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## **NARRATIVE TECHNIQUES OF MAXIM GORKY & MUNSHI PREMCHAND: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF THEIR SHORT STORIES**

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### **Аннотация**

**Шринивас Н. Повествовательная манера Горького и Премчанда: сравнительное исследование их рассказов.**

*Настоящая статья пытается понять манеры повествования в рассказах Максима Горького и Мунши Премчанда, написанных на русском языке и на хинди соответственно. В курсе такого сравнительного изучения, данная статья, также деконструирует их понимание эстетики в общем, и в частности эстетики их рассказов.*

**Ключевые слова:** Горький, Премчанд, повествовательная манера, рассказ.

### **Summary**

**Shreeniwas N. Narrative Techniques of Maxim Gorky and Munshi Premchand: A Comparative Study of their Short Stories.**

*This research article attempts to understand narrative techniques used by two masters of storytelling – Maxim Gorky and Munshi Premchand in their short stories written in Russian and Hindi respectively. While doing so, the article limits itself to analysis of craftsmanship and aesthetics of their short narratives.*

**Keywords:** Maxim Gorky, Munshi Premchand, narrative technique, short story.

Short story as a literary genre, in Russian literature, was first observed at the end of XVIII century when Nikolai Karamzin wrote «Poor Liza». Major Russian writers of XIX century (e.g. Pushkin, Gogol, Turgenyev, Dostoevsky, Tolstoy et al.), while attempting this relatively new and unexplored genre in Russian called their texts *povest'* (novella), being skeptic towards success and popularity of it. Eventually, the short story as a distinct literary genre in Russian Literature reached

its paramount popularity tanks to the storytellers of late XIX and early XX century Russia (e.g. Chekhov & Gorky) who with utmost confidence explored this genre. Subsequently, this era in Russian Literature was dominated by abundance of excellent short stories primarily by Anton Pavlovich Chekhov. It was precisely the time (the last decade of the XIX century) when Maxim Gorky (1868–1936) entered in to literary field.

In Hindi, the first half of the XX century witnesses the emergence of short story as the prominent literary genre. It was the time when Munshi Premchand (1880–1936) started writing short stories in 1906 in Urdu and in 1916 in Hindi. Short story was already attempted by a number of writers even before Premchand was born, e.g. Insha Alla Khan's «Rani Ketki ki kahani» (1808). Some critics regard few of the stories created towards the end of XIX century as short stories like: Shivprasad 'Sitare Hind's «Raja Bhoj ka sapna», Bhartendu Harishchandra's «Ek adbhut apoorva svapna» and Kishorilal Goshvami's «Indumati». The most celebrated Indian literary critic Acharya Ramchandra Shukla, in his book «Hindi Sahitya ka Itihaas», regards the following works as the first short stories of Hindi literature: Kishorilal Goshvami's «Indumati» (1900) and «Gulbahar» (1902), Master Bhagvandas's «Pleg ki churail» (1902), Ramchandra Shukla's «Gyarah varshh ka samaya» (1903), Girijadutta Bajpeyi's «Pandit i panditani» (1903) and Bang Mahila's «Dhulaiwali» (1907). However, according to Acharya Hazari Prasad Dwivedi, Bang Mahila's «Dhulaiwali» (1907) is the first authentic short story in Hindi [14, ñ. 25]. Then, according to Critics Ramesh Chandra Sharma [40, с. 26–27] and Madhuresh [4, ñ. 13], Madhavrao Sapre's «Ek tokari bhar mitti» (1901) is the first genuine short story in Hindi. Irrespective of the fact that, which is the first Hindi short story, there is no doubt that when Premchand started writing short story, this genre in Hindi was in infant stage and in an unrefined state. Nonetheless, he became the most significant short story writer in Hindi by consistently refining and popularizing it by writing more than 300 short stories one after another.

Though Gorky and Premchand belong to different cultures one can find overlapping elements in their works, particularly in their short stories. These overlapping occurs due t multiple reasons. No literature can exist in isolation, neglecting other literatures and cultures. There

is always an interaction happening between different literatures that lead to mutual influence and enhancement of each other. Though every writer is unique in his own mode of depicting the problems of life, convergences have been often observed among various writers and their works. There are largely three reasons of such convergences – 1) direct or indirect contact between the two writers, 2) Conversance of socio-politico-typological condition of the two cultures/ countries, and 3) Universality of human emotions and experiences, and their expressions. In the context of Premchand and Gorky, all the three above mentioned reasons are valid for the similarities in their themes, ideas, motives, characterization et al.

Though Russia, in the beginning of XX century, was already moving towards an industrial economy, while India was largely an agrarian society, there were similarity in the the socio-political milieu of both the countries since India and Russia both were suffering under oppressive regimes – India under British colonial forces, while Russia under tsarist regime, and their people were fighting against their respective oppressors. Similar socio-politico typological conditions give rise to similar motives, characters, conflicts, problems and plots, which in due course get their reflection in literatures of different countries. This is also one of the reasons of similarities in content and form of artistic expression of Gorky and Premchand.

