

**A / L E N G L I S H**

**NEW SYLLABUS**

**NOTES ON**

**ANTON CHEKOV'S**

**THE CHERRY ORCHARD**

by

**Fr. Herman Fernando**

B. Th (Rome); B. A. (Pera); M. A. (Lond);  
Lecturer in English.

**Series Editor: A. K. Hewage**



**A DENUMA PUBLICATION**



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## P R E F A C E

Feudalism was abolished in Russia in 1861. Thus Russia was set on the path to capitalism. By the turn of the century about 40 years later Chekov saw how this transition from feudalism to capitalism had affected the lives of his countrymen. What he saw he dramatized in the play *The Cherry Orchard*.

In Sri Lanka feudalism was abolished in 1833 but for the most part we remained 'feudal' because our economy remained agricultural. After 1977 we have begun to be industrialized and capitalistic. Our society is changing and we have begun to feel the effects of social change.

Thus Chekov's *The Cherry Orchard* is not only a text for our students for G. C. E (A/L). It is also a book of wisdom enlightening us to what is happening around us.

I have attempted in the following pages to set out some of that wisdom for the benefit of our students as well as other. My fervent hope is that all those who will study the text of *The Cherry Orchard* will be able to partake of that wisdom with the help of these notes.

I am grateful to Denuma Printers and Publishers and especially to their Managing Director, Mr. A. K. Hewage for undertaking to publish this study.

Fr. Herman Fernando,  
Lecturer in English.

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# THE CHERRY ORCHARD

by Anton Chekov (1860-1904)

## INTRODUCTION

Anton Chekov was born in 1860 in the South Russian town of Taganrog. He was the grandson of a serf. A serf was a tenant farmer under feudalism. A serf had no freedom to move away from the land he had to cultivate. In Russia feudalism was abolished in 1861 by Alexander 11 by an edict. Russia thus entered the era of capitalism after 1861.

Chekov's grandfather had however, succeeded in amassing enough wealth to purchase his own and his family's freedom. This was possible in Russian feudalism. A man could pay a certain amount of money to the authorities and buy his freedom from serfdom. Thus before serfdom was officially abolished in 1861 by the Tsar, Alexander 11 and capitalism was introduced, Chekov's grandfather was able to buy his own and his family's freedom. These details are important because as we will see, the play *The Cherry Orchard* is about transition from feudalism to capitalism.

Chekov's father was a grocery owner. The young Anton had to work for many hours in the grocery and was often beaten and humiliated by his father. His mother was a gentle woman but was powerless to make his childhood easier.

When Chekov finished his schooling, he went to Moscow to study medicine. Though he earned a medical degree in 1884, he practised medicine only intermittently. Writing was paying him more and took much of his doctor's time. His father went



bankrupt when he was at the university and he had to find money for his way through the university too. He had already taken to writing comic sketches and their publication had already helped him when he was yet a student. In 1886, he published the first collection of his short stories and quickly became famous for his short story writing. He has, to this day remained a master short story writer unsurpassed. In fact once Chekov said that fiction was his "legal wife" and drama his "noisy, impudent and tiresome mistress."

Chekov wrote many plays of which four have been recognized as masterpieces. They are *The Seagull* (1886) *Uncle Vanya* (1897) *The Three Sisters* (1901) and *The Cherry Orchard* (1904).

These four plays assure Chekov immortality as much as his many hundreds of stories do. In these plays as in his stories, Chekov understands and portrays human beings with masterful subtlety and great art. He diagnoses his characters to be frail, frustrated failures. Their wasted lives are only a manifestation of the passing of an old order. This passing of the old order and the consequent emergence of a new order is in fact a favourite theme of Chekov and that is what he deals with in the play *The Cherry Orchard* too. Chekov was a perceptive analyst of human beings. Just as he saw the wasted lives of some of his characters to be the manifestation of the passing of the old order, he also saw bold champions of the new order to be restless misfits. A gentle and compassionate man, though, Chekov depicted his findings about his characters with sympathy for their sufferings and shows their eternal longings for stability, happiness and beauty.

That however, is only one side of the story and that is the side too often exaggerated. That is the tragic side of his plays. Chekov refused to accept the verdict for example of Konstantine

Stanislavsky, the director of the Moscow Art Theatre on *The Cherry Orchard* when its premiere was held on 17th January, 1904. Stanislavsky wrote to Chekov, "This is not a comedy or a farce as you wrote; it is a tragedy, whatever the solution you may have found for the better life in the last act." On hearing this the dying Chekov complained: "Stanislavsky has ruined my play." As we will see later, *The Cherry Orchard* has a big element of humour in it. Therefore it cannot be rightway categorized as a tragedy. It has, as do his other plays, even farcical element in it. It is not a farce then either. As are all great comedies, *The Cherry Orchard* too is basically a serious play which eludes easy categorization and defies conventional labels.

#### A SYNOPSIS OF THE PLAY, *THE CHERRY ORCHARD*

Before we move on to a discussion on the themes of the play and its techniques, herebelow is a brief synopsis of the play. (N.B. Russian names are difficult to spell in English. Therefore students will come across different versions of spelling for the names of the characters in different editions. Students need not worry about this spelling difference. They should stick to one way of spelling they find in any edition of *The Cherry Orchard*. They should not mix up spelling. This writer takes the names as spelt in the American edition translated by Jennie Covan and published in the Range of Literature: Drama, Series by Van Nostrand Company, New York)

**THE CHERRY ORCHARD** is a play of four acts.

Act 1 : Madam Liuboff Andreievna Ranevskaya, a widow and her seventeen year old daughter are returning to Liuboff's estate near Moscow after a five-year absence. Different people have gathered to welcome them. They



are: Liuboff's brother Leonid Gaief, an elegant but impractical gentleman; Yermolai Lopakhin, a son of a serf who grew up in the household of Liuboff, but has now become rich; Liuboff's adopted daughter, Varya who is expected to marry Lopakhin; Peter Trofimoff, a radical student expelled from the university and formerly the tutor of Liuboff's son who drowned and a landowner who frequently falls asleep while he talks. There are some domestics too. They include an accident-prone clerk, a simpering maid whom he loves, a concieted servant whom the maid adores, a retired deaf butler and a charming governess who performs magic tricks. Liuboff on her arrival begins to reminisce sentimentally of her past and her daughter tells Varya about their poverty and her mother's extravagances. Varya is appalled to learn that the mortgage has not been paid. Lopakhin recommends a simple way of saving the estate from being sold at auction. His plan: convert the now useless cherry orchard to summer villas and rent them out. Besides saving the orchard, he thinks his plan will bring in an annual income of 25,000 rubles. Liuboff and her brother Gaieff would not hear of the plan because it will mean cutting down the orchard. The landowner asks for a loan and Liuboff looks out and cries, "Oh, my childhood, my innocence! I slept in this nursery and looked out on the orchard from here ....." Deciding to ask a rich aunt for a loan, Gaieff cheers up: "The etate shall not be sold!" Later Varya relates her household troubles. Liuboff's daughter Anya soon falls asleep and is taken to her bedroom as Trofimoff looks on deeply moved.

Act 2: Outdoors at sunset, the maid, the clerk and the servant are individually preoccupied with their love affairs. Later Liuboff, Gaieff and Lopakhin enter. Lopakhin deplors Liuboff's and Gaieff's lack of interest to save the cherry orchard from being sold at auction but they scornfully reject the commercial plan of Lopakhin to save their estate. "Summer cottages and summer residents - it is so valgur." Liuboff remarks. She feels grief-stricken at the thought of her lover who dropped her after she had



given her money to him, but now wants her back in Paris because he is ill. Lopakhin on his part is sad about his own intellectual and artistic inadequacy. The "perennial student" Trofimoff bitterly describes contemporary social conditions : "One must work and must help with all one's might," he maintains. An ominous distant sound like that of a breaking of string and the entry of a drunken beggar eventually cause the departure of all but the student Trofimoff and Liuboff's daughter, Anya. "We are above love", Trofimoff tells Anya as she reflects that the house she lives in is no longer theirs. To this Trofimoff replies that "all Russia is our Orchard" and adds that "first the past must be wiped out and atoned for, through "suffering" and incessant work." Annoyed when Varya calls them, they leave, Trofimoff still talking of future happiness.

Act 3: While Gaiëff is away at the auction, trying to save the estate, Liuboff is giving a ball. There is dancing and drinking and the governess is performing tricks. Trofimoff's lectures amuse Liuboff but when he criticizes her lover she angrily ridicules him: Imagine, at your age, not having a mistress!" He rushes out furiously and falls down a flight of stairs. The ball is at its high point when Lopakhin comes in, catching a blow Varya had just aimed at the impertinent clerk. Overwhelmed with embarrassment and unbelievable joy, Lopakhin finally announces "The cherry orchard is mine!" He bought the estate where his "grandfather and father were slaves," and plans to build it up for the needs of the future. At the same time he tearfully reproaches Liuboff for not having listened to his plan to save the estate. "Oh, if this could all be over soon, if some-how our awkward unhappily life would be changed!" He leaves after calling for music: "Here comes the new squire, the owner of the cherry orchard!" Anya, her daughter consoles Liuboff who is weeping bitterly: "don't cry, Mama, you've your life still left for you....."

Act IV: Liuboff is ready to leave the estate which is being

closed up and to return to Paris. As he keeps on looking for his galoshes Trofimoff is full of hope: Humanity is moving toward the loftiest truth, toward the loftiest happiness that is possible on earth and 'I am in the front ranks'. Gaieff has found a job in the bank and is momentarily happy: "I am a financier now," he says While the domestics drink, discuss their affairs and take out the luggage, the others conclude their emotional farewells. Liuboff embraces Gaieff tearfully and in despair says: "Oh! my dear, my lovely, beautiful orchard! my life, my youth, my happiness, good bye!" Finally when everybody is gone, the retired butler, Firce forgotten and now locked in enters the empty room, looks around, weakly lies down and mutters to himself, "nothing is left, nothing, Oh! you, good for- nothing ....." From the distance comes the sound at an axe cutting down the cherry orchard.

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## THE SOCIAL THEME IN THE PLAY; *The Cherry Orchard*

Having given you a synopsis of the play in the preceding pages with a view to helping you to get a rough outline of the play and presuming that you have read the play in its unabridged dramatic version, I would like to start my discussion of the play with you from the social theme in it.

Very early in the play *The Cherry Orchard*, there is a scene in Act I which seems to crystalize the subject of the play. The characters involved in the scene are Liuboff, Gaiëff, Firce and Lopakhin. The subject of the conversation is the cherry orchard. Lopakhin introduces the subject with a reference to the prospective sale of the cherry orchard. He says: "As you already know your cherry orchard is to be sold to pay your debts and the sale is arranged for August 22". At the beginning of the play we were told that Liuboff 'the owner of the cherry orchard had just returned from Paris after 5 years' absence from her estate. So when Lopakhin says that the orchard is to be sold to pay her debts, we easily guess that these may be the debts she incurred during her stay in Paris. In other words, life in Paris for her has been a costly one. As we will see later, Liuboff's life in Paris has been acostly to her in more than one sense; not only in an economic sense but also in a personal sense. It has been a big loss of her own self. (this aspect of Liuboff's loss of her own self, we will examine in our discussion of the personal theme in the play.)

