Chapter IV  A.P. Chekhov. The Group around Chekhov

Anton Pavlovich Chekhov, while he came to possess the same public status of Tolstoy and Dostoevsky, was also the initiator of a new genre in the sphere of Russian literature. Contributing his share to the golden age of Russian literature, Chekhov became a representative of a new type of literature and a new group of writers. This literature and some of the men who practised it, though unable to carve out a permanent niche for themselves in the minds of intellectual readers were to give an indication of the greater changes that were to take place in Russian literature in terms of style, ideological content and subject matter. The men of “the eighties” as Chekhov called them, were a varied lot - most of whom were to lapse into oblivion as authors but who formed an important circle in Chekhov’s time influencing to a certain extent the trend of literary creations of the period. Chekhov himself felt at one with the writers of the “end if the nineteenth century” among whom he included “Tikhonov, Korolenko, Shcheglov, Barantsevich and Bezhetsky”. All of them taken together could, in Chekhov’s view, represent a “guild” of creative arts who would observe society and would formulate the correct questions. While Chekhov’s hopes about most of these writers as gifted artists were belied, since they were mostly unable to contribute anything of permanent value to Russian literature, Vladimir Korolenko stood out as an exception from rest.

Temperamentally very different from one another, Chekhov and Vladimir Galaktinovich Korolenko were intellectual props to one another in the early years of their acquaintance. Both these writers made their literary debut at the about the

same time and enjoyed a similar kind of reputation as artists in the early phase of their careers. Chekhov in fact mentions in one of his letters, an article entitled "Chekhov and Korolenko" which came out in *Russian Wealth* where the writer Obolensky evaluated both their works and attempted to prove Chekhov "more of an artist than Korolenko". While Obolensky's evaluation of Chekhov's popularity eventually proved to be right, 1887, the year of the publication of the article saw Korolenko being regarded as a very talented writer for whom Anton Chekhov himself had many words of admiration. For instance in a letter to Korolenko, he writes, "I find your 'Escapee from Sakhalin', the most outstanding work that has appeared of late. It is written like a good musical composition in accordance with all the rules an artist's instinct suggests to him. Throughout the book you show yourself to be such a powerful artist, such a powerhouse that even your biggest faults which would be the death of any other writer, pass by unnoticed. Women, for instance are stubbornly absent from the entire book, and I have only just managed to detect it." Then again Chekhov comments, "I am very anxious to read Korolenko's story. He's my favourite contemporary writer. His colours are rich and vivid, his language impeccable - though a bit recherche in places - his images noble." Korolenko on his part was among the few intellectuals to assert the merits of Chekhov's writings early and had advised him along with writer Grigorovich to write long pieces and publish them in "thick" i.e. high brow journals. In fact Korolenko was instrumental in making the publication of Chekhov's first novelette, *The Steppe*, in the prestigious journal *Northern*


Herald possible, a step which Chekov regarded as a major effort towards the achievement of a literary reputation. In fact Chekhov by that time had been branded as somewhat of a reactionary by populist critics like Mikhailovsky (who was responsible for the literary criticism section of the Northern Herald) for his association with New Times, and it took quite a bit of effort on the part of Korolenko as member of the Northern Herald editorial board to negate Mikhailovsky's objections and convince the editor, Alexei Plescheev, to print Chekhov's story.

Such mental affinity between the two authors notwithstanding, Chekhov and Korolenko were to part ways later on, both in terms of their literary output as well as in terms of their personalities and public activity. While the relationship between them was to remain cordial to the last, extracts from Korolenko's diaries at the end of Chekhov's life reveal that he did not really understand the essence of Chekhov's personality and truly appreciate the complexities of the Chekhovian art. We find Korolenko describing very aptly in his diary in 1904, on hearing the news of Chekhov's death, the true nature of the relationship between them. While noting the extreme regard they both felt for each other and personal affection totally devoid of jealousy which marked their attitude to each other, Korolenko nevertheless admitted that later on in their careers they had not met much and had gone on their different roads. He emphasised that "our personal connections fitted into literary camps frankly hostile." In spite of joining hands with Chekhov over

8. L. N. 68, p523
the annulment of Maxim Gorky's membership from the Academy of Science in 1902, Korolenko was unable to revive his early fellow feeling towards Chekhov. This is clear from the remark in his dairy: "I think that the society of Suvorin and "New Times" brought Chekhov much harm. Towards the end of his life he strongly turned away from them, and did not write a line in the New Times."9

Being an ardent political activist himself - having started his adult life by facing the wrath of the Czarist autocracy who imposed a long period of exile on him - Korolenko was unable to find real empathy with a man like Chekhov, who, in spite of the terrible hardships (though of a completely different sort than those faced by Korolenko) undergone by him in his early life, was able to maintain such a placid and apparently a-political attitude towards society and art in general. In fact Korolenko himself admitted, in 1919, in the presence of V.Kataev, that though he could not simply understand and justify Chekhov's working for Suvorin, it must be said for Chekhov that nowhere, not in New Times nor outside, did he write one line which he had to repent or repudiate. The fact that he did not renounce or repent was rare luck for the author, luck which Chekhov possessed only because he was able to think beyond politics. 10

The litterateur in Chekhov always retained its intrinsic qualities in the sense that Chekhov's awareness of Western literature never induced him to adopt any kind of methodology in his writing that was alien to him. In spite of being impressed with Maupassant as a short story writer and his political sympathy for Zola, Chekhov resisted their tendencies to apply the biological sciences to literary creations. His critical evaluation of Zola's Dr. Pascal was on the whole favourable though he raised doubts about the principal character itself. Paul

9. L. N. 68, p523
10. L. N. 68, p523, Footnote 12 to the diary of Korolenko.
Bourget's novel *Le Disciple* which was highly acclaimed in Europe and was serialised in translated form in *Northern Herald*, was read enthusiastically by Chekhov.\textsuperscript{11} Chekhov praised Bourget for being familiar with the scientific method but criticised his overt crusade against anti-materialism. That Chekhov disliked overstatement in any form is proved by the fact that even at the young age of nineteen he found *Uncle Tom's Cabin* too overbearing in its melodramatic sentimentality. Cervantes' *Don Quixote* conveyed much greater literary quality to the young Chekhov who equated it to the level of Shakespearean drama. Chekhov found Henry Thoreau's *Walden* (serialised in *New Times*) fresh and original though difficult to read.\textsuperscript{12}

Western European dramatic literature was a source of great interest to Chekhov which perhaps intensified in his later years when he himself turned his hand to playwriting. August Strindberg's play *Miss Julie* translated by Yelena Shavrova was highly acclaimed by Chekhov who however identified certain shortcomings of dramatic technique in it.\textsuperscript{13} Chekhov who kept pace with changes in the format of theatre in Western Europe was highly impressed by Maurice Maeterlinck whom he recommended to the Moscow Art Theatre.\textsuperscript{14} Ibsen and Hauptman were the other European playwrights who attracted Chekhov's interest.

