Introduction

My thesis is entitled “Literature and Society in Late Nineteenth Century Russia”. Here I aim to probe into the intellectual history of the period through a study of the social aspects of literature and literary environment. Anton Chekhov as a literary personality, and his social milieu, is the focus of my thesis and I have attempted to build up around him a picture of literary society encompassing critical traditions, questions of readership, the writer’s thematic preoccupations and his interaction with critics, journalists and publishers. Through this portrayal of some of the aspects of a writer’s world I have endeavoured to highlight the new trend that was emerging in literature (a trend that was unconsciously spearheaded by Anton Chekhov) which was to herald far-reaching developments in this field of culture at a very crucial moment in Russia’s history.

I would like to mention at the outset that I have focussed on the period from the 1870s, when the Russian “Populists” decided to give a practical manifestation to their ideals of a constructive programme (through their ‘going to the people’ movement) till 1905 which saw the first major revolutionary upsurge within Russia. This was also roughly the phase when the populists attempted to dominate culture, and literature in particular, as part of their project to influence the masses. Such an attempt possibly led to a sharp reaction and the imperceptible emergence of a new objectivity in literary thinking and a tendency towards creative output bereft of a coarse assertion of social consciousness. Since Anton Chekhov was an exemplary representative of the latter trend, the year of his death - 1904, agrees very well with the time span I have chosen for my thesis.
Chapter-1

As a background to the question and the problems to be raised, I have begun (in chapter 1) by saying that intellectual developments in imperial Russia in the middle and late nineteenth century, were often synonymous with the development of the literary craft by writers of outstanding renown who assured for themselves a permanent place in world culture. Literature more than any other art played a decisive part in the Russian debate of the era which manifested itself in the sophisticated philosophical and political polemics emanating from thinkers of the time. Moreover the intellectual in Russia was a man of diverse virtues - he was at once a writer, a philosopher, a political thinker and a social activist. This further constituted the uniqueness of literary man in Russian society and probably explains his remarkable ability to exercise a decisive influence in ideological developments almost according to his will.

The enhancement of the writer's importance and his imperceptible but firm assumption of intellectual leadership in Russian society was due to a number of factors. The gradual spread of education (admittedly in an uneven manner) both in the towns and in the rural areas created a substantial reading public which broadened the scope of the writer to wield his influence over a large section of society. The writer increasingly found himself in a position of responsibility as he came to be regarded as a sort of mentor to a complex and problem ridden society.

A point that I have highlighted here is that while the middle years of the nineteenth century were well known for literary output, the appeal of this kind of literature remained essentially limited (at this point of time) since literacy was confined to the upper strata in Russian society. Till the 1820s it was an aristocratic
and elite set who had established cultural standards in Russia. The character of the educated elite changed somewhat in the 1830s with the intelligentsia comprising men from both noble and non-noble backgrounds. There were men of a high order of intelligence who interested themselves in ideological polemics not merely for mental scintillation, but for practical application of these ideas for the progress of society. While the reading public increased substantially, literary tastes displayed a great range of diversity. Intellectuals of the urban areas as well as of the provinces remained partial to high literature and to belles lettres, and constituted a group distinct from the ordinary reader of popular and low-brow literature. Moreover, in spite of the fact that increased literacy generated the habit of reading, the Russian world of publishing seemed not to respond as much as it should have to the demand for books. Though there was a sharp rise in the number of printed books, they were not very easily accessible to the Russian reader. The urban and provincial educated reader normally read not books but cheap supplements to journals like Rodina and Niva. Thus journals and not books seem to have comprised the principal reading material of literate Russians who began to be swamped with a large number of journals of a variety of standards and ideological stances. Of the two broad categories into which we can divide these journals — the “thick” magazines were monthlies that were ideologically motivated and catered to the intellectual demands of the upper and middling strata of the educated class. Otechestvennye Zapiski (Notes of the Fatherland) for instance was an overtly populist journal, while Russkaia Mysl (Russian Thought) was reputed to be liberal in outlook. Severny Vestnik (Northern Herald), Russkoe Bogatsvo (Russian Wealth), Vestnik Evropy (Messenger of Europe) and Russkie Vedomosti (Russian Notices) were some of the leading newspapers and thick journals of the period. In spite of the increase in the reading public, that has been mentioned earlier, the circulation of thick magazines remained essentially limited, with the number of sold prints not exceeding 15,000 even in the case of the most
successful one. Nevertheless, the possibility of an increase in the potential number of readers always existed as was proved by the remarkable though short lived success of Zhurnal Dlia Vsekh (The Magazine for Everyone).

On the other end of the scale was the “thin” magazine, to which the newly educated low brow public was partial. These magazines were expected to churn out pure entertainment through the written word, or at the most impart at a superficial level, an idea of popular science, history and current events. A. F. Marks' Niva (The Cornfield) which promised to be a family magazine with no ‘fighting position’ and no political purpose except the propaganda of ‘pure healthy family principle’ is a classic example of a thin magazine. For this section of the first chapter of my thesis I have relied primarily on secondary material.

