



Stories without Answers: Moral Uncertainty in the Works of Tagore and Chekhov

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Abstract

Moral uncertainty is analyzed in the short stories of Rabindranath Tagore and Anton Chekhov. The novels by Tagore from colonial Indian and Chekhov from Tsarist Russia look very different, but they use nearly identical styles by not giving readers any clear advice on right and wrong. Both writers do not provide easy solutions and for this reason, ask readers to think deeply about life and join the creative process of understanding. This work examines ambiguous morality, reviews some tales by both authors and points out how not resolving moral questions builds our understanding of ethics and human life.

Keywords: moral uncertainty, ethical dilemma, ambiguity, open-ended narratives, rabindranath tagore, anton chekhov, reader interpretation, short stories

Introduction

Humans have used stories for a very long time to get to know the world, communicate their feelings and ask questions about what is right and wrong. In most traditional tales, characters are described mainly as heroes, villains or other clear types. But there are many literary works which complicate simplicity, revealing that life is actually complex and is filled with uncertainty. Use of this technique can be seen in the work of Rabindranath Tagore and Anton Chekhov.

Both Rabindranath Tagore of India and Anton Chekhov of Russia created their stories while there were major social and political events happening.

Even though they had different personal experiences, neither author made a clear judgment on the ethics of what happened. The novels don't always give a neat conclusion but rather leave space for readers to consider the decisions and actions people take. "Moral uncertainty" is the main theme explored in this paper and distinguishes their writing style, also showing that making ethical choices can be complex.

The Concept of Moral Uncertainty

What Is Moral Uncertainty?

Moral uncertainty happens when people find it difficult to tell what is wrong from what is right. Because there is no set moral guidance in literature, readers do not always know if the characters are



right or wrong. Traditionally, many stories end with a strong lesson—the hero always defeats the bad guy or vice versa. Stories that deal with ethical uncertainty do not provide straightforward answers. As a result, it shows life as it actually is, so questions are not always easily answered and moral decisions can be difficult.

Why Do Tagore and Chekhov Use Moral Uncertainty?

Tagore and Chekhov thought that life cannot be fully explained by a few moral rules. They suggest that the way people deal with issues is rarely simple. This way, by not choosing a single moral view, these writers leave space for different interpretations. The stories stimulate readers to think long and hard about making right decisions and not just accept an ending moral lesson.

Often, their stories present characters who face decisions that can go wrong or work out well. They make it clear that real life isn't always simple and easy answers are not enough.

The Role of Uncertainty in Storytelling Engaging the Reader

A major effect of moral uncertainty in stories is that it gets the audience involved. Without a clear moral, the story prompts readers to add their own experiences, feelings and questions to their interpretation. As a result, reading becomes interactive and the reader and the text come together to interpret what is said.

Tagore and Chekhov tell stories using unclear moral rules to interact with the audience. Reading the stories makes the reader wonder: How would I react if I were in the character's shoes? Is there, in fact, a correct or incorrect answer to this? Therefore, uncertainty adds interest to the story and encourages readers to feel more empathy and understanding.

Reflecting Life's Complexities

It is seldom that people's lives can be split into parts that are only ever right or wrong. Actually, the choices people make depend on what society expects, their personal background and various unpredictable events. Such realities are shown clearly in the tales by Tagore and Chekhov. They show people who live in a world that isn't completely right or wrong, but includes both light and dark moments. It stands out in the way both writers show the influence of their

culture. In Tagore's India and Chekhov's Russia, the position of society and society's rules often obstruct people from making good moral decisions.

Because they share these various complexities, the authors let us know uncertainty is a normal part of being human. The fact that their stories are often murky reflects the unclear nature of events in real life and it isn't a mistake.

Detailed Analyses of Selected Stories

To understand how Tagore and Chekhov use moral uncertainty, it is helpful to examine specific stories from each author. The following case studies highlight the narrative techniques and thematic choices that reinforce uncertainty in their works.

Case Study 1: Tagore's "Punishment"

Summary of the Story

Tagore tells, in "Punishment", the story of how two rural Bengali families face the tragic consequences of a fight. In the story, a woman wrapped up in the expectations of society faces a shocking charge and the outcome does not fit with easy answers and moral values. No, the emphasis is shifted to the strain and sadness the characters endure without much response.