\textsuperscript{11} Karlinsky LAC, p258, letter to Suvorin dt Nov. 11, 1893 from Melikhovo and p 143, Letter to Suvorin dt May 7, 1889 from Sumy. Chekhov PSSP, vol 5 (*Pisma*), p 244 and Chekhov PSSP, vol 3, *Pisma*, pp 207, 208


\textsuperscript{13} Karlinsky LAC, p 358, footnote

\textsuperscript{14} Karlinsky LAC, p 435, footnote
Vladimir Korolenko on his part was a highly political man whose political activism set him apart as a distinctive individual before he set to make his mark as a writer and an artist. In his student years at the Petrovskaya Academy Korolenko led a signature campaign against the Academy's collusion with the Czarist police in the widescale arrest of students. This was immediately regarded as sedition by a writer and an artist. In his student years at the Petrovskaya Academy Korolenko led a signature campaign against the Academy's collusion with the Czarist police in the widescale arrest of students. This was immediately regarded as sedition by the authorities, thus initiating a period of exile for Korolenko for about nine years. This early schooling in hardship and great adversity, enabled Korolenko to "to feel, all strata of the Russian people, beginning with the half wilds in the European North where they do not yet know the ordinary cart, and ending with urban workingmen". Thus when he began his literary career at the age of thirty-two in Nizhni Novgorod, he was able to utilise his intimate knowledge of the diverse races of the Siberian part of Russia as subject matter of some of his most successful stories. Korolenko's literary activity was accompanied by ceaseless political as well as social activity. As a publicist and defender of civil liberties, Korolenko first attracted attention to himself by taking up the cause of the Multan Votyaks a tribe falsely implicated for murder by the Czarist police. Korolenko rushed to the defence of this group in a retrial which took place mainly due to his efforts and was instrumental in the acquittal of the Votyaks. The nationwide recognition which resulted from this, inspired many to appeal to him for help for various injustices done to them and earned him the sobriquet, 'Russia's conscience'. That Korolenko lived up to this title is proved by the fact that in

1899, when it came to his knowledge that a member of the Chechen tribe had been wrongly sentenced to death for highway robbery, when he was in reality innocent, Korolenko did his utmost to have the sentence repealed. Apart from writing to and personally meeting the Chief Military Prosecutor, Korolenko published the case through the press and helped the accused Yusupov to gain absolute freedom.

Like Anton Chekhov, Korolenko was a dynamic social activist. His setting up of canteens for the peasants with the help of donations when the Nizhni Novgorod district was hit by by a severe famine in 1891-92 was strongly reminiscent of Chekhov's similar efforts in famine relief work and the management of a cholera epidemic at about the same time in Melikhovo where Chekhov had a newly acquired estate.

Korolenko's propensity for organised political protest found an opportunity to express itself in 1902, and succeeded in involving almost the entire literary world including such a-political and clearly undemonstrative personalities like Anton Pavlovich Chekhov himself. This renewal of contact with Chekhov whom Korolenko met for the last time on 24th March, 1902 at Yalta was occasioned by the famous 'academic incident'. This basically was the withdrawal of Maxim Gorky's election as honorary member of the Imperial Academy of Sciences in the context of fresh student disturbances which were taking place in Russia at that time. Korolenko immediately sent a letter of protest to the Academy and sent Chekhov a copy of it which he felt would induce Chekhov to protest. Chekhov reacted by resigning from the Academy and informing Korolenko of his decision.16 In fact Korolenko here mentions exactly how independent minded

Chekhov was and that he was a person who did precisely as he thought was necessary. Chekhov, on his part initially thought of joint action, but later decided to send in his resignation to the Academy.

In 1900, Korolenko settled in Poltava in the Ukraine, which became the scene of more agitation and protest from him to defend human rights. The brutal and primitive methods used to teach the rioting peasants of the area a lesson, induced Korolenko to address an "Open Letter to Counsellor of State Filonov" which registered his vehement protest and called for Filonov's trial. The preemption of this trial by Filonov's assassination caused Korolenko to be branded once more as a subversive and initiated a campaign of persecution of the writer by the Czarist police. This compulsive urge for public justice and belief in the innate goodness of the human's spirit was however to continue unabated in Korolenko and the writer was to remain an uncompromising defender of humanity to the end of his days.

Korolenko's place in the history of Russian literature was in a sense synonymous with the genre created at the end of the nineteenth century when the intense politicisation of literature with its conspicuous tendentious leanings was fading out giving way to a new attitude in the field of the creative arts. Though it cannot be denied that Populist authors like Gleb Uspensky and N. N. Mikhailovsky were very much around, the impact of their presence and of course their writings was somewhat dispersed with the emergence of writers like Korolenko, Barantsevich, Chekhov, Tikhonov etc. In fact Maxim Gorky in his

reminisences of Korolenko remarked that the reading the latter's stories in 1888 or 89 evoked "a new impression which did not accord with the one received from the literature of the populists, a study of which was in those days considered a must for every young person roused to an interest in public life.... To every reader.... who was the least bit discerning, it was clear that Korolenko's stories in no way set out to coerce either the mind or the senses." The radicals, i.e. those who were inclined towards the Narodnik ideology, found little value in most of Korolenko's works, placing them in the same category as Chekhov's writings and discarding them as being socially unimportant. This lumping together of Chekhov and Korolenko was a significant pointer towards the identification of a "new group" of writers gradually replacing the "men of the sixties" whose most outstanding representative was Anton Chekhov himself.

The members of this "group" - a word which possibly describes very loosely the almost imperceptible distinctive features of the new creative writing which was taking place in Russia in the 1800s and 90s, perhaps never identified themselves seriously in such a manner. Neither did they seek to impose their own ideas of art on one another, nor seriously delve into the areas of word structure or the craft of writing and thereby formulate a new 'school' of literature. What is significant about these writers of the eighties is that they showed an interest in new themes and more often than not relegated ideology to the background for the sake of the purity of their art. While Anton Chekov was perhaps the one to do this most consciously and successfully, the efforts of the other writers in this respect are not to be negated and should be seen as part of a wider development towards a new emphasis on art itself to the detriment of ideological preaching through literature.