In the context of the enhanced importance and responsibility of the author as an intellectual force in Russian society, I have felt that it is important for a student of history to locate one’s preoccupations in a tradition of thought. And it is here that an examination of the dominant ideology in the Russia of the sixties and seventies becomes important, The leading intellectuals of the time were Chernyshevsky, Dobroliubov and Pisarev - all of whom subscribed to a body of doctrine - complex and often divergent in nature known as Russian Populism. They took as their reference point the work of Vissarion Belinsky of the earlier period. A discussion of their work (Belinsky and Chernyshevsky in particular) constitutes the remaining part of Chapter-I.

Rid of all its complexities, Populism meant an agrarian socialism which upheld the proposition that Russia could bypass the capitalist stage of development and proceed through the artel and the peasant commune directly to socialism. In the context of Czarist repression the
populists decided in the 1870s to give a practical manifestation to their ideas of constructive programme through their “Going to the People movement” and later “People's Will” movement. On the intellectual front the populists decided to use literature as a means of deluding the censor emphasising that literature should contain within it either a moral or some kind of opposition to authority.

The man who was responsible for the new approach to literature was a member of the intelligentsia of the thirties - a man named Vissarion Belinsky. It was Belinsky who envisaged the necessity of providing proper cultural guidance to a society which still had the task of removing prevalent economic and social backwardness to be fulfilled. Belinsky therefore conceptualised a didactic literature which was to be both a social and a moral force. Belinsky — (the main influences on whom were German idealist thinkers) acquired a unique position in Russia's intellectual history in the sense that he was the first to envisage the importance of literature as an instrument for the ventilation of progressive ideas. By resolutely stressing the significance of creative literature and thereby enhancing the responsibilities of the author, Belinsky simultaneously converted literary criticism into another important force to be used in the political struggle against the Autocracy. In his view literature should possess the qualities of reality and naturalness which should be the result of the artist's skill by which he transformed ordinary reality. To him the primary duty of art and creativity in Russia was to serve the interest of society, particularly since that society had been tottering under the burden of centuries of oppression.
In Chapter-I of my thesis hence, I have merged my introductory reflections on the background to the problem with a detailed investigation into the specific role of Vissarion Belinsky as the father of Russian literary criticism through an analysis of Belinsky's social and literary philosophy. I have indicated in some depth, Belinsky's total preoccupation with literature as the pivot of intellectual development, his incisive analysis of the history of Russian literature, identification of different phases of the literary movement, the intrinsic nationality of Russian literature, and the progressing sensitivity of society towards ideas which accompanied this literary development. Belinsky's identification of the writer as representatives of different faces of Russian society, whose creativity was never detached from his worldly conceptions, has been highlighted as has been his pin-pointing of new genres such as the novel. This was of immense literary and artistic significance. Belinsky's preoccupation with literary criticism comes out clearly in his various writings, where he traces the history of criticism in Russia and analyses the growing maturity of the reading public which gradually became familiar with a more sophisticated tone in critical writing. It has been noted here that Belinsky almost single-handedly was able to bring about significant changes in the orientation of Russian criticism of literature. Writing major articles in the most important journals of his time, Belinsky schooled critical attitudes in such a way, that the new critic tended instinctively to use his discretion and select only a few literary works for review. In fact Belinsky remarked with a sense of satisfaction that the reading public had gained maturity enough by the end of the 1840s to be able to judge for itself the merit of a book without the help of a reviewer.
In my bid to delve into the critical tradition of the 1860s, in the period under review, I have also taken up Nikolai Chernyshevsky, mentor of the cult of populism for detailed analysis. Chernyshevsky took his cue from the Belinskian attitude to art in the 1840s. In Belinsky's analysis the poet novelist or artist had perforce to rely on nature as his principal model and transmit the moral inspiration which he received from this source into his medium of creativity. As such, the artist was intricately bound to his social surroundings which automatically prevented him from raising the level of art to pure abstraction. Literary criticism too had distanced itself from pure aestheticism and concentrated instead on the circumstances which influenced an artist's creative output. Basing himself on this proposition, Chernyshevsky expressed his partiality to a socially relevant aesthetic orientation, repudiating any inclination towards the attainment of pure beauty in art. Advocating naturalism in art Chernyshevsky unequivocally pinpointed the purpose of artistic aspiration to be unalloyed utilitarianism. According to Chernyshevsky, art which constituted part of the moral activities of man should ideally be an explanation of life through which would emerge an evaluation of the phenomena depicted in it. Having set the trend for subjectivism in fine arts, Chernyshevsky displayed an intense eagerness for assimilating literature into the collective consciousness of Russian society and using it as a tool for the betterment of that society. Scholars like Lukacs have stressed on the fact that in contrast to Western Europe, where the suppression of the Revolution of 1848 ushered in a trend towards ideological compromise and reaction in the sphere of literature and literary criticism, in Russia the situation was in the reverse. Here democratic ideas remained predominant and were given concrete manifestation in the literary ideas of Belinsky and later on Chernyshevsky and Dobroliubov. Basing himself more on Feuerbachian materialism rather than on Belinsky's adherence to Hegelian idealism,
Chernyshevsky according to Lukacs spoke of an empirical literature which would play a significant role in bringing about radical changes in society and social relations. Therefore like Belinsky, Chernyshevsky displayed great keenness for the amalgamation of literature with the problematics of societal change. He however interpreted these ends in a somewhat different manner.