For the moment we proceed with our discussion of the social theme. Even though the estate is to be sold, Lopakhin has a plan to save it. His plan is quickly to break the land into small building blocks and then to lease them out as villa sites. He has al

-ready calculated the income from such action and found that leasing the land would bring at least 25,000 rubles a year. In other words saving the orchard will mean going commercial or trading with the orchard. Later on when Trofimoff says: " Ah ! Russia is our orchard" we associate that with the cherry orchard and know that at that time Russia was doing so badly under feudalism, the only way out of the bad state of affairs was to leave the feudal ideals and become commercial - become capitalist.

To this plan of Lopakhin there is stiff opposition from the owners of the cherry orchard, the feudal masters. If we still have the words of Trofimoff that all Russia is the cherry orchard, we can stretch the point to see how the feudal masters were opposed to the changes to the system; the changes that brought about the capitalist economy in Russia. We are not stretching the point too far to see that implication when we know that when Tsar of Russia, Alexander II wanted to abolish serfdom in Russia, a group of Moscow nobility came to him to ask him not to do so. In reply to that the Tsar said that if he did not abolish serfdom by law from above, it would begin to undo itself from below like in France with a revolution and then the consequences would be disastrous.

What, do we find, are the reasons for which Liuboff and her brother oppose Lopakhin's plan ? Liuboff says that the cherry orchard is the most interesting and remarkable thing in the whole province. We understand what she means exactly, later when she looks out at the orchard and cries; "Oh! my childhood, days of my innocence ! In this nursery I used to sleep. I used to look out from here into the orchard. Happiness used to wake with me every morning and then it was just as it is now; nothing has changed.....It's all, all white ! Oh! my orchard !" These words of



words of Liuboff seem to reveal plenty about Liuboff herself but that we will have to keep for a later discussion on the personal theme. For the moment they tell us really why she does not want the cherry orchard to be broken into building blocks and leased out. Orchard is tied up with her childhood life. She has a sentimental attachment to it. Gaieff's reason for opposing Lopakhin's plan is no better. His reason is that it is mentioned in the Encyclopaedia. In other words he too values the orchard for flimsy sentimental reasons.

The testimony of Firce, the old servant that in the past, forty or fifty years ago, they dried the cherries, soaked them and pickled them and made jam and sent them in carts to Moscow and Kharkoff shows that there was a time when the cherry orchard was fruitful and profitable. There was money in it. Through the negligence of its owners the orchard has fallen into disuse. Nobody even remembers how the cherries were processed and sent to earn plenty of money. Chekov here is showing that Russia could not survive under the negligent feudal masters. It had become economically non-viable.

What we have in this scene therefore is the fusion of three time perspectives; the past, the present and the future of the cherry orchard. We should examine each of them as they are given to us through different characters because Chekov in this sense creates a sense of transition. He shows us important aspects of social change. In fact the social theme in the play centres round this question of transition from one social order to another, from an old to a new order. The play therefore examines three social realities.

- a) The old order - What was it ?
  - b) Reasons for its collapse,
  - c) The new order - What's it like?
- a) The Old Order - What was it?

We have learnt something about the old social order from the words of Firce, the superannuated butler in the above-mentioned scene. In fact Firce is the typical representative of the old feudal order. He always speaks in favour of it. He has told us in the above-mentioned scene how the cherry orchard of Liuboff used to be profitable. He speaks of the past when the orchard yielded abundant harvests. Under the feudal order of the day, labour was available to work in the orchard. There were the serfs or the tenant farmers who were bound to the land. They were obliged to work in the orchard for low wages. So the orchard was profitable. That therefore was the time when the orchard was full of life and work and was beautiful and productive.

In other words these were some of the positive aspects of feudalism. Feudal society was agricultural. Farmers were mostly bound to the land. Land was productive with the labour of the tenant farmers or the serfs as they were called.

We can think of this kind of glorious past even in our country during the time of our Sinhala kings. The socio-political system was feudal. People were bound to work for the king under the practice of Rajakariya. At the behest of the king the people would march in obedience to the king, taking their hoes and other implements to lend a hand in the building of huge tanks and then they would cultivate the land with water from those tanks. As a result the country was self-sufficient in food. It was a glorious past we can be proud of. The huge and numerous tanks



in Rajarata that bear ample testimony to glorious hydrolic civilization we had in feudal Sri Lanka.

Now to return to *The Cherry Orchard* besides the fact that the orchard was economically profitable during the feudal time there were also other positive aspects in the feudal system that supported the orchard. For instance, Firce speaking about the glory of the past in a later scene tells us that it was a time when "the peasants kept their distance from the masters and the masters kept their distance from the peasants," Let us ask what it means to say that the peasants kept their distance from the masters and the masters kept their distance from the peasants. First and foremost it means that it was a society in which different layers of people kept their distance from the others; a society in which people did not freely mix because the society was so well structured and the members belonging to one layer were not expected to cross the boundaries to another. In other words in that society, everyone had his or her birth-given place well-marked out for himself or herself and everyone strictly adhered to that place. The result was that no one aspired to enter the birth-given sphere of another - No one attempted to usurp the place of another. In fact it was considered morally unacceptable and therefore wrong to break away from one's given state of life. So there was no modern-day cut-throat competition in that society except perhaps among the members of royalty and nobility, who were an ambitious lot in general, all right. Otherwise, there was peace and harmony, among the ordinary people. This is why today, when we find people fighting to usurp the position of one another, we hark back to the more peaceful times when people lived in greater harmony because there was no competition. In fact Firce ends up his words we quoted above, saying; "but now everything is in a muddle and you cannot make head or tail of anything". We will examine the chaotic situation of the new order later but here what Firce testifies is to the peaceful order that prevailed under feudalism in Russia as opposed to the kind of chaotic situation created by the changes that came later.

Russian feudalism not only had the above mentioned positive aspects to it, there were also strong adherents of it like Firce who refused to be liberated by the emancipation edict of 1861. As we saw earlier, Russian serfdom (Obligation of farmers to remain bound to land) was abolished in 1861 by the Tsar of Russia, Alexander II by an emancipation edict. Serfdom is a part of feudalism. In France, changes from feudalism came as a result of a violent revolution, the French Revolution of 1789. But in Russia the Tsar, Alexander II did not want to wait for the time when feudalism would begin to undo itself from below. He thought it was better to abolish it from above by law. But the strong adherents of the old order like Firce still loved it and found their security in it and therefore refused to be freed from it even by the emancipation edict. As Firce puts it in the play: "When the emancipation came I was already first valet. Only I did not agree with the emancipation and remained with my masters." Firce in fact goes to the extent of considering the emancipation edict a great catastrophe. In the second act when an ominous distant sound like that of a breaking string is heard Firce says: "Before the catastrophe the same things happened" and when asked "before what catastrophe" by Gaieff, he says: "Before the emancipation." It is worth here asking why men like Firce refused to be freed from their semi-slavish existence as serfs and in fact considered the emancipation as a great catastrophe. Let us remember here that change always calls for a new 'birth.' It is a new life. A birth is a painful process. Some refuse to be born because it is painful. When serfdom was ushered in for farmers they were given the freedom to live a new life. Men like Firce did not welcome that new life because they did not want to be reborn or face sudden changes.

It would also be interesting to ask the further question why people living in one order, used to one way of life, do not,



want to leave that way of life to enter a new way of life. It often happens that when the old way of life has been so oppressive, so crippling that the adherents of that way of life get morally, psychologically, paralysed. Because of their moral, psychological paralysis they are no longer capable of taking their destiny into their own hands. This moral impotence we can see in the case of Firce. Consider for example what he says when he is asked by Liuboff where he would go when the cherry orchard is sold. He promptly replies that he would go wherever she commanded him to go.

Liuboff : "Firce, if the state is sold, where will you go ?"

Firce : "I'll go wherever you command me to go."

One may think that Firce is a very obedient servant and that is what we need even today for more efficient running of our private and public sector institutes. Looked at it in that way, the humble attitude of this elderly servant being ready to be at complete disposal of his mistress, would look a very exemplary virtue. Obedience of the rank and file to authority certainly is necessary for the running of any institute. That nobody in his right sense would deny. but if we look at what is revealed in the attitude of Firce, seriously, we will find there is something other than obedience here. There is in fact something deficient on the part of Firce. What those words reveal in Firce is not obedience, but dependence. It is dependence arising from moral impotence - inability to take one's destiny into one's hands. Therefore it is no more virtue (virtue in Latin meant strength) but weakness, a deficiency. That is why we called it moral impotence.

To understand the end of such moral impotence imposed by the crippling fetters of feudalism let us have a look at the very last scene. Everybody is gone. Firce, forgotten and now locked in, enters the empty room, looks round, weakly lies down and mutters to himself. Let us listen to what he says: "It's locked."

He is referring to the room. We know that not only the room is locked for him. The way into the sunshine of life—a life of freedom—is also locked for him. Then he says: "They have left, they have forgotten me." Not only his former masters and the new owner of the orchard but history too will forget men like Firce who refuse to move with it - men like Firce who have no courage to take their destiny into their hand and march forward with others, not on the shoulders of others but hand-in-hand as comrades. Later it is pathetic to hear him say: "Life's gone on as if I had never lived.....you've no strength left in you, nothing left at all.... oh! you bungler!" Don't these words mean that history bypasses the morally lame? In fact for all his abject dependence on Liuboff, waiting to go wherever she commanded him to go, what, do we see, has happened? Not even she has had a thought for him: "They have forgotten" him.

That is in so far as the individual is concerned. We also saw that Firce is a representative character. He represents the feudal order. When we are told that they have forgotten him, that life has gone on as if he had never lived and that he had no strength left etc. Don't all those comments also refer to the system he represents. In other words, isn't he also talking about the disappearance of the system itself, it's being bypassed by history? Chekov in other words seems to imply that feudalism itself had come to a stage when it could no longer last, no longer continue on the path of history; it had run out of energy. It was morally impotent to go on.

That brings us to the other side of the story; the negative aspects of the feudal system which Chekov has not failed to present to us in the play because Chekov presents feudalism not partially but totally, with both its negative as well as positive aspects.



In Act 2, there is a scene in which in reply to the fanatic glorification of feudalism by Firce, Lopakhin the emerging champion of the new order says: "It was very good for them in the old days". We know this statement is ironic because he adds: "At any rate there was flogging formerly." this might appear a passing remark but it is pregnant with meaning for the intelligent reader. It means not only the beastly treatment of whipping meted out to serfs by their feudal masters, but also the whole social set-up in which the basic human rights to the sacredness of one's person etc. were not recognized.