Vladimir Korolenko's early stories like *In Bad Company* (1885), *The Strange One* and *Makar's Dream* while all set in Siberia had very different themes but a common appeal in terms of language and charming simplicity. *In Bad Company*, which Korolenko wrote during his years of exile in Yakutia, is a very moving story of a little child's communion with two children of totally different social backgrounds. The story tells the tale of a little, motherless boy, unloved and uncared for, unable to find solace from his grieving father who is otherwise a very honourable man, a judge by profession withdrawing from his natural social sphere and becoming a difficult and desperately naughty boy. Regarded by his family as totally incorrigible, this child - Vasya - distances himself from them and befriends two beggar children Valek and Marusya. It is on them that he showers his love and sympathy, emotions which he is unable to express among his own kind. The author gives the reader a delightful account of the relationship between these three children and in the process reveals the extreme poverty of certain sections of the Russian people and their miserable existence. Vasya who possesses an almost adult sensibility is very aware of his newly made friends' unfortunate lot and the total lack of material comforts which he himself takes for granted. He tries in his innocent way to make up for this by bringing Valek and Marusya apples from his father's orchard. Korolenko describes with great delicacy the delight of the little girl at these unexpected gifts and Vasya's feelings of overwhelming satisfaction at having brought a little happiness in the life of the little beggarchild. Many characters like Lavrovsky, Turkevich and Tyburcy - (the children's foster-father), all down andouters, are brought alive by the mastery of Korolenko's pen which at the same time draws a picture of Russian society of the time with its inherent flaws and virtues, its constrictions as well as

its broad mindedness - personified in Vasya's father - the fair minded judge who had brought a Count to task. The story ends with little Marusya's death and the breaking down of barriers between Vasya and his father which is brought about by this tragedy.

Korolenko's adroitness with his pen is revealed once more in his short story *The Strange One* in which he sketches the character of a political prisoner as narrated by a sympathetic gendarme who was given the task of deporting her to her place of exile. This story which was written in March 1880 while Korolenko himself was in prison was derived from a tale narrated by one of his own escorts during transit. The powerfully written story, which speaks of the enormous dignity and self respect of a young woman who had discarded the comforts of life and dedicated herself to her country becomes even more convincing when one recalls the enormous intellectual ferment that was taking place among the educated in Russia in the last quarter of the nineteenth century. Moreover, the heroine, arrogant and contemptuous of all chattels of autocratic power in spite of there being a few who sympathize with her, displayed the typical characteristics of young revolutionaries determined to bring about a better lot for the people of Russia. The vividness of the description makes an impact on the reader even more so because the central character is based on an actual revolutionary, Evelyna Ulanovskaya, whom Korolenko met during his years in exile.

*Makar's Dream* the story that helped Korolenko establish himself successfully as a writer was based on the theme of human dignity and man's self-respect. The story has a half-Yakut peasant as its central character, who is called to Judgement after his death. Being a drunkard and a cheat, his sins naturally far outweigh his good deeds as the scales of Judgement reveal. However while watching the scales dip to one side, Makar suddenly begins to assert himself before God and begins to narrate the various injustices that were done to him, the
way in which he was hounded for taxes, how the drought and frost had caused him great hardship, the way in which his children had neglected him and how hunger and misery had been his constant companions. On these revelations the scales begin to come even, ultimately rendering his sins negligible. This story of Korolenko's was widely read and appreciated by the radicals who according to Maxim Gorky found vestiges of their didactic principle in literature embedded in it.

Korolenko's artistic career, which was marked by highly successful stories such as Sokolinets, i.e. Escape from Sakhalin, and Going the Same Way, The Blind Musician, The River Plays, At Davan and others, was marked by a versatility which was typical of most writers in Russia in the nineteenth century (though Chekhov was an exception in this). Korolenko edited Russian Wealth form 1896 to 1900, and was a member of the editorial board of Northern Herald. This editing work was carried on simultaneously with writing articles for journals and newspapers on burning public questions of the day. The prolificity of his writings along with his intense involvement in matters relating to public welfare made Korolenko a notable member of the 'group' with whom Chekhov identified himself in his early days and even admired to a considerable extent.

Vladimir Korolenko was a typical Russian intellectual of the decades following the sixties. Intensely conscious of the ills bedevilling Russian society Korolenko was prepared to commit himself totally towards the betterment of humanity in the society of his time. However his political activity and his publicist writings seemed to have a separate niché kept unconsciously apart from his creative writing which desisted from overt moralising and any kind of tendentiousness. While it may be argued that Korolenko was later in life to

talk of ‘literary camps’ preferring to be identified with revolutionary democratism and that he was quite at ease with populists like Gleb Uspensky and Mikhailovsky, the synthesis of realism and romanticism which his literary works displayed seemed a sufficient though unconscious negation of the populist ideology in literature. And it was this which possibly marked the beginning of a new era in Russian literature whatever the merit of the literary work as art itself might have been. The fact that these authors could leave their political subjectivity behind them once they entered the field of art opened up new horizons for Russian literature. Thus, notwithstanding Chekhov’s complaints that Korolenko in spite of his mastery over the written word was getting bogged down to writing only about convicts in his stories, the change in the attitude of the author, was by and large sufficient to identify the new men with their new goals in literature as opposed to the ‘men of the sixties’.

Much less known than Korolenko, almost forgotten later on, and certainly unknown outside their own country were the two writers Ivan Leontyev (Shcheglov) and V.A. Tikhonov. Vladimir Tikhonov (1857 - 1914) enjoyed a short lived popularity at the end of the 1880s for some of the comedies like Bez Kormila i Vecla that he wrote. He was however a better reviewer than a litterateur, as Chekhov’s letter to Tikhonov dated 7th March 1889, so volubly suggests. On reading Tikhonov’s review of the St. Petersburg production of the play ‘Ivanov’, Chekhov wrote, “I had no idea you were so at home in journalistic style. It is extremely articulate and polished, well reasoned and matter of fact. It even made me envious, because I have never quite gotten the hang of the journalistic style.”

most rising young authors and was modest enough to consider himself of equal calibre with most of them, is a pointer to the latent feeling of unity which the literary artists felt towards each other. Chekhov writes.... “we can prevail only through the efforts of our entire generation and not otherwise.” Perhaps this attitude was due to the general likemindedness of all these writers with regard to a commitment to society at a personal level and a veering away from the active politisisation of creative art. Vladimir Tikhonov on his part wrote plays and novels which mostly dealt with marriage and family life. Chekhov’s personal library contained such books of Tikhonov like In our Days, Long Stories and Short Ones, Developed Idols, Stories and Stories, Barren etc. Moreover Tikhonov who was once editor of the weekly literary art journal Sever was not unwilling to work for New Times in spite of its noted reactionary stance. In fact Suvorin on the basis of Chekhov’s recommendation of Tikhonov as a talented editor with the capacity to coax stories out of authors, gave Tikhonov an opportunity to work for his paper as permanent feuletonist. In 1899 Tikhonov changed to the newspaper Rossia and began to edit its “Illustrated Addenda”, Tikhonov, though unable to carve out any significant place for himself as a creative artist, was obviously very much a part of the intellectual circle Chekhov frequented. In his diary Tikhonov says rather proudly that his notes therein had great social significance since the society in which he moved was far above the average standard in terms of the large number of famous personalities like Repin and Grigorovich who constituted part of this circle. In fact he himself realised the importance of keeping an account of these personalities for posterity to glean significant insights.

