are imbued with a keen sense of the absurdity of life.

Chekhov uses humour in his fiction to evoke sentiment in the hearts of the readers. He wants to present a real picture of the contemporary society for that purpose he gives the genre of the short story is a fresh life by using his humour. His early short stories seem to be written mainly for the amusement of the reader but the scrutiny of the critics tells us that his main moto is only social change. He spends his childhood and teen age working in his father's grocery store between school hours so that he experiences exploitation first hand at the early



age . At the time of industrial revolution, when he is nineteen he moves to Moscow. Production is the chief virtue in the industrialized Moscow and the writer sees the working class being commodified and disregarded. He feels that it is his duty to chronicle their predicament. He condemns the unhygienic conditions of the houses and streets of Moscow which leads to high death- rate among the working class.

Chekhov, as a doctor , works hard to improve the living conditions of the peasants and gives treatment to hundreds of workers for a paltry fee. He sympathizes with the opposed and the down trodden and provides a voice amidst the absurdity of the bourgeois indifference. His short stories offer vignettes of the life of the working class. The personae range from the self important state to the lowly school boy who is denied the pleasures of childhood.

Rich Goode Remarks:

*“Therefore he commits much of his authorial powers to representing the unspoken – for submerged social group of young people of all classes, and several of his early stories demonstrate, with characteristic narrative irony, the necessity of allowing boys and girls to play, to experiment and thereby to increase their epistemic fitness and quality of life”.*

In Chekhov’s short stories the readers can come across many under privileged children like David copper field. He always stands on the side of the children, and providing them a voice to evoke empathy in the minds of the adults. He suggests through his short stories that children should be given freedom to grow on their terms.

Chekhov’s child characters in his fiction have an underdeveloped sense of adult world. If there is any conflict they never pay heed to words it and move on. They have nosocial status and social class. “ Children ” is an example of ironic human which demonstrates the clash of adult and child attitudes. It mimics adults love of money celebrates the child – like rejection of human greed. “Vanka” and “Children” demonstrate the relationship between brevity and sub staining humour. These compact narratives offer single punch- lines, set up from the beginning of the story to the end by virtue of their compactness. Chekhov achieves the comic effect (it is mostly black humour) by balancing tone and timing. He emphasizes the need for a societal change.

Although not explicitly existentialist, Chekhov illustrates the absurdity or meaninglessness of life. The youngsters are not responsible for their suffering. Their terrible situation defies both reason and logic. His sense of humour stems from the humorous absurdity of life. He writes to provide insight into Russia's industrialization and its fallout. In a situation like this, human



empathy is a rare virtue. Chekhov gives voice to underprivileged and mistreated children in industrialised Russia through his short stories.

R.K. Narayan writes about middle-class living in fictitious Malgudi, South India. The Russian writer Anton Chekhov writes about both the upper middle class and aristocratic life in Moscow, in addition to the impoverished and oppressed existence. Narayan has a humorous outlook on life. He is an optimistic, devout Hindu who upholds the idea of Karma— (sin and punishment). On the other hand, Chekhov's interpretation of life is tragic. He is a pessimist who depicts wretched kids in the harsh adult world.

The children of Narayan think, act, and behave like typical kids do. They have an innocent and pure mindset. Any suffering they may have had is merely a passing episode in their exciting and contented life. The young characters in Chekhov exhibit premature wisdom. They acknowledge that suffering is a necessary part of human life . Still, they wait for the end of the tunnel and are motivated by optimism.

The whole action in Narayan's novels and short stories takes place in Malgudi, a town invented by him. It is fictitious and reminiscent of Thomas Hardy's Wessex. The lives of the children in Malgudi are easy and pleasant. However, the action regularly moves between Moscow, a city, and the rural areas of Russia in Chekhov's works. The two lifestyles are presented by him in stark contrast to one another. He seems to imply that life in country side is considerably preferable. It is shown in Vanka's life.

The adults in Narayan's fiction are kind and gentle. The signals made by the kids are not taken too seriously by them. They usually move on, forgive, and forget. In Chekhov's stories, adults are cold and uncaring. Some are so vindictive that they will stop at nothing to punish kids badly. Narayan's juvenile personas elicit laughter. When reading about Balu Swami, Raju, or Leela, the reader identifies with them, while the youngsters in Chekhov's works evoke sympathy. The reader's understanding of the Russian proletariat is greatly expanded. Basic amenities are denied to children such as Vanka. Because they are fighting for their lives, Narayan's short stories have a light-hearted, conversational tone. The majority of stories are light-hearted. In contrast, Chekhov's short stories have a dark and weighty tone. He presents a dark side of Russian life.

Narayan has a normal Hindu perspective on life. He adheres to the Karma concept, which holds that an individual's actions, whether good or evil, determine the outcome of their life. Chekhov, on the other hand, has raised in an environment of exploitation from childhood. Thus, his ideology has elements of Marxist thought. He thinks that societal transformation is desperately needed. He believes that literature should be a vehicle for the kind of social



transformation that will eventually lead to the establishment of an equitable society. It is a dream cherished by Marx and Lenin. But there is no concept of overt or covert social reform in Narayan. Narayan believes that literature exists only for the sake of amusement. He is not like the self-confessed propagandist Mulk Raj Anand in this regard.

Narayan's works have straightforward plots. They follow a traditional pattern. We witness the onset of an issue, its peak, and ultimately its conclusion. Usually, the kind adults are responsible for finding a solution. Narayan doesn't provide any catastrophic conclusions. In contrast, Chekhov's short stories hardly ever contain a plot. Not much is happening or moving. Most action takes place on a psychological level. He sets his protagonists in intricate scenarios that he develops. The stories' culmination is their response. The majority of Chekhov's stories end tragically.

A literary work's reaction from the reader is very important. We become enamoured with the tricks and mischievous behaviour of kids like Dodu, Swami, and Balu. When we grow into adults, we all remember what we have left behind. Chekhov's stories on children arouse anxiety and sympathy. We silently pray for an improvement in their living conditions.

The humour in Narayan's stories is sincere and healthy. It originates from amusing circumstances and mischievous actions committed by the children. They can all be categorised as "comedy humane" because they are all essentially deal with human conditions. Chekhov's short stories exhibit a dark sense of humour. The majority of these stories' scenarios are fundamentally existentialist. They stress how ludicrous human life is, an indisputable fact. It makes no sense. Therefore, "Vanka" and other Chekhov stories emphasise the pointlessness of human existence.

Narayan rarely uses imagery in his brief narratives. He creates the scenario, the answer, or the emotion he wants in a few clear-cut and skillful lines. The pictures by Chekhov are gory and disturbing. They remarkably resemble Salman Rushdie's Grimus and Shame pictures. For instance, the story "An Incident" has horrifying imagery. Chekhov draws a stark contrast between adult harshness and apathy and children's sensitivity.

Thus Narayan and Chekhov belong to two diametrically opposite worlds. The only common feature between the two is the effective use of irony. Both created memorable child characters. If Narayan's children give us delight, Chekhov's children awake the humanity in us. The contributions of Narayan and Chekhov to Indian English literature and Russian literature are truly significant.



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