Awareness of human rights in fact came only after the French Revolution. During the feudal times one could not speak of one's rights. One existed not for oneself but for the king and the community. This is why even now, though we are no more feudal, feudal ideals still haunt us and human rights are only matters confined to the books of law. In practice it is often the feudal ideals of serving the community, the family etc. That determine our behaviour.

To come back to our discussion on the negative aspects of the old order - feudalism, as presented by Chekov in the play, we see the bitterness of it much more poignantly in Trofimoff's outraged social conscience later. This scene comes towards the end of Act 11. Let us listen to what Trofimoff says: "Think only Anya, your grandfather and all your ancestors were slave owners, the owners of living souls and from every cherry tree in the orchard, from every leaf, from every trunk there are human creatures looking at you. Cannot you hear their voices? Oh! it is awful."

Trofimoff is an ironic character in the play for the most part. Here is a rare instance when Chekov uses his outraged conscience to pass Chekov's own verdict on history. It was a time of slave labour. Even though as a phase in history, feudalism had

succeeded the era of slavery, there was virtual slavery yet functioning in feudal Russia. Men were denied their basic human rights and the feudal masters behaved like slave-owners.

The more terrible aspect of it implied in the words of Trofimoff, however, is not the past but the present. When Trofimoff says: "from every tree in the orchard, from every leaf, from every trunk there are human creatures looking at you, cannot you hear their voices?" he means the terrible effects of such slave ownership are not over, they are present, they continue to haunt the present. The present is haunted by the monstrosities of the past.

Chekov also knew that a healthy present could not evolve from such a monstrous past until the present is cleansed of those ghostly monstrosities. This is why in the same scene, Trofimoff continues to say: "It's so clear that to begin to live in the present we must first redeem the past and that can be done only by suffering, by strenuous, uninterrupted work".

Chekov knew that there is no present without the past. the present is the fruit of the past. We will see this relationship between the past and the present in greater detail when we discuss the personal theme. The implications of this relationship between the past and the present for the social theme are equally important. It means that there is more than a mere chronological nexus between the past and the present of a society. There is a causal connection and a psychological bond between the past and the present of a society. The present is the effect of the past. The present is created by the past. Then in the social consciousness of the people, the past continues to haunt the present. Till we liberate ourselves from those ghostly relics of the past we are not free. Emancipation, therefore is not a mere matter of an imperial edict or even a bloody revolution. It is a matter of redeeming the



past by "suffering, strenuous, uninterrupted work" in the present Isn't that what is happening in our own country? We got our freedom from foreign rule 50 years ago and feudalism was abolished in this country even earlier in 1833, more than 150 years ago. But don't the feudal vestiges of family bandism, caste and ethnicity continue to haunt us like the ghosts of Trofimoff from every pillar and post and smear our hands with blood and fill our eyes with tears?

#### b) Reasons for the collapse of the old order

In our discussion of the social theme of the play we made reference to Liuboff's and her brother Gaieff's reasons for opposing Lopakhin's plans to go commercial with the orchard. The reasons were sentimental and private. Like the gentry themselves the orchard had become a relic of the past, an image of a gracious and leisurely age, a show-piece. Liuboff and Gaieff are attached to it in the same way as one would attach oneself to an image, a relic which reminded one of the better past. The orchard could not survive merely as an image or a relic. It had to be economically viable. When at the end of the play we hear the axe falling on cherry trees, we are not surprised at the orchard's vulnerability to the axe, because its unproductiveness at present compared to the juicy harvests in the past could not save it. So the economic non-viability of the orchard at least partly qualified it for its loss. Economic viability therefore is a must for any system to survive. A time came when feudalism in Russia became nonviable economically. Serfs were freed. There was no more cheap labour available to work on land. Land became unproductive. So the system which had its foundation

on land had to collapse.

Unproductiveness was one reason for the loss of the orchard, for its collapse, it was not the only reason. There was another reason and a stronger one too. Let us examine what that other major reason was for the loss of the orchard.

Though the orchard becomes vulnerable to the axe at the end of the play, what we notice as we read the play is that the orchard is not lost only at the end of the play, it is already lost at the beginning of the play.

As we have seen the play opens with the return home of Liuboff from Paris. This return home soon we understand is not a mere homecoming. It is something more. It is an attempt to return to a way of life which is idyllic and pure but to which Liuboff cannot return because it is a way of life lost for ever. Chekov seems therefore to suggest that at the root of the loss of the orchard more than anything else is this loss of a way of life. This is something we must examine in detail.

From the beginning what do we see about Liuboff? We see her restlessly moving and endlessly kissing everything - not only people but also chairs, cupboards etc. She keeps on swallowing pills and drinking coffee. What do these external actions of Liuboff show us about her inner character? They show a certain restlessness within her. There is artifice and affectendness about her; a lack of sincerity and genuineness. Then we hear her words "Oh! my childhood, days of my innocence." Doesn't that she now has lost that innocence of her chi



-ldhood. Then she adds: "It was in this nursery I used to sleep. From here I looked out into the orchard. Happiness used to wake with me every morning". Isn't she talking about a lost happiness which somehow was associated with the orchard? We know that from her few words: "...and in those days the orchard was the same, nothing has changed. It's all white." We might as well ask what has changed? She comes out with her answer: ".....If I could take this strong burden off from my breast and shoulders, if I could forget my past." She has changed. There is a burden of guilt on her. That's why she longs for innocence, the days of her childhood. In other words, these words of Liuboff show us that she is not merely reminiscing her childhood past but she is expressing a strong desire to escape from the present. It is a painful present - not the pain of losing the orchard but the pain of losing her childhood innocence which she associates with the whiteness of the orchard. That whiteness of the orchard she prizes because what it symbolizes in her own life, she has lost.

In other words, Liuboff feels the passing of time not in terms of age, but in terms of guilt. Later we come to know that she feels guilty about her lover, about the death of her husband and the death of her son and about all that Paris has meant to her. If then as the play proceeds, she looks singularly inactive about any attempt to save the orchard which means so much to her in a sentimental way, it is first and foremost because she feels that she does not morally deserve the orchard and second because that is not really where she belongs. Her call of life and love is to Paris. The telegrammes that arrive even before she

arrives at her estate from Paris is a constant reminder of a self divided between the attractions to her youthful innocence and later decadence.

This decadence has emptied her of her soul; the inner life. This is why she has grown shallow, superficial and empty. She lacks direction and purpose and cannot see in the orchard anything except a show - piece value.

This loss of self by Liuboff should not be difficult for us to understand when we think of many a girl and a boy who leaves our own shores to go abroad for employment, studies etc. What do we find when they come back? Don't we find them coming back highly sophisticated, having lost the rustic innocence they carried with them when they left the country? Further, don't we find quite a few of them no more at ease in their traditional rural milieu? In fact it is not seldom that they get their call of life and love from the soils abroad even before they return to this island which is no more morally and psychologically theirs. We can also think of quite a few children of feudal families of this country, who have made their home abroad. They have no interest in their kith and kin, home and hearth in this country. In fact they have become aliens to this land.

So what is discussed in the play is not merely a question of the loss of Liuboff's possessions, the orchard, but something much more personal and deep within her; that is the loss of her own inner self. It is the loss of her inner self that led to the loss of the orchard. That is why we said that even through the actual cutting down of the cherry orchard and therefore its loss comes at the end of the play, we notice even at the beginning and through the play that Liuboff had already lost it before she returned home from Paris.



In fact her loss of her childhood innocence, her childhood integrity, led her to a life of extravagance, a life beyond her means. So we hear her daughter say: "she (Liuboff) asked for all the expensive things and tipped the waiters one ruble each." We might ask why Liuboff did so when even her estate was mortgaged and she was in debt. She behaves like that because she lacks direction in life. With the loss of her inner self, she is lost and cannot understand what has gone wrong with her.

We are reminded of a poem the American poet, Robert Frost wrote and titled, "*Provide, Provide*". Frost had seen a former Hollywood movie idol coming with pail and rag to scrub the steps of a hotel; she had become a scrub woman. She had squandered all her money or had been cheated by someone relieving her of wealth. So Frost wrote:

The witch that came (the withered hag)  
To wash the steps with pail and rag,  
Was once the beauty Abishag.

The picture pride of Hollywood.  
Too many fall from great and good.  
For you to doubt the likelihood.

What is interesting is that Frost named this woman Abishag. Abishag was a character in the Bible. When King David grew old and ill and, even when covered with bedclothes, could not get warm, his servants and courtiers scoured the whole land to find a beautiful maiden to put into the royal bed to warm the poor old king. The beauty's name was Abishag. Frost implies that the Hollywood idol probably was playing Abishag and that is how she came to her pathetic plight of being a scrub

woman. More interesting however, is Frost's advice to avoid such fate :

Die early and avoid the fate.  
Or if predestined to die late,  
Make up your mind to die in state

Make the whole stock exchange your own ?  
If need be occupy a throne,  
Where nobody can call you crone.

Then he adds very unobtrusively,

Some have relied on what they knew;  
Others on being simply true.  
What worked for them might work for you

Having told his readers to own the whole stock exchange and occupy a throne if necessary, Frost comes out with the two lines: "Some have relied on what they knew". That is the philosophical approach. Then the next line: "Others on being simply true" That is the moral approach to life. Frost is almost casual in proposing these guidelines for life, because he knew that this sort of moral advice is not well taken when rubbed on people. But he tells his reader that this sort of life lived on knowledge and morality has stood men and women in good stead. So it should be the foundation of one's life.

Very much to the point of our discussion is Frost's advice "on being simply true." Being true is safeguarding one's integrity. Liuboff lost her own integrity and that made her lose everything else.



So the obvious conclusion we can arrive at these observations is that the decadence of the old order results from the decadence of the guardians of that order. A system collapses when the guardians of the system become corrupt.

### The Theme of Pseudo-intellectualism:

Before we examine the nature of the newly emerging social order there is one more character who seems to represent a class of people who make their own contribution to the collapse of the old feudal order. This is the character of Trofimoff, the anti-intellectual intellectual. We must examine this character to find out the negative contribution of the class he represents.

Trofimoff is a perpetual student, a visionary who ironically is the best exponent of the pseudo-intellectualism of the feudal society. "The vast majority of the intellectual people I know seek nothing, do nothing and are not fit for any work. They call themselves intellectual but they treat their servants as inferiors, behave to the peasants as though they were animals, learn little, read nothing seriously, do practically nothing, only talk about science and know very little about art."

These are strong words but it is characteristic of Chekov's irony in the play that this character, Trofimoff incurs best his own criticism. He is a person so conspicuously inadequate for any serious task. He embodies more than any one else the

inactivity he is talking about. What Trofimoff advocates in his most rhetoric speeches in other instances is often embodied before him in Lopakhin and what is strange about it all is that he himself cannot recognize it.