25. L N 68, p 493 “Iz Dnevnika V. A. Tikhonova”
about them, Regarding Chekhov, Tikhonov had predicted a great future as a literary artist for his friend when many had been unable to envisage the real extent of Antosha Chekhonte's talent. In fact Tikhonov had described Chekhov as the “freshest and most talented of all the belles lettrists” and considered himself “a small unskilled labourer” in literature in contrast to Chekhov's immense capabilities. Apart from admiring Chekhov as a writer, Tikhonov had a deep respect for him as a person which was free of any rancour or any sort of envy of Chekhov's literary success. This was in contrast to the feeling of many writers of the time who were jealous of Chekhov's steady rise up the literary ladder of fame. Albov for example, who in Tikhonov's words was not a very foolish man, made a strange assessment of Chekhov, repudiating his talent and considering him the specimen of the degeneration of Russian literature. However Chekhov did at the same time have many admirers and it was through Ivan Leontyev's characterisation of Chekhov that Tikhonov formed his initial positive impression of the great writer who was later to become his friend. Many others like the writer Soumonov were to recall how they had recognised Chekhov's talent when a blunt editor of Streokoza had rejected a story of some Antosha Chekhonte. Their triumph was complete when very soon after Chekhov began publishing in Petersburg Newspaper leaving his Streokoza and Oskolki days far behind. Tikhonov also tells us in his diary how he later on organised literary parties some of which were attended by Chekhov and which testified to the comradely feeling that the authors had for each other and the easy camaraderi among them which brightened these literary

27. L N 68, p 494 “Iz Dnevnika V. A. Tikhonova”, Entry of 16 April 1888.
evenings. Tikhonov at the same time however underscores the pettiness and envy which was inevitably present albeit in a latent manner which sometimes marred the general goodwill of the literary society of which he was a part. He points out that these literary evenings were later on handed over to S.N. Siromyatnikov for supervision and gradually came to be dominated by A.S. Suvorin which was perhaps why critics like Burenin were against attending such literary get togethers. Chekhov with his more mature outlook however encouraged these casual meetings of literary personalities and advised Tikhonov to ensure that they occurred from time to time. Perhaps Chekhov felt that these informal gatherings of practitioners of the craft of writing would have their use in terms of exchange of ideas and productive discourses regarding literary art.

Like Vladimir Korolenko, Ivan Shcheglov’s (Ivan Leontyev) literary debut coincided with Chekhov’s initial successful stints at story writing in the early 1880s. In fact Shcheglov who was an army officer started off his literary career with a rather a flourish since he succeeded in publishing his war stories in “thick” journals like New Review, Herald of Europe and Fatherland Notes. His stories were highly appreciated not only by the reading public but by men of as widely differing literary tastes as the novelist and anti government satirist Mikhail Saltykov-Shchedrin and the a political Anton Chekhov. In fact Chekhov in his early years was rather impressed by Shcheglov’s literary style and seemed to agree with public opinion about the writer’s merit when he wrote to Grigorovich “People are talking a lot about Shcheglov, who in my opinion is talented and original”. In fact Shcheglov’s stories from war life “Pervoe Srazhenie, Poruchik

Pospelov and Neudachnii Geroi were quite successful, though Chekhov had occasion to complain of a monotony of theme in their works. Writing as they did at about the same time, Shcheglov more than any of the other minor writers was to come under the influence of Chekhov's humoristic style as his stories like "Gordiev Uzel" (1886) and "Milion Terzami" (1889) reveal. We find Chekhov schooling Shcheglov on the art of the short story in a letter written to him on January 22, 1888. In it Chekhov points out Shcheglov's flaw of tending to give too painstaking and detailed descriptions and warns that while "Long serious works have their objects which demand the most careful execution irrespective of the general impression. But in short stories reserve is better than overstatement" 35 This was the period when the two writers were regarded as rising young men at par with each other in their particular professions which is why Chekhov describes his criticism of Shcheglov's style more 'technical' in nature than 'critico - literary' Chekhov writes with characteristic modesty. "At any rate remember that your slips I alone consider as slips ...... and I am often mistaken ....... Therefore my criticism is worth nothing." 36 Apart from writing stories, Ivan Shcheglov made an attempt to establish himself as a dramatist as well. His first play V Gorakh Kafkaza (1887) which made a successful debut was followed by works like Novie Pieci (1900), Veseli Teatr (1901), Krasnii Svetok (1907). 37 However Chekhov felt that the success of Shcheglov's plays was more ephemeral than real and in fact advised him to concentrate more on artistic prose where he felt his colleague had real talent. This was where Chekhov was mistaken as the future was to reveal the

36. Ibid.
37. L. N. 68, p 479, "Iz Dnevnika I. L. Shcheglova".
limitations of Shcheglov as an artist and his steady decline into oblivion. However in as much as he constituted a part of the intellectual world in the post 1860 era, Shcheglov’s importance can be highlighted as a contributor to the new atmosphere of “openness” which pervaded among literary professionals of the period. Notwithstanding his petty jealousy of Chekhov which surfaced later and is evident from his diary, Ivan Shcheglov’s interaction with the greatest of short story writers had its value for posterity in any study of the almost imperceptible changes in the mentality of Russia’s intellectuals in the pre-1905 revolutionary era. One can discern from the pages of Shcheglov’s diary that there obviously was some kind of literary club where young intellectuals gathered from time to time discussing journals, editorship and the stories which appeared in these issues. Publication affairs were dominated a good deal by Alexei Suvorin and a perusal of the diaries of small time writers like Shcheglov reveal that Suvorin’s opinion was valued by all striving to establish themselves in a career of writing. Despite his reactionary leanings Suvorin’s personality made itself felt in the intellectual world and his patronage of the young Chekhov along with his genuine ability to spot real literary talent made him a man to be wooed by the young writers of the period. In a letter to Dmitry Grigorovich, written early in 1888, Chekhov had lamented that poetry as an art was in its doldrums in Russia. Poets as a group were in Chekhov’s view ‘illiterate’ and ‘lacking education and a world view’. Chekhov’s opinion on prose writers was better and the truth of this assessment is borne out by the fact that Russia in the 1830s produced writers like Alexei Pisemsky whose novels and dramas were well known not only in Russia but in the West as well. His novel One Thousand Souls and his play A Bitter Fate were certainly merited to be of much

