

Anton Chekhov: *Fifty-Two Stories*

By

M. Mohsin Manzoor

Assistant Professor, College English Department, FCC

An old coachman is sitting near his carriage, he is dead silent and continuously staring right at the ground. His horse is standing still, while snowflakes have covered both of them. They are present right underneath the lamppost, due to the pale light of the lamppost old coachman and his horse have become a little more conspicuous. Last week he lost his young son, and he badly wants to share what he is going through. Now the situation which I have just narrated, it is an extract from a short story “Anguish” by Anton Chekhov. He is considered one of the most influential writers in the world of literature. Russian literature owes its grandeur to Chekhov’s writings, especially his short stories. I recently read this collection of Chekhov’s short stories; it is called *Anton Chekhov: Fifty-Two Stories*. It has been published by Penguin Classics in 2020.

In the above-mentioned extract we have not read about an emperor, general, politician or a larger-than-life figure mourning for the demise of his young son. It is an ordinary coachman, why a coachman? What impact can Chekhov create by discussing how a coachman feels? But Chekhov does not stop here, the situation becomes further complicated when we realize that coachman wants to share his grief, but he has no body to talk to. This ordinary coachman, stuck in an extraordinary situation is the art of Chekhov. The subject of his stories are common people, but they come across astonishing situations in their lives. There is no hero or villain in his stories but regular people trying to do best what they can.

When you read Chekhov, you don’t feel like thinking that “I wish I could be this character but what a pity that I can’t because I am not strong enough, romantic enough, intelligent enough or rebellious enough.” Why you can’t think like this because the moment you start knowing his characters, they appear so familiar to you. His stories echo with the details of everyday existence, and they are highly relatable. Shakespeare will always be regarded for his acute insight of human nature but most of his protagonists are kings, princes, generals, or people from privileged

background. Chekhov also leaves no stone unturned while portraying the mysteries of human nature, but his selection of protagonists is from the streets, roads, railway stations, fields, schools, factories, churches, offices, courts etc.

The vivid description, easy choice of words, uncomplicated prose makes it convenient for the readers to enjoy the short stories of Chekhov. The translation is very apt, and it soon transforms you to snow covered landscapes of Russia. Take some time out of the daily routine, have a coffee or cup of tea and travel with Chekhov to pay tribute to the ordinary people with extraordinary situations to deal with.