This precisely seems to be the sin of the intellectual class of Chekov's Russia. They were blind to what was happening before their very eyes just as Trofimoff is blind to what was happening with Lopakhin.

The biggest fault of the intellectual class of that day in Russia was not their blindness but their conceitedness. Whereas everyone caught in the turmoil of change was suffering, Trofimoff in Act 4 tells Lopakhin: "Mankind goes on to the highest possible truths and happiness on earth" and solemnly adds: "and I march in the front ranks." This is what I meant as the conceitedness of the intellectual class. Whereas this good-for-nothing so-called intellectual could not just see what was happening before his very eyes, he tells us that he leads mankind to highest possible truths and happiness. We are not likely to believe him. We know that Chekov uses Trofimoff as an ironic character. Therefore Trofimoff means the opposite of what he says, which means Chekov would have us understand that Trofimoff does not lead mankind to happiness and truth. So the intellectual class of his day was not merely blind but they were conceited, selfdeluded too.

Wordsworth in the *Preface to Lyrical Ballads* says:



“The task of the poet is to help men to solve the riddle of life” If we interpret the poet to be the intellectual of Chekov’s Russia they had most miserably failed in that task. They had failed to interpret the meaning of the changes that were taking place around them and give them intelligent direction and purpose.

### c) The new order - What’s it like ?

Balancing the collapse of the old order we also see the emerging new order. Chekov himself was the grandson of a serf. He was aware of the energetic egoistic thrust of his lower - class characters and their achievements.

The Character that represents the emerging new order more than anyone else in the play is Lopakhin. What we notice in him as soon as we meet him is his resourcefulness. He has a plan to save the cherry orchard. One characteristic of this resourcefulness is the imaginative quality of his mind which makes him see new possibilities of the orchard. Whereas the cherry orchard has only a show-piece, antique value for the traditional owners of it, the newly emerging representative of the new order quickly sees new possibilities for which the cherry-orchard can be used. It can be divided into plots and given on rent as villa sites.

That also shows us another aspect of that resourcefulness. That is a certain timely perceptivity. It was a time when

the new middle class was emerging. They needed suitable land for villa sites. It is the perceptive mind of Lopakhin which sees the usefulness of the orchard, otherwise unproductive, as villa sites. Lopakhin is also a hard - working man with a measure of practicality in him. He gets up at five every morning and works till evening. This hard work is at the root of his success. So he is able to say: "I sowed three thousand acres with poppies in the spring and now I have cleared forty thousand profit and when my poppies were in flower, wasn't it a picture? So here I say I made forty thousand and I am offering you a loan because I can afford to. Why turn up your nose? I am a peasant..... I speak bluntly."

Though Lopakhin's peasant origins can make him blunt, what we notice from these words is that he can be generous and also he is not altogether impervious to beauty. If his poppies are more flamboyant than the stately cherry orchard and more transient in blossom, they are what the cherry orchard no longer is. They are profitable, whereas the cherry orchard is no longer useful, no longer profitable. Though the poppies may lack the historical and in a sense the cultural permanence of the orchard, they still have more colourful vitality and along with their beauty they are profitable. their beauty is their use, a beauty for which unlike for that of the orchard people are prepared to pay.

This also brings us to the other related subject. That is the capitalist's view of this world. For example, Lopakhin sees the orchard not as the reminder of a lost innocence, which the orchard is for Liuboff but as a place full of opportunity for development and making profit. Greedy exploitation of natural res



resources by capitalist entrepreneurship has come under much fire in recent times but Chekov seems to have thought otherwise. He in fact seems to have thought that it is a duty of man by God to use the gifts of nature for his own enhancement. So we hear Lopakhin say: "Oh! God, you have given us huge forests, infinite fields and endless horizons and we living here ought really to be giants." This is the view of a man who sees this world as being full of opportunity for growth- to grow into giants. Since this is seen as a duty of man by God, it is seen as a religious duty. This certainly is an unusual view of the world. Traditionally, popular religious belief would be to think that this world is a place of sin to entice man from his other-worldly aspirations. That in fact was the view of the world in medieval times in feudal Europe. The world as a place of opportunity and that it is man's duty by its creator to developing it began to be thought only recently.

Finally we have Lopakhin buying the cherry orchard at the auction and proclaiming himself the master of the orchard where his father and grandfather had been slaves: "I bought it....My God, My God the cherry orchard is mine now, mine..if my father and grandfather rose from their graves and looked at the whole affair and saw how their Yermolai, their whipped and illiterate Yermolai who used to run about barefoot in the winter, how that very Yermolai has bought an estate, the most beautiful spot in the world! I've bought the estate where my grandfather and my father were slaves, where they weren't even allowed to enter the kitchen"

The social revolution ushered in by the disappearance of feudalism and the introduction of capitalism is implied when

Lopakhin says that he has bought the estate where his grandfather and his father were slaves and where they were not even allowed to enter the kitchen. It shows that in the new order of things a new class of people are going to be the masters. Traditional masters are ousted and a grandson of a serf takes over leadership.

The most important implication of these words is however not that Lopakhin repeats the words, "I've bought" thrice. In the feudal system, birth determined the claim to position and property. It will no longer be so. In the new order of things it is the buying power that has determined the ownership of the orchard. It is the same buying power that will determine social status in the new order. In fact in no other play of Chekov is money so insidiously dominating the characters as in the Cherry Orchard.

We should therefore examine this aspect of the play in greater detail. Chekov presents the dominating power of money on the lives of people both positively and negatively. Positively money is presented as having great liberating power. Lopakhin the grandson of a serf was able to liberate himself from his semi-slavish status in life because of his money. In the feudal system people were confined to their birth-given state of life. This was necessary for the well-being of the whole society. This confinement to one's birth-given state of life had a lot of harmful effects. It for example stifled a man's natural talents. Lopakhin, though of serf origin had great potentialities for business. He has a good business sense and sees the futility of the orchard which does not bring in profit to its owners. So he is able to buy the orchard and quickly convert it to a profitable venture because of his money. If



not for money Lopakhin's great potentialities would have been just buried. So we can see how money plays the role of the great liberator for Lopakhin redeeming him from his semi-slavish state of life as a serf and enabling him to put his birth-given talents to use.

Money has its own negative power too. It is the same money which has enabled Lopakhin to be the new owner of the orchard that has also deprived its former owners of their property. Liuboff has grown extravagant and got used to a spendthrift life because of her money. This is what she means when she confesses: "Oh! my sins, I've always scattered money about without being able to control myself like a mad woman and I married a man who made nothing but debts." We also know how Liuboff's daughter Anya complains that her mother "asked for all the expensive things and tipped the waiters one ruble each." thus Liuboff is seen to be squandering her money which at the end makes her indebted and she had to mortgage her estate.

So we have the ugly realities of mortgages, debts and borrowings. Liuboff mortgaged her estate because she ran out of money. She complains that she married a man who did nothing but made debts. The landowner who comes to welcome her on her return from Paris asks for a loan. This landowner in fact is an eternal borrower who keeps on asking for loans from everyone and says: "But the trouble is I have no money. A hungry dog believes only in meat. So I...believe in money." This landowner typifies the evil of borrowing because he borrows to pay his debts. He wants "two hundred and forty rubles to pay the interests on

typically of a giganter

the mortgage.” Debts, mortgages and interests are some of the created ugly realities spawned by money oriented society.

That is not all. Money also can wield a great alienating influence in society. Lopakhin when he returns after the purchase of the Cherry Orchard at the auction is apparently in great jubilation at the thought that he is the new owner of the cherry orchard. Along with his sense of jubilation, achievement and success, we also notice that there is a streak of sadness and embarrassment in him. His call for louder and louder music in fact is not so much an expression of joy in his heart as an attempt to drown the sadness in him because he has deprived of his former masters who were not altogether lacking in benevolence to him, of what they loved. Infact at one point he breaks down and weeps when he sees Liuboff weep at what has happened and when he realizes, as he himself says, that she cannot go back on what has taken place. His words: “Oh! if only the whole thing were finished, if only our uneven, unhappy lives were changed” are indicative of Lopakhin’s realization that his purchase of the cherry orchard has only made their lives uneven, meaning not only unequal but also unhappy.

## THE PERSONAL THEME IN THE PLAY

Chekov himself believed that “the highest aim of the playwright is to show character revealing itself subtly.” In that sense the more important aspect of the play is not the social theme, but the personal theme because what is typically artistic is this revelation of the inner landscape of all those who are caught in the process of social change.



Caught up in social change, some refuse to move, to march with history because of their moral impotence. Firce, the servant is the best example of this inner reality the moral impotence. Chekov in fact invented a word to describe this state of mind. The word now has been absorbed into the Russian language. That word is *nedotepa*. This is the last word uttered in the play. It is the word Firce uses for himself when he finds that all have left the house leaving himself alone and that he is locked in.

*Nedotepa* is derived from 'ne' and 'dotyapat.' 'Ne' means not. 'Dotyapat' means to finish chopping. Chekov most probably had in mind also the chopping of the cherry orchard which the audience hears just then at the end of the play. But it is also the word Firce uses to call himself when he finds himself in the situation we mentioned just above.

*Nedotepa* has posed considerable difficulties to English translators. In English idiom the word would mean half-chopped or half-baked. Some have translated it into English as 'bungler' or 'good for nothing.' Whatever translation we may give to the word, from the context we know that Firce is a failure; He has bungled up. It is his own condemnation of refusing to move with history because of his moral impotence. So we hear him say: Life's gone on as if I'd never lived. (lying down) I'll lie down. You've no strength left in you. Nothing left at all. Oh! you bungler."

We need no better word to recognize the inner reality of Firce. He is an exhausted man, run out of energy. Strangely he is exhausted not because he has kept pace with history but because he has refused to do so. His own lethargy has sapped him

of all energy. In other words his moral dependence on others in the feudal system has made him unfit for life. Life, if it does not renew itself must soon wither off.

Caught up in social change not all are defeated by moral impotence like Firce. There are those who measure up to the demands of changes taking place. They are like Lopakhin. They succeed externally. They become the masters of the new order but their psychology is rooted in the old order. So their values and attitudes are still of the old order and those values and attitudes continue to haunt the masters of the new order. The adjustment to the new order internally cannot be brought about so easily as externally.

There is a scene in Act 4 which illustrates the point we have just discussed above. It is Lopakhin and Trofimoff before each other's departure- one to Karkoff and the other to Moscow. During their conversation Trofimoff says this: "You know we may not meet again. so just let me give you a parting bit of advice Don't wave your hands about, getrid of the habit of waving them about." We are not much surprised at the triviality of the advice that he gives to the man who has just announced that he has bought the cherry orchard. Even if we have not seen the like of it in Lopakhin up to now; that is his habit of waving hands, we already know that he is a restless man in the sense he has no time to rest. He is always in a hurry. He comes to announce his plan to save the orchard and he does so while looking at the watch several times and then departs.