The backdrop to this transition from philosophical deliberation to utilitarian realism on the part of the leading Russian intellectuals was, as pointed out by Lukacs, in a large measure provided by German philosophy. Hegelian philosophy was regarded as a thrust away from conservatism and romantic irrationalism, geared more to a "reconciliation with reality." It was under the influence of Hegel that the progressive Russian intelligentsia deviated from questions of nature, creativity and identification with the universal, to issues such as conflict between personality and history. Embodied in the ideas of Nikolai Stankevich (1813-1840) and Mikhail Bakunin (1814-1876), Hegelian thought in Russia came to imply the assertion of the active element in the personality at the cost of the contemplative ideal. By the time Vissarion Belinsky began to make his influence felt as one of the leading thinkers of his time, he had liberated himself from belief in Absolute law (according to Hegel's contention that the "real is rational and the rational is real") which had rendered totally ineffective any subjective pretensions of individuals. Belinsky's new orientation stood for negation of the anti-individualistic concept of historical necessity.

It was from this point onwards that Belinsky began to investigate questions of the individual's desire for change vis-a-vis established social norms. In attempting to highlight a "philosophy of action" in which a path could be worked out to transform nature and history, Belinsky imbibed to some extent the anthropological materialism of Feuerbach. It was in Alexander Herzen, another famous contemporary of Belinsky, that a critique of Hegelianism was to emerge and independence of action and autonomy of the personality highlighted.

Philosophical probings into broader issues like man's identification with nature, the question of the universe and of history were to be accompanied by an analogous interest in issues of greater practical significance but narrower in scope. Sociological deliberations and investigations into social relations began to interest Russian thinkers and social scientists from the middling years of the nineteenth century. Alexander Herzen's *My Past and Thoughts* was a breakthrough in this direction, as a broad spectrum of social relations emerged from this work alongside his analysis of the political system and the existing structure of social thought. The commercialisation of social relations was highlighted in the course of Herzen's exploration into his personal experiences vis a vis society.

From the 1870s social scientific thought was to develop an even broader ambience with P.L. Lavrov's *Positivist Sociologist* (1872), *Methods in Sociology* (1874) and *Essays in the History of Modern Thought* (1888-1894). Merging into social philosophy, Lavrov's sociology identified man as having a free will and being capable of purposeful activity consciously. N. K. Mikhailovsky's *Darwin's Theory and the Social Sciences* (1870-71), Louis Blanc's *Philosophy of History*
The Struggle for Individuality (1875-76) and Heroes in the Crowd (1882) generated ideas of struggle for individuals as an integral part of social progress. Cooperation, epitomised in the rural commune, had according to Mikhailovsky, a special role to play in the struggle for individuality.

This nineteenth century legacy in social scientific thought was to culminate in academic scholarship in university circles. N.I. Kareev, S.N. Iuzhakov and M.M. Kovalevsky emerged as important sociologists who were to dominate the scholarship on the subject in this period. The most renowned among these scholars, M. M. Kovalevsky compounded in himself the evaluative skills of a historian, anthropologist, legal theorist and sociologist. His innumerable books such as Contemporary Sociologist, An Essay on the Development of Sociological Theories, Origin of the Family, the Species, Private Property, The State and Religion all probed important aspects of the sociological problematic. Kovalevsky was instrumental in organising a College of Social Sciences in Paris (in 1901) in which outstanding names of the era such as P.V. Struve, V.M. Chernov and Emile Durkheim lectured. The complex character of philosophical and sociological debate at this time clearly left the way open for a variety of opinions concerning the nature of social problems. The intellectual environment in which the intelligentsia wrote led individuals to question dogma as much as to subscribe to it. This aspect to the writer's intellectual environment was reinforced as I point out later, by changes in patterns of publication and readership. For, by the end of the nineteenth century, the diversity of
book production and readership generated a plurality of views in intellectual circles.\(^2\)

The evolution of modern academic discourse on socio economic problematics in Russia is in many senses a by-product of nineteenth century preoccupations, initially with philosophy and then with society and social change. While this by itself constitutes an important issue of discussion, I have decided to confine myself to the critical tradition in order to present a compact line of argument. I would like to mention here that even though I am aware that much of Russia’s literary and philosophical debate developed in the context of discussions of Western ideas, I have chosen not to highlight the link between Western European literature and Russian literature because of the decisive significance of local circumstances to the course a writer would take.