Themes and Moral Ambiguity

It points out that anti-caste, anti-patriarchal and anti-gender norms activism are important for fighting against the influence of such systems. It is not clear from the story who the villain or the hero is, because the problem is addressed without setting up a clear winner or loser. Rather, each character is harmed by the unfairness of the society. Because the accused woman is silent and the brothers accept the unfairness, readers see the unfairness but are not shown a way out.

Not having a final resolution in the play makes it uncertain: Can a good person overcome their traditional fears and values? Can the characters take actions within the set structure of society? The questions indicate that, because of old traditions and social barriers, it is rare for actions to be clearly right or wrong—people often make such choices on their own.



Impact on the Reader

“Punishment” concludes by making readers feeling uneasy and without answers about the responsibilities and consequences of justice. Viewers do not get a clear sense of justice after the story, but are given the often confusing uncertainty active in everyday moral decisions.

Case Study 2: Chekhov’s “Ward No. 6”

Summary of the Story

“Ward No. 6” is a familiar story by Chekhov which takes place in an asylum in provincial Russia. Dr. Ragin is the main character in the story and as he grows more and more distant, he starts to doubt his sanity when his reflections are challenged by a very perceptive inmate. Usha and Baby live in an impersonal and chilling environment and this setting shows readers the disorder going on inside them.

Themes and Moral Ambiguity

In his novella “Ward No. 6,” Chekhov brings attention to how mental health issues really are, how people can unintentionally be assigned to unfair social roles and the difficulty of finding purpose in our industrialized society. Dr. Ragin’s character evolves in ways that run against how a healer is generally expected to behave. Going from being in charge to exploring himself deeply does not fix what is wrong with his moral position. Rather, it underlines the uncertainty of truth and being sane.

The conversation between Dr. Ragin and the inmate leads both characters and the readers to reconsider the usual way things are done. Is the craziest part the mind of the prisoner or the society that assumptions what is considered normal? Because the story leaves open questions, the moral issues are even more puzzling.

Impact on the Reader

In “Ward No. 6,” at the very end, it becomes clear that some doubts about whether Dave is truly insane will never be resolved. Rather than giving a lesson, Chekhov allows doubts to linger, so readers focus on questions about power, responsibility and the struggle to understand themselves.

The Influence of Cultural Contexts

Tagore’s Indian Background

Much of Tagore’s writing reflects the cultural and social conditions of colonial India. His stories

contain remnants of traditional norms, strong respect for customs and effects of colonial rule. The story “Punishment” offers a hint that Tagore is against the social rules that hold people back. His characters are often stuck by norms that existed before people understood individualism or democratic justice.

Because of this cultural backdrop, his stories are filled with moral doubts. When people doubt the rules of society, usual categories for morality become hard to define. Tagore makes this ambiguous story to highlight how an old and often harmful system should question, not accept, the things around us.

Chekhov’s Russian Reality

Unlike Dostoevsky, Chekhov’s stories often show the tense and uncertain time of late Tsarist Russia. All the bureaucracy, dullness of small-town life and changes came with modernity are visible in his stories. The setting in “Ward No. 6” shapes the themes and feelings throughout the story.

Chekhov’s uncertainty about what is sanity and what is madness could show that Russian society was go through troubles in that era. Uncertainty in society caused by major events was matched by a lack of clear moral guidance. The setting and culture in Chekhov’s tales enhance the moral ambiguity, showing that different circumstances mean ethics have to be reconsidered.

Literary Techniques that Enhance Moral Uncertainty

Ambiguous Characterization

Both authors often have characters whose traits are unclear and could be seen in different ways. Tagore and Chekhov write about people who have both positive and negative traits which makes them much more complex. This shows how hard it is to decide right from wrong in life when neither choice is completely clear.

For example, the characters in “Punishment” are sketched out so broadly that they reflect their society and inner battles and viewers can decide for themselves what leads them to act the way they do. Just as with other hero figures, Dr. Ragin is described as both kind and cold hearted and though admirable, he is also deeply imperfect. As a consequence of the character not fitting into any simple category, readers are pushed to see more of the complicated moral struggles taking place.



