Preface

In the outset of the twentieth century pioneering work in Indian fiction was done by two great authorities, Rabindranath Tagore in Bengali literature and Premchand in Hindi literature. The standard they reached could not be surpassed by any other fiction writer several decades. Though these two writers came from two different regions and their approach to social problems was different yet we find many points of their similarities in their delineating of character, organising of episodes as plot and providing appropriate setting on realistic basic. The story being the most popular form of modern fiction drew their attention and within a limited period they held experiment after experiment and the short story as an art form reached its culmination within a few years. Tagore being mainly a poet found most suitable poetic symbols for revealing the truths of human life through some select characters; Premchand being an adept in the version of spoken Hindi and the common speech of the vulgar found a suitable style. The stories of Tagore carry the weight of his great personality and the stories of Premchand make him the greatest mouth piece of the peasantry and the lower middle class being oppressed by Zamindars and the ruthless petty officials of the British government.

The two writers were contemporary. Style, language, theme — in all sides they have created a new path. Both of them were the worshipers of humanism. Though Rabindranath and Premchand belongs to different social setup yet both of them depicted social evils such as superstition, age-old beliefs, custom, tradition, ignorance etc. in their writings. Through the writing both of them declared a war against social evils. This social consciousness of Rabindranath and Premchand attracts me very much.
And I was interested to do the research work about them. So, I have started the research work entitled 'Social Consciousness in the short stories of Rabindranath and Premchand: A comparative study.' The chief purpose of this project is to delve into the comparative study of personality, excellence the literature and society of the respective periods of these two greatest literattuer who have glorified their respective literatures - Bengali and Hindi. Apart from this last but not the least purpose of the research I tried to analyse the inter relation of their respective societies that have been portrayed through their creation. I have faced a lot of difficulties in getting information as study materials for such work readily unavailable.

In my research work I lastly arrived at the conclusions that literary works of both the writers reflects the aspiration, hopes, agony, love, feelings, enthusiasm etc. of mass people of India. While conducting the research work I showed that both Rabindranath and Premchand belongs to different social set-up, yet they exhibit the same aspects of life, ethical values and activities of Indian society. Long sixty years have elapsed since the time of Premchand and Tagore. However the problems of modern age in the field of education, consciousness, scientific and technological advancement is nothing different than that what had been existing in the 3rd and 4th century. The problems socio-economic, political and cultural matters as have been delineated in their writings are overtly or covertly prevalent in modern time too. I have also tried to show that they have not only highlighted the problems but has also tried to find out the path of emunecipation.

I have got the habit of reading stories since my childhood. I have been fond of short stories more than poetry and articles. The short stories of Tagore have had great appeal to me and I found them highly fascinating.
I have been influenced by the stories of Tagore which deal with social life of various characters. Apart from the short stories in Bengali I have read the translated version of short stories in Bengali from other languages and I found them aesthetically very satisfying. I came across a number of good stories of Hindi story writer Premchand at my undergraduate and post graduate level. I was greatly influenced by the frank expression of social consciousness in the stories of Premchand. I found a similar approach in the stories of Tagore and they are remarkable for social causes.

Being influenced by the two contemporary thinkers I made up my mind that if I would ever do any Ph.D. work than I would frame my thesis keeping their stories at the centre. I was greatly influenced by the depiction of sweet and tears, pain and suffering together with the social consciousness of the common man in the stories of Tagore and Premchand which inspired me to do my research work on ‘The social consciousness in the short stories of Rabindranath and Premchand - A comparative study.’

My research work is divided into six chapters and each chapter is named accordingly.

The first chapter is named as ‘Modern short story: its traits and dimension.’ In this chapter, I reviewed the views of different scholars regarding modernism in the context of literature. In this context I discussed the definition and nature of short stories and high-lighted how the social consciousness is reflected in short stories. Here I wanted to show that modernism is not a separate issue and have modernism of to-day becomes the older ones of tomorrow. Modernism can’t be confined to any territory, it changes response to changing situation and time. While discussing about the short stories, I elaborately discussed great contribution of 19th century’s production short story. Here I tried to show how this contribution of 19th century could draw attention of mass readers. I have also presented the
relationship between social uprising and literature. I wanted to show in the first chapter that the literature is the media which reflects human aspiration, emotion, feelings, sorrow, agony etc.