Having said this, I have sought to specify what I consider to be the main argument of my entire thesis. Thick journals which had as their main audience the reader from the intelligentsia were dominated by the prevailing populist psyche. They were dedicated to the dissemination of purposeful literature among the readers with the aim of fostering a socio-national consciousness among them. Drawing inspiration from the Belinskian model, the new didactic trend in the evaluation of literature was reinforced by Chernyshevsky who as an important collaborator of *The Contemporary* raised the call for a new intellectual maturity through critical and committed literature. The *Fatherland Notes, Russian Wealth* and *Russian Word* were the leading publications of the time which responded enthusiastically and accorded pride of place to reviews by men like

Chernyshevsky and Mikhailovsky whose political viewpoints emerged quite emphatically from their essays. Articles on rural society and economy were given due importance in these journals as were the writings of N. A. Nekrasov, M. E. Saltykov-Shchedrin, G. I. Uspensky and N. N. Zlatovratsky.

However what seems more important to me, is that, in spite of this dominating utilitarian prescription of good literature in the second half of the nineteenth century there existed a trend away from didactic literature towards a search for aestheticism which culminated in the Symbolist and Futurist movements marking Russian literary development in the twentieth century.

At the risk of sounding self contradictory I have hinted in Chapter-I of my thesis that Vissarion Belinsky possessed an outstanding intellect and could therefore avoid being simply the theorist of a realistic art which was to fulfil only a utilitarian function. In his attack on the doctrine of art for art's sake, Belinsky admitted that art must first be art and only afterwards can it be the expression of the spirit and drift of a society in a given age. This sensitivity was lacking in the later generation of literary critics such as Chernyshevsky, Dobroliubov and Pisarev.

Chapter-II

This brings me to the second chapter of my thesis where I have dealt with the ideological preoccupations of two literary 'greats' of the golden age of Russian literature — Dostoevsky and Tolstoy who were certainly important reference points for late Imperial writing. Here I have highlighted the fact that writing as they did at a time when
anti-establishment ideologies were dominated by populism and when the *Sovremeni*k (*Contemporary*) was joined by the *Otechestvennye Zapiski* (*Fatherland Notes*) in creating new cultural identities, both these writers devoted much of their energy on deliberating on the question of art itself. Dostoevsky theorised on literature and literary ideology, in the context of the two prevailing categories of art — art for art's sake and the utilitarian ethics in art which remained constant in his consciousness. Strangely enough, in spite of being a man of the sixties and the seventies, Dostoevsky never regarded the criticism by Vissarion Belinsky with much esteem. Dostoevsky felt that Valerian Nikolaevich Maikov and Dudyshkin were more important as critics and emphasised that it was the latter with his brilliant article on Fonvizin who really initiated meaningful literary criticism in Russia. Once criticism as a particular literary discipline assumed importance, the two views on art began to make themselves perceptible in the pages of various journals and became an important preoccupation of both the creators of literature and the receptors of their talent.

It may be pointed out here that the relevance of the question of art itself was acknowledged by intellectuals of all shades, both liberal and conservative during this particular period of intellectual dynamism in Russia. Dostovesky who rated this as one of the most “important literary questions today” highlighted the need for “freedom of inspiration” and emphasised the value of art itself with its set standard and an independent inseparable organic life of its own. He contended that even if a picture of contemporary society emerges in any work of art it does so spontaneously, as a part of artistic expression, the purity of which constitutes true purpose of art. Having deleneated the object
of art in this rather forceful manner Dostoevsky set himself apart, somewhat along the line of Chekhov from the rest of the progressive intellectuals who were his contemporaries.

This idealisation of art, the search for purity in any artistic effort was epitomised in Tolstoy’s conceptualisation of art as well. Tolstoy equated artistic creation with profound mental activity which brings clarity to imperceptible feelings and emotions which can then be easily transmitted to others. The artist is induced by an inner compulsion to convey his internalised vision, through his work of art to all around him. The populist domination of culture notwithstanding, true art and the role of the artist had very different implications for Tolstoy. He made a sharp distinction between art and non art and negated all theories which attempted to reduce art to a tool for intellectual brainwashing. His literary activity with its emphasis on the moral movement overcame the intellectual impediments posed by the critical tradition of the sixties with very little effort, with even less effort than that with which he rejected revolutionary activity as an important principle of societal change.