38. L.N. 68, p 481, “Iz Dnevnika I. L. Scheglova”. Entry of 1st July, 1890. “Chekhov was luckily bestowed with success while I took every step with a fight”.
superior quality than most of the works produced by his contemporaries. Anton Chekhov, master craftsman that he was in the art of the written word describes Pisemsky as a "really major talent .... Pisemsky's characters are alive and his artistic temperament is powerful." Chekhov's letter to Suvorin provides ample clue to Pisemsky's mastery as a novelist. From it one can gather that while the narrow minded Skabichevsky was unable to find traces of the moralist tendentious ideals that he stood for, Pisemsky in spite of condemning all symbols of authority in his novels (and in fact we find his heroine Mastenka in 'One Thousand Souls' reading 'The Fatherland Notes') was able to convey an image of an a-political outlook which skilfully covered his liberal leanings. Alexei Pisemsky thus happened to be another of the authors (who perhaps deserved to be much better known outside Russia than he actually was) who possessed real talent and at the same time indirectly challenged the older concepts of good literature and thus constituted part of the very eclectically identifiable group of "new" writers.

The "men of the eighties" thus emerged as a new generation relegating to the background their predecessors of the "sixties". In fact the sixties too had seen a conglomerate of talent, moderately good and often below average, whose total impact as a force in literature was rendered somewhat significant due to the political backing it received from the populists who in adherence to the outlook of their mentors did not believe in art bereft of any social purpose. More accolades are therefore due to the new generation of writers who were to follow two decades later since average though much of their output was, they were able to make their mark in Russian literary history as a new team with new values and a total sincerity towards their profession. Even while admitting that much of their importance as literary personalities was the reflected glory of their illustrious

friend Anton Chekhov, their much more difficult task of touching the sensibilities of their readers without the aid of young populists ready to point out the merits of their creations to receptive minds, isolate them as an important collective force in literary evolution in Russia. The contrasts with the preceding generation of socially conscious writers appear quite stark when one recalls that Gleb Uspensky and Nikolai Zlatovratsky were writing their stories in the 1870s, and even in the early 1880s with the peasant utopia uppermost in their consciousness. While Zlatovratsky nurtured no pretensions of artistic objectivity in his creative works, Gleb Uspensky on the other hand betrayed a greater attachment for aesthetic attributes over and above specific content. A sense of the kind of stimulation that writers of this school received from *Fatherland Notes* right up to the 1880s can be gained from a perusal of a single issue of the journal. Out of ten articles in the January issue of *Otechestvennye Zapiski* of the year 1879, three major articles were dedicated to the peasant question. By contrast the *Russkaya Mysl* contained only the occasional article on provincial life and its orientation was more towards the presentation of good literary works along with some *belles lettres* on various subjects. Poems by the symbolist poet K. D. Balmont stories by Anton Chekhov the correspondence of Herzen and Natalia Zakharina and letters of Turgenev to his French friends all found a place in pages of this journal. Particular importance was given to European literature. Translations of English and French works were frequently found in *Russkaya Mysl*.

Alexander Engel'gardt who in his capacity as scientist spent a major portion of his life in the rural areas of Smolensk wrote articles in *Fatherland Notes* from 1872 to 1882, which highlighted his close observation of rural life.

42. *Otechestvennye Zapiski*, no. 1, Yanvar, 1879
Advocacy of collective labour as a means of avoiding economic differentiation of the peasantry were aspects of Engel'gardt's faith in the survival of peasant agriculture on which he believed Russia's future to be dependant. Transfer of land to the peasant masses seemed an ideal way of avoiding the capitalist stage of economic development in Russia. Engel'gardt developed a scheme of involving urban intelligentsia in the actual work of tilling the land and converting them into intellektinie muzhiki. This in his view would reduce urban parasitism, and at the same time bolster up collectivism and help uplift rural life. 44

In the ultimate analysis, inspite of certain doubts raised by personal experiences in rural life (Uspensky and Engelgardt) all the populist writers were ultimately to equate Russia's fate to her villages and its inhabitants. The populist critic Mikhailovsky while professing a more toned down attitude to the intrinsic value of Russia's popular institutions was unable to avoid placing total faith in the obschina and artel. He however maintained that these institutions were important only due to the fact that they helped to sustain moral qualities and not for any subconscious affinity with the spirit of the people. 45

It was this sense of commitment to rural Russia, to an absolute faith in the simplistic solutions to problems of the rural masses (Engel' gardt for example) that gradually ceased to find a place in the literature of the new generation. And as such writers like Alexander Kuprin and Ivan Bunin were to emerge as representatives of the new writings that was to make its mark in Russia's literary history. While the two authors may be bracketed together as young disciples of Anton Chekhov, Ivan Bunin was to far outshine Alexander Kuprin in terms of the intrinsic value of his creative output as well as in terms of international

44. Encyclopaedia of Russian and Soviet History, op cit, vol 10, pp 201-203.
recognition. Moreover, while Alexander Kuprin was directly influenced by his mentor's literary style, Ivan Bunin was to move out of the Chekhovian format quite early in his career and concentrate on preoccupations which were to remain typically his own.

What is of significance here, is that in neither of these two authors does one find any overriding impulse to highlight the virtues of Russian peasant life and equate Russia's destiny with that of her countryside. In the case of Bunin, some of his stories do attempt to consciously underscore the problems bedevilling rural society, his novella *The Village* which he wrote in 1910 being a perfect example of this.

However the down to earth practical approach of describing village life in Russia, without using any kind of romantic imagery which characterises Bunin's style in *The Village* was in marked contrast with his other stories set in rural Russia such as *Apple Fragrance* and *Sukhodol*. In Bunin's own words *The Village* was meant to present "an unvarnished picture of the Russian character and the Russian soul, with its bewildering complexity and chiaroscuro, from which an underlying note of tragedy is hardly ever absent" 46.... And the Russian life that he painted for his readers in *The Village* was one wracked with contradictions and indirect preparations for a social and political upheaval. In this story. Bunin subjects his readers to a detailed description of the peasants inhabiting the village in all their suffering and humiliation and emphasises their total subjection to those in power such as the landlords and merchants. The perpetual hunger and want among the peasants is vividly described as is their desperate bid to seize power in the context of the simmering ferment that followed the Revolution of 1905.