Premchand was aware of Gorky's literary works in translation. Gorky, especially his novel «Mother», has influenced and inspired the Indian revolutionaries fighting against the British imperialism. In 1905, Mahatma Gandhi wrote in his South African news paper «Indian Opinion» that Maxim Gorky's «selfless fighting for people's rights» was unparalleled during that time [26, п. 401]. The major Hindi poet Hari-vanshrai Bachchan said such words about Gorky:

«...when we see the example of Gorky we find in him such light, and his writings, though purposeful and with noble aims, their own convictions, their own height their own standards, at the same time satisfy the artistic demand. And here lies the success of Gorky....» [6, п. 86].

Indian English writer Mulk Raj Anand regarded Maxim Gorky as «a humanist» who «dared to speak of man» and masterfully depicted not only the awful conditions of human beings, but also suggested «what

man could be.» [6, ñ. 94]. Gorky has influenced political as well as literary movements in India. Many Indian writers have experienced Gorky's influence on them in some way or the other, e.g. – Sadat Hasan Manto, Ismat, Krishna Chandra, K.A. Abbas, Hayatullah Ansari, Anwar Azim, Shokat Siddiki, Sudarshan, Ali Abbas Husaini, Premchand and others.

The Hindi literature, during the first half of the XX century, witnesses a tectonic shift from romantic mode of writing to more realistic mode of expression. This was a result of interaction with European literatures, especially the Russian literature. Russian realists like Pushkin, Gogol, Turgenev, Dostoevsky, Tolstoy, Chekhov and Gorky have greatly influenced the Indian writers including writers in Hindi. Emphasizing on Gorky's influence on Indian Literature in general and Hindi literature in particular, critic Ravindrasahai Verma in his book «English Influence on Hindi Poetry» (Kanpur, 1954) says: «Gorky's work has a huge impact on modern Hindi literature. Every contemporary Indian writer including Premchand is familiar with works of Gorky» [26, ñ. 404]. Gorky was well acquainted with the centuries-old Indian culture, art and literature and has a very high regards for civilization, culture, literatures, folk art of ancient India. In his own words: «The history of world literature does not begin with "Iliad" and "Odyssey" of Homer, but it originates from ancient Indian and oriental myths» [26, ñ. 397].

Munshi Premchand (real name Dhanpatrai) and Maxim Gorky (real name Alexei Maximovich Peshkov) both learned from life a lot, which explains to the presence of real life characters in their works. Incidentally, both wrote under their pseudonyms and died in the same year of 1936. Gorky has once suggested calling literature as «Human science» i.e. *the study of human nature*. Premchand also expresses similar opinion, when he defines literature as «critical appraisal of life» [9, ñ. 6]. Stressing upon the role of literature in society, he further adds: «Literature does not serve the purpose of entertainment alone... it influences society and people» [9, ñ. 9]. Like Gorky, Premchand too stressed upon the social responsibility of literature. Both the writers, in their literary works, criticized exploitation, inequality, injustice and oppression. In a colonial and feudal country like India poor people (especially poor farmers) were easy target of the repressive British

rulers and oppressive feudal lords. These underprivileged farmers acquire centre stage in the works of Premchand, including his short stories. Premchand sympathetically portrayed life of these unfortunate farmers, vividly depicting their struggle, suffering, emotions, agony, joy, psychic construction etc. Weighing innovation of Premchand to Hindi literature and world literature and comparing him with Gorky, XX century Russian writer of Ilya Erenburg noted:

«Premchand was about 10 years younger to Gorky, whom he valued and admired a lot. Premchand's stories are honest, at times moving, at times brutal, but always humane. This writer is a genuine innovator, thanks to his political conviction and aesthetic manner». Premchand came in contact with Gorky through latter's literary works. This contact significantly influenced the former's narrative techniques and aesthetics. This influence can be recognised in Premchand's later stories, like – *Kafan*, *Poos ki raat* etc. Gorky's influence on Premchand is observed not only in the areas of theme, idea and content of the story, but also in the areas of form and composition. Both Gorky & Premchand were in favour of simplicity in art. According to Premchand, short stories are written for common masses, subsequently they should be written with simplicity. «Short stories are written for ordinary people, who have neither money nor time. Here, the writer should blend fascinating with simplicity – that is the art» [9, п. 29].