Chapter-III

Having deliberated in some detail over the roots of the populist literary mentality on the one hand (apart from Belinsky and Chernyshevsky I have handled, admittedly briefly some populist authors of mediocre talent in my first chapter) and on the conscious inclination towards true aestheticism on the part of two really great authors - Dostoevsky and Tolstoy on the other (Chapter-II as mentioned earlier), I pass on to Anton Chekhov in Chapter-III of my thesis. I regard Chekhov as a true representative of a new type of literature
which was to carve out a niché for itself in the minds of intellectual readers. It was in Anton Chekhov perhaps, in his personality, ideas and literary output that the polemics regarding the purpose of art reached a satisfactory conclusion. Gifted with a remarkable talent of putting across his ideas concisely he became the *avant garde* storyteller who initiated a new genre, the short story in the art of writing. As the fascination for the short story caught on among Russian writers, readers and publishers Chekhov himself modestly acknowledged his personal contribution to changes in literary technique. The master craftsman in Chekhov emerged in his sophisticated handling of thematically ordinary episodes which he wove into fascinating tales thereby adding new dimensions to creativity in Russian literature. Reticent by nature, Chekhov had little to add to the philosophical debates of his time. In fact his strong sense of personal freedom of a writer prevented him from philosophising or overtly preaching in any of his writings. However the richness of Chekhovian literature which encompassed within itself all elements of Russian society as well the varied nuances of Russian life through the depiction of ordinary everyday characters, lay in the fact that it always refrained from being consciously tendentious. This break from the stranglehold of utilitarian art was particularly significant — for Chekhovian literature was to serve as an inspiration for many a young writer and was ultimately to pave the way for revolutionary developments in aestheticism in Russian literature in the form of Symbolism and Futurism. In fact my thesis would like to expand on and modify to a certain extent (in the context of the writings of Dostoevsky and Tolstoy), Arnold Hauser's observation that "In Russia the novel as mere entertainment or pure analysis of character, with no claim to social significance is unknown until the beginning of the eighties". In my view

Anton Chekhov emerged as the lynchpin on which the Russian literary development supported itself and found the courage to traverse hitherto untrodden paths in creativity at the turn of the century. Chapter-III of my thesis attempts at presenting an overview of the literary environment in which Chekhov lived and worked so as to provide an insight as to how and why Chekhov ultimately became a literary phenomenon loved and respected by both writers and readers in the years preceding the first revolution.

My investigation into the Chekhovian literary scenario, with insights into his interaction with writers, critics and publishers reveal that Chekhov was a man actually made by the critic, spotted by Nikolai Leykin, editor of the humour magazine *Oskolki* (Fragments), adopted by Alexei Suvorin, owner of the conservative journal *Novoe Vremia* (*New Times*) and befriended by Lavrov, publisher of the liberal journal *Russian Thought*. The fact that Chekhov published his stories not only in thick journals after he had attained success, but in 'thin' journals like *Niva* (*Cornfield*) widened his readership a great deal. By this time, a middling layer of Russian readership comprising provincial gentry, school teachers and clergymen had in any case narrowed the gap between readers of the urban intelligentsia and the ordinary reader of provincial and rural Russia.

*Chapter-IV*

The short story on which Chekhov's fame primarily rested was taken up by other writers of his time and some of those following him, the two most important being Alexander Kuprin and Ivan Bunin. This
subtle Chekhovian influence on other writers, their artistic aspirations and struggle for recognition, constitutes Chapter-IV of my thesis. Chekhov himself experienced an element of likemindedness with the writers of the last two decades of the nineteenth century like Tikhonov, Korolenko, Shcheglov, Baranstevich and Bezhetsky. The men of the eighties as Chekhov called them were dissimilar in terms of their potentiality as writers. Many of them were unable to establish themselves as artist of lasting importance. However they formed an important literary circle in Chekhov's time, influencing to a certain extent the trend of literary creations of the period.

Though it cannot be denied that writers and critics like Gleb Uspensky and N. Zlatovratsky and N.N. Mikhailovsky were quite dominant in journals like *Fatherland Notes* the impact of their writings was tending to get somewhat dispersed. Vladimir Korolenko's work was quite in keeping with the declining trend of politicised literature with conspicuous tendentious leanings, towards the end of the nineteenth century. In fact Korolenko's stories were regarded as socially unimportant by the populists who bracketed Korolenko and Chekhov as being writers of the same category. Narodniks failed to find elements of coercion in any of Korolenko's stories and thus were forced to discard him as a writer of value. The fact that Korolenko achieved a good deal of success during his lifetime was a significant pointer to the steady undermining of moralistic literature which the populists had promoted from the 1860s.

The group around Chekhov however did not assume any kind of collective identity or profess to adhere to any common orientation in their work as literary artists. No attempt was made by any of these writers to build up a new artistic
vision in commonality, or consider question of word structure or the craft of writing. Their significance lay in the fact that these writers of the eighties interested themselves in thematic variations (the highlighting of ideal rural life and peasant existence no longer constituted the focal point of their works as had been in the case of the populist writers) and more often than not relegated ideology to the background. Along with Anton Chekhov’s outstanding achievement in this direction – the emphasis of these younger writers on art itself, contributed in a major way to the undermining of populist visions of utilitarian literature.