In the second chapter ‘Short story in Hindi and Bengali literature: A background’ I wanted to depict the effect of major social and political events of later part of 19th century and early 20th century of Bengali and Hindi literature. I highlighted how these events enriched the contemporary literature. The arrival of the British and their imperialist policies have changed the whole Indian society. People became aware of their weakness and as a result nationalism emerged in Indian society. Meanwhile capitalism replaced feudalism. Sepoy Mutiny gave birth a new national consciousness and political uprising. Here, I wanted to show how the middle class Indian faced helpless situation in the year 1914. Inspite of all difficulties and obstruction, ultimately India became an independent nation. In this context, I elaborately discussed about political, social, economic and academic condition of 19th Century. I discussed how all these aspects influenced the contemporary literature. Here I have mentioned the contribution of Bengali literature works of Raja Ram Mohan Roy, Vidyasagar, Michael Madhusudhan Dutta, Dinabandhu Mitra, Swami Vivekananda etc. I tried to show how the Hindi literary works of Bhartendu age depicted the simple events and characters in short stories. I took the opportunity to elaborate the contributions of Acharya Mahabir Prasad Dwibedi and famous poet Jayshankar Prasad, so that contribution of Premchand could be depicted in a proper way. In other words the subject matters of discussion of this Chapter is the background of Bengali and Hindi literature. Hence considering the contemporary political and social situation of the period, I tried to discuss the arrival of both great literary authors Rabindranath and Premchand in Bengali and Hindi literature.

In the third chapter named ‘Rabindranath and Premchand : Social
background and ideological frame work’ I wanted to highlight the social
environment of Rabindranath and Premchand and the variation in their
feeling and expression. I selected literary authors Rabindranath and
Premchand of Bengali and Hindi literatures to show their great
contributions in highlighting social evils. I also tried to show how the
great authors declared a war through their works against various social
evils such as repressions, corruption, superstitions, erosion of moral values
etc. Inspite of the facts that both Rabindranath and Premchand came from
different social setup, but they depicted in their writings same kind of
social evils prevailing in Indian society and both of them tried to uproot
these evils through their writings. I tried to exhibit the present day relevance
of the writings of both literary authors.

In the fourth chapter named ‘Women in the stories of Tagore and
Premchand: A formidable stay of social awareness’, I have presented
some aspects related to women characters in the stories of Rabindranath
and Premchand. In this chapter I discussed various aspects of Indian
women. I tried to highlighted how both Rabindranath and Premchand
depicted women character, ideals and their present day conditions. I have
discussed how women kept the family tradition after playing the triple
role as daughter, mother and wife. I also tried to portrayed how women
maintained their personal freedom after playing the above role. In this
chapter the subject matter is women’s consciousness about their rights
and how these are reflected in the short stories of Rabinadranath and
Premchand.

In the fifth chapter entitled ‘Short Stories of Rabindranath and
Premchand: An expression of Social Awareness’ an analysis of social
consciousness in the short stories of Rabindranath and Premchand was
presented. In this context I wanted to make an assessment of the methods
adopted by different scholars in analysing the aspects of social stratification.
Apart from this, I presented how the short stories have depicted the influence of social, political, economic and religious aspects of human life. Since long time the down trodden section of society has been suffering due to social tradition. In this context I also tried to highlight how this section of the society organised to fight against the repression.

In the sixth chapter named ‘Short Stories of Tagore and Premchand: Achievements’ I discussed about the academic aspects of the short stories of Rabindranath and Premchand. In this part I tried to show how both the story writers became the media of mass people’s aspiration and hope which have been depicted in their artistic leanings of literature. Finally, I tried to present how these aspects of famous story writers have influenced the literary workers of the later period and highlighted their popularity among the mass people.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

For the fulfillment of my work I have been helped in many ways by my relatives and friends. I would like to thank them for their support, without which I would have not been able to complete this work.

At first, I would whole heartedly thank my guide, Dr. Nikhilesh Purkait, who has not only directed me but had always helped me whenever I approached to him. He has always been a source of help and inspiration for my Ph.D. work. Without his guidance and sustained encouragement, it would not practically have been possible on my part to accomplish this.

I am greatful to Dr. Usha Ranjan Bhattacharjee (Head of the Bengali Department, G. U.) for his encouragement and constructive suggestions.

My parents Sree Birendra Kumar Bhattacharjee and Maya Bhattacharjee deserved much credit of my work as they inspired me from
time to time to complete my work in a good manner within the stipulated
time. Without their blessings and moral support, it was very difficult for
me to complete the work.

I am grateful to my sons Samrat and Sagar who have always inspired
me to do this work. Even though, I feel guilty for depriving them of
motherly affection still they have always provided me with energy to do
my work. Above all, I would give maximum credit to my husband who
has always provided me with mental strength and co-operation.

I would like to give credit to Dr. D. K. Verma, Head of the
Department of Hindi, Rangapara College, who aided me with many of the
important notes and materials about 'Premchand'. He was always ready
to discuss with me all the important subjects regarding my topic.

I am also grateful to Dr. Ram Murti Mishra, Dr. Shamim Behzad,
Prof. K. N. Singh who always helped me time to time whenever I seek
advice from them.

The Libraries which have provided me with all the books required
are Gauhati University Library Guwahati, Rangapara College Library
Rangapara, Darrang College Library Tezpur, District Library Tezpur,
Jadavpur University Library Calcutta, North Bengal University Library
Siliguri and District library Jorhat. I would like to thank all the librarians
of these libraries.

Lastly, I would also thank to Mr. Keshav Krishna Upadhaya of
Sonitpur Comprint, Tezpur who has whole heartedly and friendly done
the typing, printing and binding of my thesis.

(Mili Bhattacharjee)
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