The same backdrop in rural Russia is on the other hand utilised in a totally different and perhaps more characteristic manner by Bunin in his stories *Apple Fragrance* and Sukhodol. *Apple Fragrance* is a narration of revived memory about the life of the gentry juxtaposed with lyrical descriptions of nature in rural Russia and the ways of the common people. The story which is a recital by a young man of gentry origin, superbly and with utmost sensitivity conveys the feeling of nostalgia for past glory and the pathetic struggle of this once prosperous class to live up to standards that were now far beyond their capacity. The povest *Sukhodol*, another story of gentry life in its doldrums, which has as its audience two young children - descendent of the gentry owners of the estate, holds the reader's attention for its aura of old world charm and its interesting twists and turns in the lives of the earlier generation. Upholding the ideal of an eternal, perpetual, selfless love, which is Bunin's real purpose in the story, the writer reveals his basic instinct as a specialist in human emotions which was to surface in the last phase of his career.

On can perceive a similar veering away from doctrinaire preaching in the works of Alexander Kuprin, notwithstanding his famous story *Moloch*. Basically outlining the evils of industrialisation, the story is interesting in the sense that it skilfully relates two important objects, one inanimate, the steel mill and the other human the captalist Kvashin, to Moloch the monster, that destroys everything in its way. The all too familiar picture of workers toiling in the steel mill, sacrificing their health and energy for the benefit of the rich industrialist is vividly portrayed.

as is the character Kvashin the “capitalist shark” whose worth as a human being is absolutely nil once he is separated from his position of wealth and power. In this vivid portrayal of the woes suffered by the ordinary man caught in the mesh of industrial development Bobrov - the character through whom the author reveals his own views on the issue, stands out as the “conscience” which should make itself felt in industrial society but never really does so. Though much of the moral preaching so coveted by the literary critics of the sixties may have found a place in this story, the vast majority of Kuprin's works concern themes such as genuine love in stories like Olesya and the Garnet Bracelet. Olesya in particular while dealing with the peasant environment never harbours any pretension of dealing with the peasant question. Focussing primarily on the two main characters and their love affair, a young city bred writer and a beautiful country lass regarded as a witch by villagers, the story as it unravels gives the reader an almost casual picture of rural Russia, the poverty, ignorance and superstition embedded among the countryfolk and the slowness of life in a typical Russian village. The tale is a delightful one of deftly described human emotions with only indirect pointers to some of the evils that plagued Russian society.

Thus with their genuine sense of commitment to their profession which enabled them to present a sincere portrayal of rural Russia without finding a solution to all Russia's problems in the peasant commune, neither Bunin nor Kuprin can be pinned down to the populist matrix of literary preaching. It is in this sense therefore, that one can distinctly identify a new generation who by virtue of their being different from the populists were to unconsciously form a new literary movement spearheaded equally unconsciously by its brilliant exponent Anton Chekhov.

Chekhov and his group perhaps had a more serious situation to contend with in their bid to ease themselves out of the didactic vision of art. While major figures (Dostoevsky and Tolstoy) of the sixties and seventies could still indulge in polemics on the question of art itself, almost four decades of utilitarian orientation in criticism beginning with Belinsky and continuing through Chernyshevsky. Dobroliubov and Pisarev seemed to have settled the question of aesthetics quite firmly in favour of didactism. Thus inspite of the fact that writers of the West such as Oscar Wilde were candid enough to formulate that life was totally inferior to art, the Chernyshevskian school led by Pisarev in the 1880s asserted that all art was subordinate to life. Though Pisarev's sensitivity to nuances in artistic technique is revealed in his analysis of Turgenev and Dostoevsky, the radical in him highlighted the total redundance of purely aesthetic experience, advocating instead the marshalling of intellectual forces for use towards the betterment of society. Russian society could not afford to waste intellectual resources in providing art to suit the requirements of the upper classes. 51 Pronouncements such as these, backed by the Belinskian heritage as well as the stark realities of political persecution in Russia placed litterateurs like Chekhov and his group in a position of disadvantage, psychologically, which made it difficult at least for the less well known writers to established their credo in terms of aestheticism in their writings in defiance of the atmosphere of utilitarian patronage around them.

This new generation had other points of commonality as well, the most important being their initial dependence on Anton Chekhov as their friend and guide. Moreover, they moved around in a common literary milieu, published in

the same journals and haggled with the same editor for greater monetary value for their writings. Kuprin's professional career was in fact more akin to that of Anton Chekhov's in the sense that he utilised his ability to pen down in a trice short stories that managed to hold the attention of editors and readers. In his years of hardship after leaving the army, Kuprin held journalistic assignments from a small Kiev newspaper as well as contributed little stories to it. Bunin writes "He told me that he sold these tales for a few coppers, but without the slightest difficulty. He dashed them off with careless ease, always on the go, on the run' and always owing to his talent managing to satisfy the tastes of editors and readers. Then just as cleverly he continued writing not for the little Kiev newspaper any more but for solid periodicals". These more solid periodicals were Russian Wealth, World of God, and Journal for Everyone which published among others, his stories In Retirement and At the Circus. In fact Russian literature was well past the days when publishing in Fatherland Notes was deemed to be one of the important criteria in the making of an author. The new generation was more used to journals like Russian Thought, Russian Notices, Northern Herald as publications of quality and strove to attract the attention of their editors. An important publishing outlet for authors of this period turned out to be the Znanie group of publishers controlled by Maxim Gorky, who though a contemporary of Bunin did not, in many senses, belong with the others of his generation. While his stature as a novelist and writer was soon to make its mark in Russian literature the socialist preoccupations which he deliberately sought to bring out in his works places him in a class of his own as the initiator of the literature of socialist realism at the turn of the century. As such Gorky, admirer that he was of Anton Chekhov and receipient of the latter's friendly advice like the others, is nevertheless treated as being apart from the group of writers who are discussed in this chapter. Both

52. Ivan Bunin, Memories and Portraits, op cit. p 98, "Re-reading Kuprin".
Kuprin and Bunin found a common publishing platform in the Znanie. Kuprin wrote to Chekhov “Things on my literary front are so good that I am scared to look. Znanie has bought from me my book of stories”. 53 In fact The Duel which some consider to be Kuprin's best work was brought out in the association's collections - Sborniki tovarichestva "Znanie" Kuprin was proud of being associated with Znanie, not only for the material comfort it brought him but for prestige that this connection gave him as well. Bunin's connection with the Znanie Publishing House was more professional and in one sense ideological. The group of writers then associated with the Znanie publications included among others Alexander Chaliapin who was a close friend of Bunin's. These writers in the pre-revolutionary days pledged to preserve nineteenth century literary forms as an antidote to new forms such as Symbolism and Futurism. Bunin did conform to this prescription in his novella The Village which appeared in 1910. However one must emphasise that this sort of commitment against structural innovation in literature was merely a passing phase in Ivan Bunin's career, which when seen in its totality and after taking into consideration his later principal focus on the triad of love sex and passion was to be a forerunner of Symbolism, the hallmark of freedom of imagination in Russian literature of the future.