Chapter-V

And this brings me to the final and perhaps the most important chapter of my thesis Chapter-V the works of Anton Chekhov where I have tried to show the distinctive qualities of his work and his unique role as harbinger of a new age in literature. This chapter has two sections, dealing with (a) a few examples of the prose of Chekhov and (b) the relation of his plays to experimentation in dramatic art. I have reiterated throughout my Introduction that Chekhov was never overtly tendentious in his stories and plays. However in his conceptualisation of the role of literature and writers, Chekhov was not devoid of any interest or totally detached from his characters and their problems and did not distance himself from any kind of commitment to them. He felt that the author had the duty of formulating questions which amounted to a sanction, albeit a very mild one, of the concept of writing for a specific purpose. In that sense Chekhov was no misfit in the Russian literary society of his time, he was an integral part of his immediate
social context. His individualistic temperament abhorred regimentation of any kind. Thus we have such thematically diverse and stylistically wide-ranging stories such as The Steppe (kaleidoscope of impressions of the countryside), Lights, (theme of pessimism), The Party (scathing view of intellectuals) A Dreary Story (ideals and values discerned in the everyday existence of individuals), Ward No 6 and The Black Monk (two intensely psychologically probing stories) The Duel (superfluous man) and stories like Ariadne, lonich, The Darling and Lady with the Dog (all with women as heroins).

While dealing with Chekhov's plays I have tried to point out that Chekhov's work here, was somewhat similar to his prose writing. The new Chekhovian theatre of mood coincided with the urge for 'revising and rejuvenating the old regime of the theatre.' His new format of plays of non-action inspired great directors like Stanislavsky to experiment with dramatic technique and even more radical experimentation at the hands of Vsevolod Meyerhold in the form of his Symbolist productions.

The literature

In attempting to present an overview on the state of Russian literature from the 1860s to 1904, I am aware of the existence of a considerable amount of scholarly literature dealing with various aspects of the subject under examination. Studies in literary criticism constitute a major focus of scholarly interest and works such as Modern Criticism and Theory by David Lodge, The Theory of Literature by Rene Wellek and Austin Warren, together with classics such as Studies
in European Realism by G. Lukacs and Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics by M.M. Bakhtin have been of immense help in my understanding of the subject. R. H. Stacy's Russian Literary Criticism – A Short History with a highly specialised focus has been of direct relevance to my field of investigation. Biographical works on the major authors I have dealt with are numerous. Needless to say writers like Dostoevsky, Tolstoy and Chekhov have attracted the attention of scholars the world over. K. Mochulsky, Aylmer Maude, B. Eikhenbaum, Ronald Hingley, E. J. Simmons & D. Rayfield are some of the important biographers of the above writers. A Handbook of Russian Literature by Victor Terras along with Kratkaia Literaturnaia Encyclopaedia have been of immense use in providing biographical information on most of the authors about whom I have given some details in my footnotes. A. Walicki's A History of Russian Thought, dealing with philosophical developments within Russia, and Jeffrey Brooks' When Russia Learned to Read, on the world of popular readership and publishing, have certainly opened up new vistas in Russian studies.

Soviet scholarship on the period is embodied in a number of capital works. Among those worthy of mention here is Russia and the West: 19th Century by N. Pirumova, B Itenberg and V Antonov, which explores the evolution of the revolutionary mentality of Alexander Herzen, Mikhail Bakunin and Peter Lavrov in the context of


their interaction with Western European society and its leading revolutionary personalities. Mazzini, for example, it is pointed out, inspired Herzen to a great extent, though the two did not actually meet. Lavrov’s impressions of French and German society and the influence of Herzen upon him emerge quite emphatically in an exclusive chapter on the thinker. Andrei Anikin’s *Russian Thinkers - Essays on Economic Thought in the 18th and 19th Centuries*, 6 meanwhile deals with Russian ideologues of the Petrine period, the Moscow professors during Catherine II’s era, and Lomonosov, Belinsky, Herzen and Chernyshevsky. It has been of immense help in gauging the emphasis of Soviet scholars on the democratic socialist thrust of the thinkers discussed. Recently, *Mystery of a person. Peculiarity of F. M. Dostoevsky’s Realism* by N. V. Kasatkin and V. N. Kasatkina 7 and *Turgenev, Dostoevsky, Chekhov: The study of the writers’ creative ties* by E.V. Tyukhova 8 explore innovative methods of how to handle the stylistic technicalities of the writers’ works.