In fact in Lopakhin we might think that we have the most successful man in the newly emerging order. Yet it is an embarrassed and rather lonely man that we meet in Lopakhin. He is embarrassed because he realizes how he has hurt those he loved, by taking from them what they loved. He is also embarrassed because he cannot forget the fact that he was only the son of a serf. He is lonely and estranged from the others for the same reasons that he has hurt them and cannot forget his beginning. When Lopakhin invites the band to play, when he calls for music as he triumphantly announces that he is the new owner of the cherry orchard we know that he calls for music not only to celebrate his joy of buying the cherry orchard but also to drown his sorrow and embarrassment for what he has done. That is why he weeps and says: "Oh ! if only the whole thing were finished, if only our uneven lives were changed". 'Uneven' here means not only unequal but also unhappy.

There is another scene which exposes the embarrassment and especially the inadequacy of Lopakhin. That is when he frankly admits his inability to propose to Varya: "To tell the truth", he tells Liuboff, "I don't understand it myself.... It's so strange I don't feel as if I could ever propose to her without you". This is an honest admission of his inhibition due to his humble origin. His humble origin haunts him and paralyses him. So he pleads with Liuboff for help to propose to Varya.

Even if he did propose to Varya, we begin to doubt whether he would make a successful husband since he displays his classic obsession with business and money. When for example in Act 1 Lopakhin says: "For money will the Germans make a Frenchman of a Russian," we associate that money-mindedness as much with Lopakhin himself as with Germans. Later we find that his

money mindedness has made him miserly and mean. For the farewell party he gives, he buys only one bottle of champagne and tells Yasha, the servant: "Eight rubles a bottle" and adds "It's frightfully cold here." This coldness is not only in the house; it is much more poignantly in the hearts of the people in the house and above all it is in the heart of Lopakhin himself. Having said that it is frightfully cold, this man, practical and calculating that he is, adds: "Good building weather."

All that shows is that there is not much warmth in the heart of this businesslike, calculating miserly man. Is it then surprising for us to think whether he would ever be able to truly love Varya even if he marries her? Perhaps even in his love he will be too calculating and businesslike and miserly that it will not be love any more.

This means that in the newly emerging order of capitalism those who really become the masters of it would be so obsessed with money that they would be too dried up of human tenderness as to be able to love another person genuinely. In other words in the new order of things people would be less human in spite of Trofimoff's claim: "Mankind goes on to the highest possible truths and happiness on earth." Knowing Trofimoff to be an ironic character in what he says, we know, here too is only an ironic comment which means that mankind is actually retreating from truth and happiness.

There is a very significant scene in Act 3 when Pischik invites Liuboff to dance a waltz and they dance. As they dance Yasha sings: "Oh! Will you understand my soul's restlessness?" We associate this restlessness as much with Liuboff as with Yasha



It is an invitation to the audience to understand the restlessness of Liuboff's soul. In other words restlessness resulting from social change is not only the problem of the masters of the new order like Lopakhin. It is also common to the masters of the old order. Liuboff represents that class of people and embodies that restlessness we have already seen at the very beginning of the play how restless Liuboff is. Her incessant coffee-drinking, pill taking and flitting around like a grasshopper, kissing cupboards, and calling the table, "my little table," all show how restless she is.

When Yasha says. "Oh! Will you understand my soul's deep restlessness," he includes himself too in that restlessness. This means restlessness was not the malaise of only the members of the upper classes. the members of the lower classes too shared in it. In fact, the restlessness Yasha sings about becomes contagious. Dunyasha the maid-servant becomes restless and complains that her head whirls and heart beagins to palpitate when she dances. She sits and fans herself while Yepikhodoff reminds her of her word to him. Dunyasha becomes snappish at Yepikhodoff and Varya orders him out, hits him with a strick and it hits the wrong man Lopakhin who enters the scene just then. This external commotion only typifies the inner turmoil of the characters. Thus restlessness is shown to be the general malaise of all and sundry.

Dunyasha becoming snappish at Yepikhodoff also shows how people become irritable and intolerant of one another when they are the victims of inner restlessness. This situation of mutual intolerance is shown in much clearer light when Varya orders Yepikhov off and wields a big stick against him.

A few more consequences of that general restlessness are

also shown in the play. Inner restlessness also drives people away from their traditional habitats in search of new pastures. This is what happens at the end of the play. Trofimoff goes to Moscow, Lopakhin to Kharkoff and Liuboff back to Paris. In the new places the fugitives will be rootless aliens.

That rootless alienation however is not the biggest danger. We have seen how for example for Liuboff Andrievna the social change has meant more in terms of a lost innocence- a way of life to which she would like to return but cannot. It is this irrevocability of what is lost that forms the greatest loss in personal terms for people caught in social change and fleeing to new pastures.

In the case of Liuboff that irrevocability of what is lost in personal terms is implied in the tragic past tense she uses in the following passage where she speaks of her childhood innocence: "Oh! my childhood, my innocence, it was in this nursery I used to sleep, from here I looked into the orchard. happiness used to wake with me every morning and in those days the orchard was just the same. Nothing has changed."

This tragic past tense Liuboff uses shows that at the time she is talking she possesses neither her innocence, nor her sleep, "the season of all natures," (Shakespeare's Macbeth Act, 3, Sc. 4:140, nor her happiness she used to wake with. She has lost these qualities which the orchard symbolized for her. When she says; "in those days the orchard was just the same. Nothing has changed", it is more than clear that she has changed. Her way of life has changed and the orchard which has remained the same has become an eloquent symbol of her lost happiness, her inner



tranquility and peace, the innocence of her childhood.

We also saw that Liuboff suffers not only from the loss of her childhood qualities like innocence and happiness but she suffers more from a sense of irrevocability of these qualities; she cannot hope to regain them. It would be interesting to ask why her past is irrevocable. Liuboff's past is irrevocable not because it is past but because its place has been filled by new cultural affinities. The telegrammes that arrived from Paris even before she arrives at her estate are the surest signs of these new cultural affinities. They are the messengers that call her to this new way of life. So her tragic irrevocability is not so much a question of retrieving her lost innocence as a matter of giving up or freeing herself from a new way of life to which she has given herself up. The result of it all is the deep restlessness with which Liuboff is bound to live, a schizophrenic existence which Yasha invites us to behold during that dance we referred to.

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## CHEKOV'S TECHNIQUE IN THE CHERRY ORCHARD

From the foregoing discussion on the Personal Theme in *The Cherry Orchard*, it might appear that the play is a tragedy: Liuboff is the tragic heroine who suffers from the irrevocability of her past happiness. Lopakhin is the champion of the newly emerging order, who is also unhappy because of his own inadequacy to face life due to his humble origin. The minor characters themselves are the victims of the malaise of restlessness. Firce is a tragic failure. Because he was too faithful to a crumbling feudal system.

Chekov himself, however, would not agree with the view that *The Cherry Orchard* is a tragedy. As early as 1903, while he was still in the process of writing it Chekov had said; "I shall call the play a comedy" and later he added; "It has turned out not a drama (meaning a tragedy) but a comedy, in parts a farce indeed." Never did he renounce this conviction that *The Cherry Orchard* was above all a comedy. But Konstatin Stanislavsky the director of the Moscow Art Theatre from the moment of first reading the play had very different ideas about it. "This is not a comedy or a farce as you wrote, it is a tragedy, whatever the solution you may have found for the better life in the last act," he wrote to Chekov after reading the play. This is a matter of opinion. What do you think? Is it a tragedy or a comedy?

This shows that *The Cherry Orchard* from the very beginning was staged amid controversy as to its basic technique. This controversy seems to remain unresolved even today. This controversy as to whether the play is a comedy or a tragedy would however point to the fact that **the play contains in it elements of both comedy and tragedy but is neither of them.**



The earliest plays Chekov wrote were heavily farcical. For example his early plays *The Swan Song* (1887), *The Bear* (1888), *The Proposal* (1888), *The Wedding* (1889), *The Anniversary* (1892) all bear testimony to Chekov's gift as a skillful farceur who could explore the farcical element in human behaviour. This farcical element is present in the play *The Cherry Orchard* too. For example Epikhodoff, the clerk is a comic character in the play. He squashes, breaks and falls over everything. Trofimoff too falls downstairs at the point of his indignant exit in Act 3. Varya wields a strick that almost hits the wrong man. It is because of these farcical elements present in the play that Chekov himself described the play as a comedy and in parts a farce indeed.

When we examine the comic element in the play, we also notice that it is not a play with a happy ending with a wedding like Shakespeare's "Twelfth Night" or "As You Like It". There are quite a few proposals for marriage but not a wedding takes place. The parties involved fail to enter into marriage for some reason or other. Thus we are provoked to laugh at the behaviour of some characters but there is no event in the play that moves us to happiness. Therefore we may say that Chekov has used the comic element not to create a comedy in the traditional sense of the word but to represent an essential aspect of life: The delightful aspect of life.

This view of the comic element in the play as representing the delightful aspect of life and is not meant to create a comedy out of *The Cherry Orchard* also tallies with what Chekov himself seems to have thought of the play. He thought it as a hilarious affair tending to farce in some places. This is why as we said before, he did not agree with Stanislavsky when he said the play was a tragedy.

Chekov however, could not in spite of this conviction of his, convince his actors to act for a 'comedy'. They persisted in seeing pathos and tragedy in these figures and so have actors ever since. Probably the actors are right for there is evidence that the play deals with serious ideas about the tragic element of social change. Thus we have also to see the play as a tragedy and probe into the tragic element in the play.

One of the most remarkable things that we notice in the play at once is that there is no violence in it. Not a single gun-shot is heard. No one wields a sword. No one is killed. Chekov himself has said that there was no violence in his play because violence played such a small part in people's lives. What we see happening in the play on the other hand is a concentration on the internal scene of its characters; What happens inside the characters. In that sense even if the tragic element is present in *The Cherry Orchard*, it is different from that of the 16th century drama.

For example Shakespearean tragedy took many forms and themes. *Macbeth* deals with the tragedy of ambition, where he carries on a rule of terror killing and killing till he himself is killed. *Othello* deals with the tragedy of suspicion where Desdemona, an innocent faithful wife is made the scapegoat of the intrigues of the villain Iago. *Romeo and Juliet* is the tragedy of love where the young had to die to bring peace to the elders. *King Lear* deals with the tragedy of the innocent having to die while the guilty live.