Premchand & Gorky both advocated in favour of such art that grants more freedom to artists for expressing their ideas the way they feel. Gorky blended romanticism with realism to produce romantic realism (e.g. «Makar Chudra», «Old Izergil»). He also invented a new method that was later named as socialist realism by socialist writers. Whereas Premchand experimented with realism by amalgamating his idealism to produce what he called – idealistic realism (e.g. *Panch Parmeshwar*). Premchand initially wrote fictional works in Urdu. His first collection of stories was published as «Soz-e-Vatan» (1907) which also contains few of his critically acclaimed plot-oriented short stories (e.g. «Panch Parmeshwar»). In these stories authors voice very often interfere with the narrative structure of plot development. Author portrays character of protagonists in his own words, gives background of the main conflict, and provides his own assessment and explanation of it. Similarly, in Gorky's early romantic realist stories (e.g. «Makar

Chudra», «Old Izergil») narrator's speech has been extensively used for characterization of protagonists. These stories are folkloric, sometimes create mythical overtones and full of romantic connotations and devices. Though the author, in these stories, appears to be violating the orthodox rule of brevity in short stories, his beautiful use of figurative language engross readers in the narrative structure of the story. Similar techniques of narration have also been observed in the early story of Premchand (e.g. stories of «Soz-e-Vatan»). Though the protagonists of these short stories are typical, their actions sometimes break archetypes to embody author's own ethical ideals and aesthetic values. Subsequently, such stories conclude with moral preaching of some kind or other. Despite of raising realistic issues through realistic characters, the author often ends up resolving the conflict in a dramatic idealistic manner. Author, apparently wants his readers to see life through the eyes of an idealist narrator, who presents himself as the proponent of author's ideals. Subsequently, these stories often become subjective without hesitating to violate the fundamental principle of critical realism (i.e. objectively depicting the life). Similar practice of preaching through the characters of the short stories is found in the early stories of Gorky as well.

Premchand's stories of 1920's (e.g. «Atmaraam», «Algyozha», «Budhi kaki») witness a thematic and stylistic shift in author's writing. In these stories he draws vast canvas of Indian folk life especially motives of Indian freedom struggle (e.g. – «Julush», «Maiku»). If in his early stories, author's ideals occupy prime spot, then topical social issues come in the focus of his stories written after 1920. Nevertheless, since Premchand strongly believed in the educative role of literature, he was unable to stop himself from preaching at times. It led to birth of idealistic realism – artistic blending of moral preaching and realism. Nevertheless, during the same period he also wrote few stories where author's idealism has been completely suppressed in favour of realism, e.g. – «Sava ser genhoo», «Muktimarg», «Poos ki raat» et al. Thus, one can say that Premchand's stories of 1920's show a transition from idealistic realism to critical realism. This transition can be attributed to the fact that, this was the time when Premchand got acquainted with the works of Russian and European realist writers. If Premchand's stories witness a shift from idealistic realism to critical

realism, then Gorky's stories witness a shift from romantic realism to critical realism.

In the stories of both the writers, subjectivity of the author and objectivity of the story usually are in agreement with each other (e.g. «Maiku», «Julush», «Kafan», «Idgaah», «Sadgati», «Muktimarg», by Premchand; «In salt lake», «26 men and one girl», «Once upon in autumn» by Gorky). In those cases of rare contradiction between them, the author does not hesitate to express his point of view bluntly or subtly at the end of the story («Panch parmashwar», «Dhokha» by Premchand; «Makar Chudra», «Old Izergil» by Gorky).

Gorky wrote from his own personal experience. His characters are often inspiration from real life people with whom Gorky had met. It gave Gorky an edge in understanding human psychology closely. Subsequently, majority of his stories concentrate on understanding and analysing human behaviour from a psychological perspective, e.g. «Malva», «Konovalov», «The Companion», «Orlovs», «Chelkas», «26 men and a girl», «In salt lake» et al.. In the aforesaid stories (except «The Companion») we do not find a positive hero. Absence of positive characters in Gorky's stories can be attributed to the fact that the life of working class was so harsh, competitive and demanding that majority of positive qualities gradually disappears from their nature. One of the characters in the short story «In salt lake» – Matvei explains this dehumanization in such words:

«The main reason is life! What kind of life we live? Backbreaking! Carrying a cart of 260 kg, bitten by leeches, and only fifty kopeks a day! Is this not enough to become brutal! You work harder and harder, and then you drink all your earnings – and work again! If you live a life of this for five years... you will lose your human temper too, – beast, *oye shabbash!*» [18, п. 104].

Dehumanisation of character can also be seen in few of the stories of Premchand (e.g. «Kafan»). In Gorky's works author's voice is often expressed either through ideal characters (as in «Songs of falcon», «Songs of petrel», «Human», «Birth of man» etc.), or through criticism of the evils of social order. Premchand too used these two modes of expressing author's voice. However, both of them employ another mode of communicating author's voice – negation of negative – by portraying dehumanised protagonist, absence of positive motives

in the characters. Both the writers blame the social construct for dehumanisation of characters.