A range of articles are also clearly valuable in piecing together the ideological background to literary activity. Vladimir A. Tunismanov’s *Revolutionary Visions of the Life and Creativity of A. I. Herzen: Buchot & Gilbert Romme* 9 has a orientation similar to the

work by N. Pirumova and others cited above. It analyses the influence of the French Revolution on the life and work of A. Herzen. The scholar highlights the fact that Herzen dwells on the aspirations of revolutionary personages in his works and incorporated major figures of the revolution such as C. G. Romme and M. Bouchot in his writings. This demonstrates the points of reference which were common among Russian writers in the early nineteenth century. The same is true of “Imia rokovoe” (Dukhovnoe Nasledie P. Ya. Chaadaeva i Russkaya kultura) by V. Kantor which deals with Chaadaev’s ideas about Western Europe stressing his contention that Russia must follow the path of enlightenment and take lessons from West European history. It points out Chaadaev’s opposition to the Slavophils and his connection with Pushkin regarding the philosophy of history and questions of Europeanisation. The article also explores the link between Chadaev’s worldview and later Russian culture. Here the author mentions the embodiment of Chaadaev’s ideas in Chekhov’s impressionistic plays as well as in futuristic poetry. Another important article, meanwhile, by V. Mildon, Ot Chevo Umer Gogol discuses how Gogol regarded his work to be his life. The essay goes into questions of realism portrayed in Gogol’s writings and probes how his works were connected to the people. N. G. Chernyshevsky and P. A. Bibikov: the case of an attribution on the authorship of the book ‘The Literary Activities of N. A. Dobroliubov’ by V. I. Batov and Iu A Sorokin, discusses new

methodologies for determining authorship of historical texts, while Lauth Reinhard’s *The question of the origin of the ‘Legend of the Grand Inquisitor; Notes on the problem of mutual relations between Dostoevsky and Solov’ev*\(^\text{13}\) deals with the influence of Dostoevsky’s religious and philosophical ideas on Solov’ev. These studies show how literary texts may be approached without strictly stylistic points of reference, and with an eye to textual reconstruction and ideological context. Literary cross-readings in this respect are dealt with in *Russian and Foreign Philosophical and Philological thoughts about Gogol’s Spiritual Search* by T. M. Millionshukov\(^\text{14}\) and constitute some of the important research articles produced by Soviet scholars.

In general, Leykina-Svirskaya’s\(^\text{15}\) work on *The Intelligentsia in Russia in the Second half of the Nineteenth Century* and B. V. Dubin’s *Biografia, Reputatsia, Anketa (O formax integratsii opita v pismennoi kulture)*\(^\text{16}\) provide impressions of different issues of cultural history being investigated by Russian academicians in Soviet times and today respectively. Earlier tradition clearly sought to draw attention to the attributes and popularity of figures who were lionized in the Marxist-Leninist canon. It also sought to find social commitment in the litterateur. Good examples are articles such as *Chernyshevsky-Chitatel-


Vremja by V. Serduchenko\textsuperscript{17} which connects the problem of art in Chernyshevsky's novel Shto Delat with the problem of historical time and his readership. The scholar find genuine beauty and perfection in Chernyshevsky's novel obviously from the standpoint of the literary creations of socialist. S. Semenova, painfully aware of the problems posed by Dostoevskii for the Soviet variant of Marxist-Leninist priorities, focuses on the early works of Dostoevsky such as Poor Folk, Notes from the Underground etc. in her Vishaia Idea Shushestvovania u Dostoevskovo.\textsuperscript{18} She points out that at the end of his life and work Dostoevsky's ideas displayed great depth and manifested themselves in "his great idea of the existence of man". V. Lakshin in his article Vozrashenie Tolstovo-Mysletelia\textsuperscript{19} takes up the works of Tolstoy, examines Lenin's views on Tolstoy and probes into Toltoy's ideas about leading a simple peasant existence. He concludes that Tolstoy regarded the inhabitants of the world as one big unified family. A fairly typical Soviet evaluation of Chekhov is probably S. Povarstov's essay Liudi Raznikh Mechtanii (Chekhov i Merezhkovskiy).\textsuperscript{20} The author writes that even though articles have been written on Chekhov and Turgenev, Chekhov and Korolenko, Chekhov and Maupassant, Chekhov and Gorky, Merezhkovsky, as representative of "decadent" literature, did however indirectly have a certain contextuality with Chekhov. Both

\textsuperscript{17} V. Serduchenko, "Chernyshevsky - Chitatel - Vremia" in Voprosy Literatury, No. 8, 1988, pp 120-134.

\textsuperscript{18} S. Semenova, "Vysaya Idea Shushestvovania i Dostoevskovo" in Voprosy Literatury, No. 11, 1988, pp 166-195.

\textsuperscript{19} V. Lakshin, "Vozrashenie Tolstovo - Mysletelia" in Voprosy Literatury, No. 5, 1998, pp 104-117.

\textsuperscript{20} S. Povarstov, "Liudi Raznikh Mechtanii, Chekhov i Merezhkovskii" in Voprosy Literatury, No. 6, 1988, pp 153-183.
their works were written in the backdrop of cultural dynamism in Russia. Chekhov and Merezhkovsky, however, represented two lines of Russian culture and were as far apart as two opposing poles. They were both literary artists, but their styles differed. The author concludes that as any compromise between materialism and idealism was impossible, so was any reciprocal relation between Chekhov and Merezhkovsky not viable especially on the threshold of approaching revolution.

