

Indian English Short Story

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The question of defining short story is really difficult. One may hasten to state that the best course is to recognize it by its brevity, economy, and short length. On a second thought, however, one pays a more serious attention to the genre and acknowledges, like a recent definer of literary terms, that:

A relatively short narrative which is designed to produce a single dominant effect and which contains the elements of drama, a short story concentrates on a single character in a single situation at a single moment. Even if these conditions are not met, a short story still exhibits unity as its guiding principle... Dramatic conflict-the collision of opposing forces -is at the heart of the story.

This is unmistakably a comprehensive definition for the short story, and is fairly acceptable but for a slight modification which is that it concentrates on a single character or on a group of characters. The traditional notions associated with the short story are: continuity and design, though it has to expand its scope and texture in our own day to accommodate the truncation of ideas and the presentation of psychoanalysis, the obvious results of a tension ridden age enveloped in disillusionment and discontinuities. According to A. Walton Litz, the hall marks of a well-made story are: consistency of style, rationality of structure, and steadiness in view point.

As a concentrated form of narrative prose fiction, the short story has been theorized through the traditional elements of dramatic structure: exposition (this introduces the conflict), rising action, crisis (the decisive moment for the protagonist and his commitment to a course of action), climax (the point of highest interest in terms of the conflict and the point with the most action), and resolution (the point when the conflict is resolved).

The short story has always been flexible. The writer is subject to a stricter technical discipline but also to a wider freedom. The writer is concerned with the present moment only. He does this without explanation of what went before and what will happen beyond a point. Thus, the short story becomes a moment exerted for a moment. It is an attempt to catch the eternal in the casual, invest a moment with the immensity of time.

The short story has fragmented and restless form. It also has its own socio-political implications. It is essentially a report on the outside world. It has been described as poetic in structure and narrative in intention. Unlike the novel, which emerges from relevant minutely worked out detail, the short story can be brought into existence through a mere suggestion of detail, the focus being kept on central idea or climax is what a second rate story lacks. And whenever a short story writer has succeeded even if in only a couple of his stories, he has come out with a good story invariably.

H.G. Wells correctly declares that the short story has to be read within twenty minutes.

Thus, a short story is a brief work of literature, usually written in narrative prose. At its most prototypical the short story features a small cast of named characters, and focuses on a self-contained incident with the intent of evoking a single effect on mood.

Shiv K. Kumar gives an account of the origin of Indian English short story in the following words:

Although the Indian short story in English is comparatively a recent phenomenon, its genesis may be traced back to the ancient fables of the sixth century A.D. Its origin lies in such ancient classics as the *Katha-Sarit-Sagara*, *Yogavashistha*, *Brihatkatha* or the *Panchtantra*. As stories, these fables and tales were tightly structured and ingeniously conceived, although their primary objective invariably was didactic- geared more to instruct than to entertain their readers.

In its initial stage, the short story was mainly the occasional diversion of a novelist. Hence, it was neither numerically nor literarily very significant. Indian English short story has not been able to achieve its distinct identity so far in spite of the flexibility of form and opportunities for publication. It has been treated casually by critics resulting in the overall neglect of the genre. It has developed as a byproduct of Indian English fiction.

This should not surprise us as long and short fictions are kindred branches of literature and are interrelated.

The short story has evolved in its present form after passing through various stages. In the nineteenth century, firmly developed plot design was given the top significance. However, today methods of poetry (figurative and rhythmic) and drama (direct presentation) have become central in it. That is why Ian Reid rightly observes: The tale-telling impulse is too irrepressibly fecund to be confined within any single narrative pattern.

Sisir Kuamr Das, commenting on the state of modern Indian English short story observes: the thematic range of Indian short story today is as extensive and varied as the geographical and social diversities of the country. It is in some sense the most complete world. Indo-Anglian writers have neglected the short story. This is surprising, considering that, the short story is the most flexible form considering that next to poetry, the short story is the most flexible form of writing, and thus eminently suited to portray the variety of Indian life.