Chekhov's role as a father figure, to a whole group of rising young authors, Kuprin and Bunin being the two most prominent examples, comes out clearly in the memories of these two writers. Kuprin tells us that the great man read a large amount of works by young authors. Chekhov was always “sympathetic and kind” towards them. He believed in encouraging new writers and “always praised their work, not so as to get rid of them, but because he knew how cruelly sharp, even if just, criticism cuts the wings of beginners and what an encouragement and hope

53. L.N. 68, p 386, Letters of Kuprin to Chekhov, Letter dt. 6 December, 1902. from Petersburg.
a little praise gives sometimes. Kuprin gives an example of this quiet sympathy towards rising colleagues in connection with his own story In Retirement. Chekhov's initial reaction to Kuprin's queries about the literary quality of the story was "The povest is good, I read it at one sitting like At the Circus and truly enjoyed it". But Kuprin's persistent request for some kind of critical evaluation induced Chekhov to write "you want me to speak of defects only and thereby put me in a difficult situation. There are no defects in that story and if one finds fault, it is only with a few of its peculiarities. For instance your heroes, characters you treat in the old style as they have been written for a hundred years by all who have written about them - nothing new. Secondly, in the first chapter you are busy describing people's faces - again that is the old way, it is a description which can be dispensed with. Five minutely described faces, tire the attention, and in the end lose their value. Clean shaved characters are like each other, like Catholic priests, and remain alike, however studiously you describe them, That is all I can say in reply to your question about the defects, I can find nothing more that is wrong." Chekhov was equally encouraging to the young Bunin when he advised him on the art of writing. "One should never read one's writing before it is printed. Nor should one ever take other people's advice. All right you've gone wrong somewhere, you've made a mistake - but let the mistake be your own. In work, one has to have daring. There are big dogs and small dogs and the small ones need not be put out by the existence of the big ones. All of them have the duty to bark-to bark with whatever voice God has given them".

57. Ivan Bunin, Memories and Portraits op cit. p 32.
Diligence and perseverance were the two traits that Chekhov recommended in young writers. To Bunin he commented, "You must work you know. You must work without stopping .... All your life." 58

That he was something of a phenomenon in the world of short story writing, was a fact that Chekhov himself conceded when he remarked that he was a trend-setter who had given the short story an unprecedented prestige in the eyes of editors and publishers. "For one thing you ought to be grateful to me" - he told Alexander Kuprin, "it was I who paved the way for writers of short stories. Formerly when one took a manuscript to an editor, he did not read it. He just looked scornfully at one 'What? you call this a work? But it is shorter than a sparrow's nose. No we do not want such trifles. But see, I got round them and paved the way for others." 59 Alexander Kuprin was certainly one of these "others" whose stories like, The Garnet Bracelet and I was an Actor 60 follow the Chekhovian style of commentary but no comment interspersed with touches of humour and pathos. In fact I was an Actor is a typical example of a story by Kuprin, written according to the Chekhovian format. Written a couple of years after the death of Chekhov - the story draws an interesting picture of life in the small theatres of Russian provincial towns. The contradiction between deciding to stage serious works like Gutzkow's tragedy Uriel Acosta, Alexei Tolstoy's Death of Ivan the Terrible and Bukharin's Izmail on the one hand and the lackadaisical attitude of the directors and the actors on the other, who thought nothing of presenting works of this magnitude after a couple of rehearsals is brought out in an amusing manner by Kuprin through his narrator.

60. Alexander Kuprin, The Garnet Bracelet and Other Stories, op cit, pp 240-274, "I was an Actor".
Descriptions of makeshift roles of untalented actors, indiscriminate use of extras, makeshift props and the production team's assumption of an undiscerning and foolish audience accurately portrayed the weaknesses of the small-town theatre. *The Garnet Bracelet*, which Kuprin wrote in 1911, is a lyrical tale containing an underlying tone of idealism and at the same time conveying an impression of the impracticability of harbouring this sort of sentimentality. The story is woven around the theme of "genuine love" of "a love....that is holy, pure and eternal - and unearthly...." While this phenomenon is to be rarely found in human society - the heroine of the story, Princess Vera Nikolayevna turns out to be the object of precisely this sort of adoration from an unknown admirer, whose sense of fulfilment emanates from his ability to love from afar. The sense of rejection which Vera experiences at the end of the story for not realising the greatness of her admirer's passion, and the welling up of a new tenderness in her heart, vividly imbue in the reader a sense of the existence of "everlasting, exclusive love".

Kuprin's affinity to Chekhov, in terms of plot formation and compact narratives was remarked upon by contemporaries and friends. Ivan Bunin wrote of Kuprin's stories *Solitude*, *Sacred Love* and *Night Lodgings* that they were written in a manner imitative of Maupassant and Chekhov, and again they were too neat and smooth "competent". What is important however is that Kuprin by imbibing the Chekhovian structural pattern was helping to form a new "school" of literary craftsmanship different in content and form from the writings of the previous era. And significantly enough he was able to achieve a certain degree of success not only by mastering Chekhov's technique [Bunin remarks about Kuprin's tales of army life ".... as I read them, I kept exclaiming to myself,".

'That's excellent'. Here too one saw excessive neatness, smoothness and skilfulness, but it all reached a level of genuine craftsmanship, it was all of a completely different standard, The Wedding in particular, which contrary to the other stories, never made you think 'Oh dear, how much there is in this of Chekhov or of Tolstoy' - a very cruel story, with a flavour of virulent caricature, but truly brilliant62 but by serving the cause of the new literature which had by now conceded an important place to the non-committal, non-tendentious, highly imaginative short story. The degree of competence Kuprin had acquired in this field is evident from Bunin's recollection of his writings..... "And when I reached the stories written at the peak of his career (The Horsethieves, The Swamp and some others) I simply took no notice of their defects, even though some of them were serious. But I did not think of the flaws and whole heartedly enjoyed the various qualities which were preponderant in these short stories, the freedom, vigour and vividness of the narrative, and the excellent style, sharp, rich but never excessively lavish." 63 Chekhov's place in the history of Russian literature as an innovator of thematic and stylistic formats was therefore all the more assured through the works of his followers like Alexander Kuprin. The short story had by now carved out a permanent niche for itself and the plotlessness of style and thematic unconventionality were to serve as a platform for greater innovations in the craft of writing in the next phase of literary development in Russia represented by the Symbolist and Futurist movements.