While acknowledging the rich contribution of the above works to Russian studies of the late nineteenth century my dissertation has a different orientation in that it seeks to place the social position of a writer in a tradition of literary thought, without standard Marxist-Leninist terms of reference. In drawing out my story, I focus on various aspects of Russian literary society which do not find a central place in any of the above works. These include: the political and social connotations of literary criticism, the development of the writer's particular mental stance in the context of this kind of criticism (which I seek to investigate in my chapter on Dostoevsky and Tolstoy), the intellectual and social milieu which makes the writer the man he ultimately is (my focus on Anton Chekhov is an effort in this direction). I must point out here that the writers of the populist genre who help bolster up my argument about the progress of aesthetic ideal in the writers mentality as opposed to democratic utilitarian art do not find much importance in scholarly evaluation of Russian literature.
I would like to mention here that Victor Terras' *A History of Russian Literature* when dealing with literary criticism and aesthetic theory presents certain aspects of the subject which are similar to issues handled by me. However considering the much greater time span covered and its almost encyclopaedic scope, the work can be regarded to be of a category quite different from the motivations guiding my thesis. I hope that, in integrating social and literary themes in the way I have done, I posit a slightly novel assessment of this very crucial period of Russian literary history through my thesis.

The sources

I have used both Russian as well as translated English sources as primary material for my thesis. Fortunately the Collected Works of most of the thinkers and authors I have dealt with are available at the Russian section of the National Library at Calcutta. I have thus systematically consulted some of the volumes of Belinsky's *Polnoe Sobranie Sochinenii*, (Complete Collected Works), F. M. Dostoevsky *Polnoe Sobranie Sochinenii V Tridsati tomakh* (Complete Collected Works in 30 volumes) L.N. Tolstoi's *Polnoe Sobranie Sochinenii* (Complete Collected Works) and of course A. P. Chekhov's *Polnoe Sobranie Sochinenii I Pisem (v tritsati tomakh) Pisma v dvenatsati tomakh*, (Complete Collected Works and Letters).

I would like to emphasise the fact that the Collected Works of all these writers each comprise innumerable volumes (Tolstoy's Collected

Works comprise more than 80 volumes of about 500 pages each, while Chekhov's works are compiled in about 30 volumes) and contain apart from their literary works all their other intellectual writings as well as their letters diaries and notebooks; all footnoted in great detail. I have consulted the relevant volumes dealing with letters, diaries, notebooks and intellectual articles and used them for my chapters. I have also utilised the Collected Works of the lesser writers like Korolenko which I consulted in the Russian section of J.N.U. Library Delhi.

Apart from this, another series Literaturnoe Nasledstvo (Moskva), available both at Calcutta and at Delhi has been of great use to me. Volume 68 in particular contains letters, diaries, notes—all pertaining to Anton Chekhov, by the lesser known authors of his time such as Tikhonov, Shcheglov, Leykin and letters of Korolenko and Kuprin as well as letters by the celebrated actor and director—Vsevolod Meyerhold.

Apart from Russian sources, I have also used primary sources translated into English very frequently. Many of the letters, diaries, notebooks of Dostoevsky, Tolstoy and Chekhov have been translated by well known and highly respected names (as translators) in the Western world such as David Magarshack, Constance Garnett, Aylmer Maude, R. F. Christian and Ernest J. Simmons I have looked into all them and then corroborated my reading from the original Russian versions. Sometimes translated pieces such as the production notes of Stainslavsky directing Chekhov’s play Seagull (translated by David
Magarshack) and Meyerhold on Theatre tr & ed Edward Braun of which I have not been able to locate the Russian version have been of immense use to me in the last chapter of my work. Memoirs and portraits such as Kornei Chukovsky's Chekhov - The Man and Ivan Bunin's Memoirs and Portraits have constituted other sources helpful for my thesis. However I would like to point out that the published material in the form of Collected Works of literary personalities available to us in India, specially in the case of Chekhov and Dostoevsky do not contain letters written to the authors by their friends and contemporaries. Even though the volumes entitled Literary Heritage do make up for this, to a certain extent, correspondence from ordinary members of the reading public who were admirers of the writer have not been published here. As a result I have been unable to delve into the question of readership and popular reactions to specific works in as great depth as I would have liked to. Moreover as the early drafts of the creative works have not been published it has been difficult for me to gauge the author's intention and the changes in his frame of mind. These certainly constitute some of the limitations of my thesis. Often certain missing volumes of the Collected Works, sometimes rather vital to my area of investigation has been a big hindrance to systematic scrutiny of the sources in Russian. As I have been unable to arrange a visit to Moscow due to personal difficulties as well as due to political instabilities in Indo-Russian ties gaps in my reading of primary material have become a major lacuna of my thesis.