The character that embodies the tragic element most in the play is Liuboff Andrievana. For although Liuboff is an attractive character of whom Chekov said nothing but death could subdue a woman like that, it is she who becomes the tragic heroine in the play. We notice at the very beginning a certain worldliness and vulgarity about her which ultimately proves her tragic flaw in driving her away from the cherry orchard, world of her youth. She feels the passing of time as we said earlier not in terms of age but terms of guilt, and guile. about her lover, about the death of her, in son, about all that Paris had meant to her. And if she fails to save the orchard it is because she knows, that is not where she really belongs. In her deepest self she regards the experience of losing the orchard as a form of penance—the loss of the emblem of that innocence whose reality has long since gone. Thus the cherry orchard with all its metaphysical connotations of innocence becomes the point of reference of Liuboff's life and happiness and the fact that she can never hope to return to it is the greatest tragedy of her life. That is what imparts the tragic character to the play even though the play cannot be classified as a tragedy like *Macbeth, Othello or Romeo and Juliet*.

Thus the conclusion we can arrive at from the above discussion is that *The Cherry Orchard* is neither a comedy nor a tragedy in the traditional sense but a play of delightful realism in which tragedy and comedy merge with each other.

In saying that *The Cherry Orchard* is a play of delightful realism we have only attempted to classify the play. We have found it to contain elements of both comedy and tragedy but in its totality it is neither. Therefore we have labelled it as *a play of delightful realism*. In doing that we have not said anything about the technique of the play. That still remains to be seen.

Chekov himself believed that "the highest aim of the playwright" is to show character revealing itself subtly rather than dramatically." Therefore in trying to determine the technique of the play our task is not only to find a suitable label to put on it but also to see how Chekov has brought out the internal reality of his characters; what techniques he has to do so and how successful he has been in doing so.

Chekov uses several means to bring out the internal scene of his characters. First and foremost he uses their speech to manifest their inner reality. Therefore we find the speech of characters is aimed not only at communicating what is in the mind of the speaker. So Chekov brings out the internality of the character to the audience through what the character says. For example when Liuboff speaks about her childhood we know not only her appreciation of her childhood innocence but much more. We also know her longing to return to that childhood innocence and her sense of guilt for weaning herself from that innocence and her sorrow for not being able to return to that innocence. So too when Lopakhin says that he needs the help of Liuboff to propose to Varya, we know not only his inability to do so but also his embarrassment caused by the haunting traumas of his low beginning.

Secondly we find that this revelation of the internal scene of the characters Chekov is able to do, not only by skillful creation of the speech of his characters - the words - but also through the mood and sudden halts and broken sentences. There are inconsequential and incoherent remarks all of which reveal their souls to us more than their minds think. Take for example the following speech of Liuboff: "Is it really I who am sitting here ? (laughs)' Isn't that laugh really out of place with her question, inconsequen



-tial to the question? Then she says: "I feel like jumping about and waving my arms. (Covers her face with her hands) "But suppose I'm dreaming! God knows I love my own country, I love it dearly; I couldn't look out of the railway carriage, I cried so much (Through her tears) Still, I must have my coffee. Thank you, Firce. Thank you, dear old man, I'm so glad you're still with us." We see Liuboff flitting from one thought to another like a grasshopper. Through this kind of speech and behaviour, we not only understand what Liuboff thinks but also see the restless hysterical nature of her soul itself.

In this kind of language in fact there is more poetry than prose because this is the kind of emotion packed language which reveals not only the surface truth but also the deeper truth suggested by it. This is why Stanislavsky himself claimed the play to be a poetic elegy singing a nostalgic regret for a passing away of an era not so much in terms of a passing away of time but more in terms of a passing away of a state of mind, a lost innocence and peace.

Chekov realizes the manifestation of the inner reality of his characters not only their speech, mood and tone thereof, but also through their actions. For example Liuboff's addiction to pills and her incessant coffee drinking are not mere habits. They indirectly suggest her disturbed and guilty feeling about her worldliness; her lack of peace of mind. So too at the beginning of Act 4 when Lopakhin stands in the middle of the deserted house, we perceive not only the fact that the former owners of the house are preparing to go but also the emptiness of the soul of the new owner of the cherry orchard. He for all his newly acquired wealth is an isolated, lonely man empty in his soul of the love of those whom he has hurt by what he had done. He waves his hands in a little nervousness and his offer of champagne to the party friends is

only an apology to a lost friendship and affection.

By this method of revealing the inner landscape of his characters to us through the indirect method of inference from their speech, mood and tone of their speech and their actions, Chekov cleverly achieves several purposes. One is to arouse our sympathy towards the characters without their knowledge. Not only that the characters do not know that we sympathize with them for their tragic plight but they do not know also their own plight. It is revealed only to us and the characters themselves remain ignorant of it because on the conscious level their words and actions mean to communicate something else and their plight, true state of their souls lie at a deeper level which only the audience can infer from what they say and do. It is in fact this power of the play to arouse our sympathy towards the characters that imparts the tragic element to the play.

While we sympathize with the characters for their tragic plight of suffering internally, we cannot also help laughing at their ridiculous behaviour. In other words Chekov makes us laugh by their word and action. For example, when we see Liuboff incessantly taking pills, drinking coffee and childishly moving about kissing cupboards, table and everyone around, we not only understand the pathetic state of her mind and sympathise with her, we are also provoked to laughter. When we hear Trofimoff telling Lopakhin, "Don't wave your hands about, get rid of that habit..." we not only associate that habit with the restlessness of his character, we also laugh at this idiosyncrasy. Thus Chekov cleverly introduces the comic element to the play through the words and actions of his characters just as he did the tragic element.



Talking about Chekov's technique in the play, there is another unmistakable technique Chekov has used in the play. That is the *Pastoral Mode*. The Pastoral Mode was developed chiefly by Greek and Latin poets like Theocritus and Virgil. The pastoral elegy can be defined as a formal and sustained poem lamenting the death of a particular person presented as a shepherd in a pastoral setting. This may not directly apply to *The Cherry Orchard*.

The pastoral mode of course has taken many forms over the centuries. Wordsworth's 'nature' poetry for example may not seem pastoral in the classical sense at all. but in a certain sense. Wordsworth's poetry is pastoral. For example Wordsworth lived and wrote poetry during a period of rapid social change. This was the time when Industrial Revolution with all its attendant consequences was taking place. as a result this was a period of social and psychological instability, artists often try to project images of rural contentment to their audiences. Wordsworth's 'nature' poetry is a typical example of an attempt by an artist to project images of rural contentment. This in fact is a service that artists can do to the public during a time of change. During a time of change ideals and values are in a fluid state. the public need ideas and values for their life. Images of rural contentment projected by artists supply these ideals and values. In that sense Wordsworth's poetry is pastoral. It projects images of rural contentment providing ideals and values to its readers.

When we examine *The Cherry Orchard*, we find *The Cherry Orchard* too is pastoral in that sense. In its simplest sense we can say *The Cherry Orchard* provides a contrast between an ideal rustic goodness and the sophisticated vanities of a rapidly changing world. Liuboff has lost the ideal of rustic goodness symbolized by the orchard and its place has been taken over by the so

-sophisticated vanities symbolized by Paris.

The forms of art that emerge at times of rapid change may not always be as simple as the contrast we have drawn between the rural goodness symbolized by the orchard and the sophisticated vanities symbolized by Paris. But the popular tendency is to equate the loss of an older way of life with the loss of cultural innocence. It is this tendency that provides the artist with a stock of powerful images to work on. See for example in *The Cherry Orchard* the imagery is not limited to the orchard. Along with the image of the orchard, Chekov includes also the flute, the shepherd's musical instrument and the wayside shrine. In effect what is happening is just as one of the most momentous social transitions in Russia was taking place Chekov renovated stylized elements of an old pastoral mode for his own purpose; to artistically define the yearning in the hearts of his audience for a lost innocence.

Thus the pastoral mode in the play is used not so much to lament the death of a particular person as was done in classical literature but to lament the loss - the death of a way of life to which though Chekov's spectator's would perhaps like to return, but they could not. The pastoral mode thus was used by Chekov for a distinctively new purpose and that too quite successfully.

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## CONTEMPORARY RELEVANCE OF THE CHERRY ORCHARD

When we speak of the contemporary relevance of *The Cherry Orchard* we have to look at it from three distinct points of view: a) Its relevance to the world today, b) Its relevance to Russia today and c) Its relevance to Sri Lanka today.

### The relevance of *The Cherry Orchard* to the world today:

As we have seen, *The Cherry Orchard* essentially deals with the question of social change and its impact on the lives of people. Social change exerts a destabilizing influence on the individuals caught in transition. Russia was changing from feudalism to capitalism which meant one set of ideals and values was being replaced by another set of ideals and values.

Feudalism upholds the ideals of community. One must be prepared to sacrifice not only one's freedom for the sake of one's community but even one's life if necessary. In fact the ideal of human rights and individual freedom were born after the French Revolution, which meant the end of feudalism. In the place of those feudal ideals and values, with the birth of capitalism new capitalist ideals and values were born. Individual became supreme. Private property and profit replaced the ideal of community. Free market forces began to erode human concerns and social welfare.

After 1917 Russian Revolution for a few decades till 1989, there was an attempt to control the spread of capitalism by socialist forces in the world. After the collapse of Russian Union in 1989 and afterwards hope of world socialism have grown dim.

Today western capitalism is sweeping through the world.

It is in that context that *The Cherry Orchard* has its relevance to the world today. As in no other era the world is changing today at an unprecedented speed and scale. We are talking about the globe village. a monoculture is struggling to be born. In fact the problem is not because the monoculture is being born but because its chief promoters, the western capitalists are trying to impose it by subtle means on the world.

When Chekov wrote *The Cherry Orchard*, it was at least inevitable that feudalism had to go or had even begun to go. It was decadent. So in its place capitalism was born. The birth of the new order was natural.

In today's context it is the birth of a new culture right round the world induced by interested parties, the western nations. through subtle means of sophisticated communication techniques people right round the world are being induced to give up their traditional ideals and values and embrace an alien system of ideals and values because that alien system is depicted as being superior to their own traditional ideals and values. Naturally in this process of giving up and taking in --the process of transition - people's lives are destabilized. As a result we can see people becoming agitated and restless like the characters in *The Cherry Orchard*. So in a sense *The Cherry Orchard* has its globe relevance.

### The Relevance of The Cherry Orchard to Russia :

The Cherry Orchard was written in 1902 before the Russian Revolution. The Marxist Socialist Revolution led by



## THE SYMBOLISM OF THE TITLE

### The Cherry Orchard

In the Autumn of 1903, Anton Chekov arrived in Moscow. He was already a very sick man. He was suffering from tuberculosis. That did not prevent him from attending nearly all the rehearsals of his new and the last play for which, however, he just had not been able to decide on a title.

One evening in conversation with Konstantin Stanislavsky, Chekov said: "Listen, I've thought of a marvellous title for the play. Simply marvellous..." he announced, gazing at Stanislavsky intently. "What?" said Stanislavsky excitedly.

"Vishnevi sad" which in Russian means 'The cherry orchard.' When it is pronounced with the stress on the first syllable, it means an orchard where cherries are grown for commercial purposes. The poetic form has the stress on the second syllable.