Unlike Premchand, in Gorky's stories lyrical hero is often present and narration occurs in first person, suggesting as if the author, the narrator, the hero are closely related. This is not a coincident, since Gorky himself worked as worker at many places in his country and has not only interacted with his literary characters but had himself lived their life for many years. Premchand rarely narrates his stories in first person, as if he wants to maintain a distance from his characters in order to avoid his subjective interference, nevertheless, often intervenes to express his opinion and show his solidarity with the suppressed mass.

If early stories of Premchand and Gorky were plot oriented, then their later stories are mainly character oriented (e.g. «Kafan» of Premchand and «Twenty six men and one girl» of Gorky etc.) and concentrate more on understanding of human nature. These stories use minute psychological details of the characters as artistic tools for depicting social reality. Premchand was pioneer in the art of creating plot-less stories (i.e. character oriented stories) in Hindi literature.

Usually incidents are arranged in chronological order in the stories of both the writers. Denouement, in Premchand's early stories, is often closed and seems to be dramatic, thanks to author's tendency of resolving the conflict through his own idealistic views, e.g. «Do bailon ki katha», «Panch parmashwar», «Gulli danta», «Nashaa», «Vaishya» et al.. However, in his later stories denouement is open, e.g. «Kafan» (1935), «Dudh ka daam» (1934), «Thakur kaa kuan» (1932), «Muft kaa Yash» (1934). These stories end without any kind of direct intervention from author's side.

Detail as an artistic tool is masterfully used by both Gorky and Premchand in their later stories. For example, each and every detail provided by the story tellers of «Kafan» by Premchand and «Conclusion» by Gorky are artistically expedient and serve a definite purpose. In «Kafan», Premchand provide intricate details of the duo – the father and the son – roasting the only potato that they have in an almost extinguished bonfire, while son's wife is going through severe labour pain. The father-son duo have no interest in the lady's labour pain, since both of them can't trust the other one with the potato being

roasted in the bonfire. With the detail of this simple act of roasting potato, Premchand has depicted the irony of human relationship without saying anything about human relationship. Everything – their eyes, their conversation, yelling, the bonfire, half burnt potato are artistically so expedient and complement the narrative structure that, no one can dare to remove even one word, one object, one conversation or one incident from the narrative structure. Similarly the song which the father-son duo kept on singing at the end of the story – «*Thagini kyun naina jhamkave*» – is a terrific aesthetic expression of author's satire on the society and its religious customs as well.

Nature is used by both the authors as an artistic tool either to express mood of the story (e.g. Premchand's «Poosh ki raat», Gorky's «Companion»), or to express the mood of the protagonist (Premchand's «Idgaah», Gorky's «Chelkas», «Old Izergil»). Depiction of nature sometimes express the harmony between man and nature (Premchand's «Gulli danta», «Kusum»), and sometime the harshness, indifference of the surrounding towards the protagonist struggling to survive in his hostile environment (e.g. Gorky's «Once upon time in autumn», «In salt lake», «Twenty six men and one girl», Premchand's «Sadgati», «Poosh ki raat», «Cava ser genhu»). Depiction of nature in the story «Old Izergil» is incredibly extraordinary and works as the connecting link between the three parts of story. Here nature changes its mood according to the changing mood of the story.

Since both the authors regarded literature as a means to awaken and enlighten the masses, they choose their protagonists from common folk (farmers in Premchand's stories, workers / labourers in Gorky's stories) and their settings are also taken from agrarian society (in Premchand) and industrial society (in Gorky). Since India was largely an agricultural economy during Premchand's time, his stories are set up in village surrounding. Nevertheless, migration of poor landless farmers towards cities has also started, and Premchand masterfully depicted this phase of India's transitions towards being an industrial economy in his story «Muktimarg». «Muktimarg» is a story of – how a farmer became landless and had no option left but to migrate to city and become a worker/ unskilled labourer.

Both the writers have used a lively colloquial language of masses. They use plenty of figurative language, especially maxims and prov-

erbs, which common folk use in their day-to-day speech. Gorky, unlike Premchand, poeticises his sentences and uses rhythmic combination of words & phrases in few of his stories. Whereas, Premchand uses similar sounding words (e.g. – *idhar-udhar*, *jahan-tahan*, *aise-vaise*, *jaise-taise*, *yahan-vahan* etc.), word repetition (e.g. – *kabhi-kabhi*, *baithe-bathe*, *daude-daude*, *thandi-thandi*, *hanfte-hanfte* etc.) to produce desired effects.

Both the writers have developed their own narrative techniques to expose social iniquities and to compassionately depict the life of marginalised and underprivileged folks. Comparative analysis of stories of Gorky and Premchand confirms the fact, that fate of socially deprived people in an antagonistic surrounding has been same everywhere around the globe.

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