Open-Ended Plot Structures

Both inter-twining do not provide a perfect conclusion for every part of the plot. Choices you make in these stories often make things more unclear than clear.

Letting game results be unpredictable is a way to imitate how life often surprises us. Because of the lacking final answers, these stories reflect that people often encounter moral problems that have no clear solution.

“Ward No. 6” ends without making clear what happens to Dr. Ragin or defining true sanity which gives readers something to think about. The ending of “Punishment” leaves readers puzzled, making them keep questioning the influences behind social norms.

Symbolism and Metaphor

Tagore and Chekhov depend on symbolism and metaphor to highlight the themes of being unsure. Nature in Tagore’s stories often shows the inner emotions of the characters or how heavy social traditions are upon them. By using them, authors lead readers to look past events themselves and pay attention to the morals behind them.

He, too, uses the surrounding of the asylum which is full of limitations, to illustrate how the main character feels restricted by both herself and society. Such literary tools help show the reader that the choices we take in life can be as confusing and tied up as the symbols stand for.

The Reader as a Co-Creator of Meaning

Active Engagement and Interpretation

Because both Tagore and Chekhov do not give readers a clear set of rules in their tales, understanding the message depends on the reader. Because a narrative may be read in different ways, readers use their personal beliefs, values and experiences. In this way, text and reader join together in creating the meaning of a work.

Because of this interaction, two readers may understand the same story in opposite ways. A viewer could learn something valuable from the mute protest of a character, while another may have a stronger emotional reaction because of the injustice shown. Having many possible interpretations is good and bad—it suggests readers must be open and respectful of alternate viewpoints. As a result, this

hands-on method increases how literature affects its audience.

The Question of Authority in Morality

By not giving clear answers to moral questions, the authors challenge authority figures in ethics from every angle, including those found in religion, society and even the writer. They claim that learning about ethics involves introspection, as it cannot be simply told to someone from above.

But it also ensures that moral decision-making is approachable for everyone. Instead of being told the difference between right and wrong, the reader has to figure it out through personal examination and with the help of the text.

Broader Implications of Moral Uncertainty

Reflecting Societal Changes

The presence of moral uncertainty in literature demonstrates changes happening in society about ethics and human actions. Since traditions are being talked about more freely, pieces of literature that display those discussions can strongly move people. The fact that Tagore’s and Chekhov’s stories are unclear reflects the difficulty people in that time had in understanding their shifting world.

Ethical Relativism in a Globalized World

With globalization, different societies often have very different moral beliefs. Tagore and Chekhov use moral uncertainty in their stories to show that what is moral depends on the situation. Since people now encounter many different cultures and ideas, the point is made that there is usually no hard and fast rule for morality. What might look fair in one place could be wrong in some other place, so talking about what is right or wrong is not easy.

Educational and Philosophical Value

Literature that deals with uncertain morality can promote thinking critically and encouraging students to be open to others. When the writer leaves some ethical issues open-ended, readers are prompted to discuss those issues and think about them. Debates in classrooms about justice, powers held by officials and difficult human reasons can be sparked by these texts. Such pedagogical value highlights the use of literature in thinking more deeply and improving personally.



Conclusion

Ambiguity in storytelling can be seen clearly in the works of Rabindranath Tagore and Anton Chekhov. Both authors choose not to give easy moral solutions which better shows, how realistic life can be. The people in these books move through situations where good and bad are hard to separate, social patterns guide many actions and every action affects the outcome. Since they never offer simple answers to moral questions, Tagore and Chekhov help readers think more deeply about their lives. They ask us to accept that, like their lives, life does not always offer solutions that tie up nicely. Rather, it gives us a variety of issues—a chance for all of us to look within and decide how to act ethically. Because of this moral uncertainty, our view of both literature and current affairs is greatly affected. Since the world is getting more connected and our values are getting more complex, the lessons in these tales are still needed. They show us that instead of expecting final answers, we can learn from asking questions

and exploring understanding which is what it means to be human.

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