Later on he suggested the name as "Visnyovi sad," which means an orchard which does not make a profit. It retains its blossoming whiteness but for all practical purposes it is useless. It looks a pity to destroy it but a necessity to do so for the sake of country's economy.

When therefore Chekov used the name *The Cherry Orchard* for the play he means a cherry orchard which is no longer economically useful. It is a cherry orchard which had lost its practical use and profitability. This is why we also said that for Liuboff and her brother the cherry orchard had only a sentimental show-piece value.

When Trofimoff says: "The whole of Russia is our cherry orchard," he extends the meaning of the cherry orchard to the whole of Russia. As the cherry orchard itself had become unproductive and unprofitable Russia had become unproductive and unprofitable under feudalism.

In this sense feudal masters themselves are a part of the cherry orchard. They too had become unproductive and unprofitable. The orchard had to be cut down and in its place something more viable had to be erected.

That is the meaning of the cherry orchard in an economic sense. In the play its symbolism extends further. It also symbolizes the unsophisticated rustic life as opposed to the sophisticated city life of Paris. It is in that sense that the orchard becomes an eloquent symbol of Liuboff's own past, her childhood. The whiteness for example of the cherry orchard is a symbol of Liuboff's own innocence.

When Liuboff prizes the whiteness of the orchard, she only laments the loss of her own innocence symbolized by the orchard. In that sense the orchard is not only a symbol but also a reminder to Liuboff of her childhood innocence.

In the famous speech of Trofimoff in Act. II, the orchard also becomes a symbol of all the atrocities of the past. So when Trofimoff says. 'Think only Anya, your grandfather and all your ancestors were slave owners, the owners of living souls and from every cherry tree in the orchard, from every leaf, from every trunk there are human creatures looking at you. Cannot you hear their voices? Oh! it is awful,' the orchard becomes an eloquent symbol of all the atrocities of the past.

As the play ends we hear the axe falling on the cherry trees. Then we know the orchard is being cut down. The new owner had already announced his plans to use the orchard for villa sites. We therefore can imagine what will happen to the orchard. Thus the orchard becomes also a nexus between the past and the present. It was the symbol of an agricultural past with all its other connotations of leisurely and purer life which however could not sustain itself. It had run out of energy. Then the cherry orchard will be the site of middle class villas - a symbol of the new era of industrialization.



The new owner might even retain the name "The Cherry Orchard" for the housing estate manifesting a longing like that of Liuboff for a lost past because the name would recall a nostalgic past - the memory of an idyllic era.

Thus *The Cherry Orchard* in its final suggestivity stands for Russia in transition. It becomes a characteristically Lyrical symbol of a nation's transition from a purer, more orderly and leisurely way of life to a more chaotic and less human way of life. *The Cherry Orchard* is the symbol of both what changes and what remains, the variable and the constant.

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## CHARACTERS

### **Liuboff Andreievna Ranevskaya**

Liuboff Andreievna Ranevskaya is the main character in the play. We meet her first through a third party. That is Lopakhin. He is one of those who have gathered in Liubof's house to welcome her on her return from Paris. While waiting for her he speaks to Dunyasha the maid-servant about Liuboff.

Lopakhin speaks well of Liuboff. He tells Dunyasha that Liuboff is "a good sort - an easy, simple person." Then Lopakhin goes on to say how when he was about fifteen years old, his father had hit him with his fist and that his nose had bled. It was Liuboff Andreievna who nursed the young serf boy and consoled him with the words: "Don't cry my small peasant, all wounds heal at last."

Thus the initial picture of Liuboff we get from this third party account of her is one of a lovable and gentle young woman. She is presented as kind and sensitive. Corroborating this good opinion about Liuboff, Lopakhin later tells her: "You more than anybody else did so much for me once upon a time that I love you as if you were one of my own family... and even more."

In fact this is not the testimony of someone who had a claim to Liuboff's love and kindness. Liuboff was the mistress of the household where Lopakhin's grandfather, father and himself were serfs - 'slaves'. Therefore Lopakhin to be able to recall the love and kindness of his mistress with such sentiments of gratitude, her goodness had to be really extra-ordinary - really outgoing.

Thus the initial picture Chekov creates of Liuboff though this third account of Lopakhin is quite a positive one. In other words, we meet Liuboff for the first time though indirectly as a good person. We like and love her for her goodness.



That is when we meet her through another's report. When we meet her personally on the stage we begin to see a different person. The first thing we notice when she appears on the stage is her unusual behaviour. She is joyful and sad at the same time. She laughs and cries. There is a note of vulgarity in her moving about, kissing everyone around and even things like tables and cupboards. In fact there is a note of artifice and affectedness in her behaviour when she waves her hands, jumps about, professes her love for her country and then asks for her coffee. She keeps up swallowing pills and shows that she needs them to keep her nerves cool. Thus Liuboff projects a different character from what Lopakhin has told us.

A little while later when Liuboff opposes the plan of Lopakhin to save the orchard because as she says that the orchard is the most beautiful thing in the province and it should not be cut down for villa sites, she also shows how shallow and sentimental she has grown. She fails to understand the gravity of her own problem and she has no moral and intellectual resources to face the problem. She is lost.

Then a little further in the play when Liuboff talks about 'Oh, my childhood days of my innocence,' etc. she shows that she has a serious inner problem. She is a woman for whom the passing of time has been not merely in terms of age but in terms of guilt.

Liuboff suffers from a sense of guilt about many things. She feels guilty about squandering her money, about the death of her husband, about the death of her son by drowning, about her lover and all that Paris has meant to her. Thus at this stage of the play, she is shown essentially as a guilt-ridden woman.

Later on when she tells Trofimoff: "I seem to have lost my sight and see nothing," she is not talking about the loss of her physical sight but about the loss of her moral sight. In other words she is shown to be morally confused. She has become a woman who is lost between her youthful goodness and later decadence.

The bigger tragedy we see about Liuboff is however, not her being lost between her youthful goodness and later decadence, but her pitiful suffering. On the one hand she suffers from the humiliation of losing the orchard and that too to one of her own serfs - servants to Lopakhin. On the other hand she also suffers from her sense of guilt which has reduced her to a nervous wreck. So she complains: "Here it's noisy, my soul trembles at every sound. I shake all over" and then in the same breath she adds: "I'm afraid of the silence." This is not the complaint of an ordinary person. It is only a nervous wreck, a neurotic person who would complain like that.

So when we see the suffering of this once good woman, the pain into which she has been plunged, we cannot but pity her all the more because we knew her to be almost a model of virtue - once a happy woman now all in shambles.

### **Lopakhin**

Even before we meet Liuboff the main character, we meet Lopakhin. From his own talk with Dunyasha, the maid servant, we come to know that Lopakhin is the son of a serf. He has become newly rich. When we meet him first, he carries a book in his hand but he tells Dunyasha that he understands nothing of what he reads in the book. Therefore we also know that he is not educated. Furthermore we also come to know that Lopakhin is a son of a serf in Liuboff's estate and he has grown up in and around the house of Liuboff. As a boy he was loved by his mistress.

On Liuboff's return from Paris, he comes to see her not merely on a social visit but on business. He knows that Liuboff's estate, the cherry orchard, is scheduled to be sold at auction. He has a plan to save it. He comes to announce it to Liuboff and her brother Gaiëff.



In addition to the fact that he is rich but illiterate, we also come to know that Lopakhin is a resourceful man. He knows what to do to save the orchard from being sold out. His plan is to divide the land into small building sites and to lease them out for villa sites. With the rise of capitalism he knows there will be middle class people who will need such villa sites. In other words, we come to know Lopakhin to be also a man with a timely-perceptivity. He knows what to do and when to do what.

When Liuboff shows no interest in saving the orchard, Lopakhin buys it at the auction. Thus he becomes the new owner of the orchard.

When he announces that he has bought the orchard, he looks to be jubilant but we know from what he says that he is not very happy about it. He knows he has hurt his former masters by taking away from them what they loved. Therefore when he calls for louder and louder music, it is not so much to celebrate his joy but to drown his sorrow.

Lopakhin is also a restless man. His waving and wringing his hands is a sure sign of his nervousness. There is a sense of inadequacy haunting him. He feels embarrassed to propose to Varya, the adopted daughter of Liuboff. Lopakhin is also miserly because he buys only one bottle of champagne for the farewell party and tells Yasha that a bottle was 8 rubles. That is being rather mean. Lopakhin thus is a man who was poor when he was young, but has become rich by hard work and resourcefulness. But there is a sense of inadequacy in him and he tends to be mean and miserly with his money.

### **Gaieff**

Gaieff is the brother of Liuboff. He shares the ownership of the orchard with his sister.

He continuously talks about billiard; moves his arms and body about as if he were playing billiards. In fact that is what we see him doing when he enters the stage for the first time. Billiards is a gentlemen's game - a game played by the aristocrats during feudal times. It is a leisurely game played by middle-aged aristocrats to while away their time. It does not demand much exercise or energy nor does it demand much imagination. So when Chekov brings Gaiëff to the stage with his arms and body moving as if he were playing billiards that says much about the man. He is an aristocrat who has got not much brains and has got used to a leisurely life. In fact he is the opposite of Lopakhin. Whereas Lopakhin is the man who is always in a hurry, who has no time to rest, Gaiëff is a man who has no sense of urgency. He cannot comprehend the seriousness and urgency of the orchard to be sold at auction. Where as Lopakhin is a man with practical brains who has a plan to save the orchard, Gaiëff thinks he will be able to redeem the orchard from its mortgage by borrowing money from his rich aunt, which never happens. He also shows his shallowness and lack of touch with reality when he says that the orchard must not be cut down because it is mentioned in the Encyclopaedia.

This lack of touch with reality also makes him not accept Lopakhin for what he is. Lopakhin is prepared to raise a loan of 50,000 rubles to save the orchard. Gaiëff's reaction to it is to call him a snob. His feudal origin blinds him to the present situation and makes him refuse to accept Lopakhin for what he is capable of.

Gaiëff's feudal origin has made him not only an easy-going man. It has also made him dependent and parasitic. He thinks it would be a nice thing to inherit a fortune from somebody or in default of that at least to marry Anya to a rich man on whose wealth he too can feed. In other words Gaiëff wants not to work hard like Lopakhin and earn his wealth but wants to enjoy unearned wealth.



Speaking about Liuboff we said that her behaviour was full of artifice and affectedness. Gaieff, her brother is no exception either. At one moment he rails against Liuboff for marrying a lawyer and not an aristocrat. Next moment when Anya appears on the stage he kisses her face and hands and calls her an angel and when she warns him against talking too much, he again kisses the hands of both Anya and Varya and promises them that he would keep quiet.

His lack of direction and determination comes out best when he proposes three different ways to save the orchard. He thinks of borrowing money from Lopakhin from the bank and from his aunt. At the end he gets from none.

Lopakhin is so frustrated with this kind of vague character that at one stage he calls Gaieff 'old woman'.