Ivan Bunin was in some senses a typical product of the Chekhovian era's emphasis on artistic excellence regardless of any social or political commitment. With the possible exception of The Village which had a special purpose, Bunin's early stories as well as the ones written during the last phase of his career

62. Ibid, p 106
63. Ibid, p 106
displayed a propensity for plotlessness which led to polemics among critics on the similarity between the Chekhovian and Bunin styles. Stories like *Apple Fragrance* and *Pines* written during the initial years of Bunin's career induced many critics to discern a "Chekhovian mood" in Bunin's writings. This was denied vehemently by both writers concerned (Chekhov commented "How stupid this is, how stupid....you and I are as much alike as a borzoi and a blood hound. For one thing you are much shaper that I". Bunin himself asserted "As far as I remember, I have never imitated anyone"). One might notice that Bunin's ultimate preoccupation with the repetitive motif of love, sexual passion and death had in it the overtones of the Symbolist style and even a little bit of decadence, perhaps as the first manifestation of the Chekhovian influence which remained largely indirect but strong enough to herald important developments in the field of literary culture at the turn of the century. It might perhaps be useful to mention here the Chekhov operated at a totally different level—with artistic activity which was often steeped with the "intense modernism" of his later works of his plays in particular. It was therefore natural for Bunin, whose literary bent of mind displayed far greater conservativeness and restriction than that of Chekhov, not to be able to appreciate the latter's powerful yet restrained ability to break literary conventions and write plays as brilliant and innovative as *The Seagull* and *The Cherry Orchard*. Bunin's comment about Chekhovian plays was as follows. "I thought at that time and I still think that he (Chekhov) ought never to have written about the nobility, their country estates and so forth; he did not know them well enough. This was particularly noticeable in his plays, in *Uncle Vanya* or *The Cherry Orchard*. The noble landowners in them are very false. The heroine of *The Cherry Orchard*, for example, supposed to have been born in that class, does not belong to it by a single trait; she is an actress written with the sole purpose of giving a

64. Ivan Bunin, *Memories and Portraits* op cit, p 46 "Chekhov"
part to Olga Knipper. Firs in as cliché as can be, and his phrase, ‘A man has been forgotten’ is a typical curtain line. Besides where did he find such enormous gardens consisting entirely of cherry trees? Cherry Orchards existed only in Ukrainian villages, where the peasants planted them behind their huts. Another question, why did Lopakhin have to cut down that cherry orchard” Surely he could not have intended to build a factory in its place. 65

This mental block regarding his senior colleague’s later creations notwithstanding, Bunin was certainly very close to the latter in his young days. Sometimes the two authors would sit closeted in Chekhov’s study sifting through newspapers all morning in order to “try and fish out some plots for dramas and vaudevilles”.66 There certainly seemed to be very little compulsive interest to find meaningful social themes from this endeavour. This became more of a starting point for a literary career which was to increasingly impart due importance to the play of the writer’s imagination and which was to culminate in remarkably brilliant creativity in the form of stories like Ash Wednesday, Mitya’s Love, Chang’s Dreams, all of which sought to examine various nuances of the emotion of love, without being monotonous in any way.

These stories along with those included in Shadowed Paths and Grammar of Love as well as the story entitled Gentleman From San Francisco68 a brilliant exposé of the hypocrisy of capitalist society, ensure Bunin’s place among the all time greats of Russian literature notwithstanding his deliberate recourse to the

65. Ibid p 41
66. Ibid p 45.
repetitive triad of love, sex and death. These creations were moreover a step in the development of new perspectives for an author where it was possible to achieve success and popularity by examining in detail a restricted subject matter highlighting individuality rather than any general social goal. This perhaps helped to change not only the attitude of the author, but the tastes of the reader as well and may have cleared the way for the later Symbolist and Futurist developments in Russian literature.

The total achievements of the age of Chekhov of which these writers were a part were imperceptible yet meaningful, in terms of the new purpose dominating the author's preoccupations. Creativity shorn of any kind of social responsibility, deliberate emphasis on the betterment of the art itself regardless of subject matter of political or social relevance seemed to gradually occupy the minds of the writers of the period. As such, taken together, their output seems to deserve a compartment of its own in Russian literature which was henceforth denied to them, and may be seen as an era offering certain new perspectives in the process of literary evolution. In an environment of radical enthusiasm, the permeation of revolutionary theories and the vehement dislike for the establishment, this group of writers stand out in their persistent sincerity to their profession and honesty to their craft without submitting to the easier and more natural tendency to preach through their writings. In this way perhaps they served a nobler purpose by helping to elevate their art to a higher level while at the same time their personal sympathy with the cause of the oppressed exemplified by the social work undertaken by many of them, set them apart as typical members of the Russian intelligentsia of the time.

All the writers taken up in this chapter, whose literary creations were to broadly coincide with the time span of Chekhov's creative years (with the possible
exception of Bunin) were each to move to spheres of their own, and were to acquire literary standings according to the receptivity of their works among the reading public. Vladimir Korolenko was to spend his entire life committed to movements for the betterment of the lot of the Russian people, while Alexander Kuprin and Ivan Bunin were to leave their motherland for a more congenial environment for the practice of their art. However, what they had in common was that in their youthful years, Anton Chekhov provided for them a single source of inspiration which was powerful enough to instil a new kind of sensibility in an entire generation of young writers. That this inspiration came from a man who was totally unwilling to dominate over anybody and was himself a most reticent personality perhaps makes the import of its impact all the more conspicuous. This valuable interaction helped rescue Russian literature from the increasing narrowness of the years of populist domination which made writers like Korolenko feel that "...a new trend in literature will arise from the synthesis of realism and romanticism". Chekhov himself seemed satisfied with the way modern writing was progressing. "All write superbly now; there are no bad writers," he commented. "And hence it is becoming more and more difficult to win fame. Do you know whom that is due to? - Maupassant. He is an artist in the language, set so high a standard for an author that it is no longer possible to write as of old. You try to re-read some of our classics.......try and you will see what obsolete common place stuff it is. Take on the other hand our decadents. They are only pretending to be sick and crazy - they are all burly peasants. But so far as writing goes, they are masters." 69 With such an eclectic vision, Chekhov was able to help others to assimilate fresh ideas and at the same time, diversify into new avenues of literary exploration, thereby forming along with his "group" a watershed in the history of Russian literature.