Finally like Liuboff, Gaieff too is a man in despair. The orchard is sold. He has to leave the house with his sister and others. He falls into the arms of his sister as she too does the same into his hands. His grief is so much that he can only say "my sister, my sister."

This is the final picture of the man we are left with as the curtain falls. It is one of sadness and despair. We pity him for his plight. It is no fault of his. As if fate had so decreed that this descendent of the feudal class like his sister ends up a broken man.

### **Trofimoff and Firce**

In dealing with the theme of pseudo intellectualism and the nature of the old feudal order we have dealt with the characters of Trofimoff and Firce respectively. The readers of this study are kindly advised to refer to these sections for an understanding of these characters. (p.7)

## SOME POSSIBLE QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

### *Question:*

1. **How effectively does Chekov depict the struggle between the old order and the new in *The Cherry Orchard*.**

In 1861, the ruling Tzar of Russia, Alexander II abolished feudalism officially by an edict. Even by then feudalism in Russia was in decadence. Therefore when a group of Moscow nobility came to tell the Tzar not to abolish feudalism, the Tzar said that if he did not do so from above, feudalism in Russia would begin to undo itself from below with a violent revolution as it had happened in France. Thus in 1861, Russia was placed on the path to capitalism. By the turn of the century, about 40 years later, Chekov had seen how the changes introduced had affected the lives of his countrymen both socially and personally. So he wrote the play. *The Cherry Orchard* to dramatize Russia in transition.

The cherry orchard is the major symbol in the play. At a point in the play, Trofimoff, one of the characters says that the whole Russia is the cherry orchard. So we know that the orchard stands for Russia. The social changes that take place in Russia are shown mainly through the change of ownership of the orchard. The former owner of the orchard, Madam Liuboff Ranevskaya, through a life of extravagance and negligence of the orchard loses it. A more enterprising and hard working son of a former serf in the orchard succeeds in buying the orchard when it is sold at auction to pay the debts of Liuboff. In the new order of things money becomes the factor that bestows power, position and prestige whereas in the feudal order it was birth that determined those matters.

One thing we notice in the play is that there is no violence. Not a single gunshot is heard. Chekov himself had said that there was no violence in his play because violence played such a small part in the lives of people, as social changes were introduced from



above by the Tzar unlike in France, there was no violent struggle in Russia.

In the play the struggle between the old and the new order in fact takes place more on a personal level than on a social level. In fact Chekov himself said that "the highest aim of the playwright is to show the character revealing itself subtly rather than dramatically." So in the play *The Cherry Orchard* there is a concentration on the internal scene rather than on the external scene.

Chekov shows the internal struggle best through the play's main character Liuboff Ranevskaya. There is a very significant scene in Act III when Pischik invites Liuboff to dance a waltz and they dance. As they dance Yasha, a servant in the household of Liuboff sings: "Oh! will you understand my soul's restlessness?" We associate this restlessness as much with Liuboff as with Yasha. It is an invitation to the audience to understand the restlessness of Liuboff's soul. In fact long before we hear Yasha inviting us to behold the play how restless she is. Her incessant coffee-drinking, pill-taking and flitting around kissing cupboards and calling the table "my little table," all show how restless she is. This is restlessness resulting from being caught in transition.

In fact we notice that restlessness is not limited to her. Lopakhin the new owner of the orchard is restless as well. He keeps on waving his hands. At the final parting, Trofimoff tells him to get rid of that habit of waving his hand. Lopakhin's humble beginning makes him an embarrassed man and he is restless. Even otherwise he is a man who has no time to rest. He is always busy.

Even the minor characters in the play are shown to be restless. Dunyasha the maid becomes snappish at Yepikhoff and shows how people become irritable and intolerant of one another when they are the victims of inner restlessness resulting from social change. This situation of mutual intolerance is shown in much clearer

light when Varya orders Yepikhodoff and wields a big stick against him.

Thus Chekov succeeds in depicting the inner struggle of his characters expressing itself as restlessness. They are like travelers midstream buffeted and shaken by the waves of change.

**Question:**

- 2. How do characters like Madam Ranevskaya, Lopakhin, Trofimoff and Varya come close to real life people? Are they "rounded" personalities? (Teachers Guide issued by NIE)**

Chekov along with Ibsen is a realistic playwright. Ibsen is said to be the father of realism in modern theatre and literature too. Ibsen believed that it is the task of the playwright not to bring on to the stage heroic models for the esteem and imitation of his audience but to show real people with all their contradictions, caught up in different and difficult situations of life.

Chekov himself was as said before, a realistic playwright but he believed that "the highest aim of the playwright is to show character revealing itself subtly and not dramatically." Thus we see how Chekov focuses on the inner reality of his characters. In other words he organizes the words and actions of his characters in such a way that we as the audience hear and see not only what characters say and do but also what they are - the inner state of their minds and hearts.

In *The Cherry Orchard*, the focus of interest is not character but theme: Transition from one social order to another or in other words the theme of *The Cherry Orchard* is social change. Chekov therefore creates his characters to reveal the effects of this social change on people. Characters therefore become the embodiment of these effects of social change. The characters thus are meant to be the personification of an otherwise essentially social reality.



The characters therefore are real. They are the personal realization of a social reality. Hence is the realistic nature of the characters.

Chekov was able to achieve this realistic characterization because he created most of his characters as people he knew as real life. Madam Ranevskaya, her brother Gaieff, Firce, Trofimoff are all based on real people Chekov knew. This realism of Chekov's characters also proves itself when we feel that we too come across characters like the ones in the play, in our contact with people in real life.

Chekov's characters seem to stop their similarity with real people there, though. People in real life are not static. They change. Chekov's characters do not. In other words there is character revelation in the play but not character transformation whereas in real life there is character transformation. People become better or worse. They do not remain the same always. They change.

We do not fault Chekov for that lack of character transformation in the play. His focus was not character. He did not intend to show his audience how characters become better or worse caught in social change but how they suffer.

Therefore the conclusion we can arrive at in answer to the question is that whereas Chekov's characters are realistic they are close to real people in so far as they come close to real people. They are not "rounded" personalities in the sense that they are not presented as characters capable of change. They remain static. Such static characters are called flat characters whereas well rounded characters are three dimensional and dynamic.

**Question:**

3. **It was precisely the blend of comedy and pathos in the play that gave it its originality and freshness. Discuss.**

Controversy has raged from the very first staging of Chekov's *The Cherry Orchard* as to the kind of play it is. Chekov himself thought it was a comedy. Konstantine Stanislavsky, the Director of the Moscow Art Theatre where it was first staged disagreed with Chekov and thought the play was a tragedy. The controversy continues even today.

What we as audience see is that the elements of both comedy and tragedy are present in the play. That may be why the controversy continues still. The tragic element present in the play however is different from the same for example in the 16th century Elizabethan drama. Shakespeare's *Macbeth* was a tragedy of ambition. He kills, kills and kills till he himself is killed. *Othello* was a tragedy of suspicion where Desdemona, an innocent faithful wife is made the scapegoat of the intrigues of the villain Lago. *Romeo and Juliet* is a tragedy of young love where the young lovers had to die to end the hostility of their elders.

Chekov's *The Cherry Orchard* has no violence in it. No gun-shout is heard. No dagger-stroke is seen or death witnessed. Instead we see pathos in the lives of people caught in social change. Chekov shows how difficult it is for the owners of the cherry orchard to break away from the old feudal order; how painful for them to separate themselves from the place which had a sentimental value for them and finally how guilt-stricken the former owner Liuboff has become because of her loss of childhood innocence.

There are other characters too who suffer in similar manner. For example there is Gaieff, Liuboff's brother. He has grown shallow unimaginative and unresourceful. He is attached to the orchard in a sentimental way but he has neither the will nor the resources to save it from being sold and cut down. We see him therefore at the end of the play falling on Liuboff and crying unable to say anything more than "my sister, my sister."



Firce is a retired butler. He is sort of, at the other end of the spectrum. He has attached himself so much to the feudal order, even when emancipation come he refused to be liberated from his semi-slavish serfdom. His fate too is tragic. At the end he is left in a locked house and forgotten by all. In fact Chekov had to invent a new word to sum-up his fate. Chekov called it 'nedotepa.' It meant half-baked or half-chopped. Some translators have translated it as 'bungler.'

At the opposite end of the spectrum is the champion of the new order, Lopakhin. Lopakhin externally is a success. But he too suffers from a sense of embarrassment and inadequacy because of his humble serf origin. More than that, he suffers from a sense of alienation because he has taken from his loved ones what they loved. That is the cherry orchard.

Thus the tragic element in the play is unmistakable. Even though no one dies in the play, though there is no violence, Chekov brings out the inner suffering of his characters so much that anyone seeing the play feels like going along with Konstantine Stanislavsky when he says that the play is a tragedy.

One cannot however ignore the comic element in the play either. Here again one notices that the comic element present in the play is different from the conventional type of comedy present in the plays like *Twelfth Night*. In the conventional comedy the play ends with a wedding or even two or three. In *The Cherry Orchard* though there are quite a few proposals for marriage, no wedding takes place.

The comic element present in the play thus is not the traditional type. Yet it is present unmistakably in others ways. Yepikodoff the clerk for example is presented as a comic character. His complaints about his creaking boots is comic. He irritates Lopakhin who is impatiently waiting for the arrival of Liuboff.

Chekov also achieves a comic effect in presenting Yepikodoff as an accident prone man. He himself complains that every day some misfortune happens to him. Later Dunyasha confirms this: "Every day something unpleasant happens to him." So they have nicknamed him "Twenty two misfortunes."

In another scene Varya wields a stick and it almost hits the wrong person, Lopakhin and Trofimoff's indignant exit in Act. III are all comic. The episode between Yasha and Varkya in the Act. I is also comic. When Yasha tries to kiss Varya, she drops the saucer screaming. In these scenes, the type of comedy present is farce. We see a subtler form of comedy in Liuboff and Gaieff's behaviour. When Liubof jumps about kissing cupboards, tables and bookcases, there is certainly comedy. We pity her restless character when she says: "I can't sit still, I simply can't. This is happiness to me. You may laugh at me. I know I'm silly - my darling bookcase."

Gaieff too speaks to the bookcase as if he is addressing an important assembly. "Dear and much respected bookcase! I greet your existence which for more than hundred years has preserved the noble ideals of justice and virtue."

Thus we find the unmistakable blend of comedy and tragedy in the play. By blending the tragic element with the comic element Chekov not only achieves a sense of realism but also cushions the effects of pathos on the audience. The pathos arises from the two aspects of maternal loss of the orchard and the mental suffering generated by it. These aspects of pathos are juxtaposed with the comic element thereby balancing their effect on the audience.

We cannot therefore classify *The Cherry Orchard* as tragedy in the conventional sense but we can say it is a happy blend of both, which makes it a tragi-comedy.



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