The early Indian writers were facing several serious problems so far as his creative art in English was concerned. He was to adopt English language to his requirements. It was not possible for him to make experiments with the techniques. His main concern was to give a convincing picture of the then contemporary India to his readers. Indian short story writer took this form not because he was very much

interested in it, but because he found the form to be simplest. Further, he found it to be the most popular means of conveying the India and the life in India as it had been understood. Hence, he was not occupied with the individual and his personal predicaments either. Thus the characters tend to be typed rather than individuals. The characters represent their class. It is a fact that the Indian short story writers from ancient Indian, classics; nevertheless one cannot deny that the western short story writers considerably influenced them. The influence of western writers becomes evident when we go through the short stories written in English. For instance Bankim Chandra Chatterjee is said to be a writer influenced by Sir Walter Scott. Our early writers were mainly inspired by a zeal for reform, trying to focus the attention of the educated class on social evils.

A cursory glance at the state of affairs in Indian English short story convinces the reader that it has traversed a long course of journey and has now reached a stage, through the salutary efforts of a few talented writers where it can make breakthrough by exploring certain new areas and techniques. Despite the natural hardship of language and expression- it is true that English is an acquired language and not our mother tongue as such- the short story has made some headway and has become truly Indian after shaking off the initial foreign influences. The short story writers have come to realize, and rightly so, that their own tradition of both tales and fables has been rich enough to feed and support them in moments of necessity, and that they have just to look around for their keen and lively subjects, to which they have tailored their modern techniques. So, while their sensibility and subject-matter are essentially autochthonous, their treatment of story is molded by such modern modes of expression as the stream-of-consciousness, the flashback and the flash forth, the first person narration, the point of view method and the epistolary method.

The short story came to India as a genre through its contact with the west, primarily through the western master piece available in English translation. Mulk Raj Anand comments on the significance of this genre in these words-

And when the history of Indian cultures comes to be written in the next century, it may appear that the inmost longings, thwarting, desire, urges of the many people of our country as expressed in the short stories are more authentic evidence of the life of our time than the slogans of politics and the very obvious outer events.

More than any other literary form, the short story is a ready and easily available barometer of human experience; that is reason enough for its popularity. The central idea has varied from time to time, and the periodical shift has reflected the social and political history on the one hand, and the story writer's coming to maturity on the other. The earliest stories, as is to be expected, were simple narratives, extended anecdotes and tales based on legends and history as, more often than not. A great deal of sentimentality and explicit didacticism are obvious in many of them. The entry of the common man played a very vital role in the development of the short story in India. The short story unlike the novel portrays the common man with his worldly

problems. It, thus, in certain ways, acted as a balance between the historical novels and the novels dealing with social problems by identifying a new zone of experience. (Das)

It was in the quarters of the 19th century, i.e., in 1898 that the first collection of short stories in English was published. Shoshee Chander Dutt in London published the earliest collection of short stories entitled *Realities of Indian Life stories collected from Criminal Reports of India* (1885). S.C. Dutta and Surendra Mohan Tagore published *The Time of Yore: Tales from Indian History*. The 19th century saw two more writers of anthologies- Kshetrapal Chakravaty who published *Sarla and Hingara: Tales Descriptive of Indian Life* (Kolkata, 1895).

Indian English short story began its history towards the close of the 19th century with the publication of Kamla Sathianandan's *Stories from Indian Christian Life* in 1898. Almost those who cultivated this form consciously in the early stages of development, K.S. Venkatramani contributed two collections of short stories under the title *Paper Boat* (1923) and *Jatadharam*, Nagarajan produced a single volume called *Cold Rice* (1945). The writers often seem to be ambivalent in their attitude to the tension resulting out of the conflict between traditionalism and modernity. There was no considerable output of short stories before the beginning of the 20th century.

The stories have but a historical importance, although credit could be given to them for the fact that their simple narratives actually underline the folk tale form - a form which has been so well exploited later by such noted writers as Raja Rao and Mulk Raj Anand. The advent of Gandhi on the social and political scene of India awakened our writers to a new reality as the Mahatma's personality and activities guided them. Contemporary events and the destiny of their immediate fellows caught the attention - a very significant development towards realism. The 30s and 40s saw the 'Great Leap Forward' in the short story form. That was the period when the great four, Anand, Isvaran, Narayan and Raja Rao appeared on the scene.

Historical events have continued to have their impact on the Indian short story. With independence, the reconstruction of India and the assertion of a national identity brought in some of the work of Indo-English writers. Mulk Raj Anand, R.K. Narayan, Isvaran and Raja Rao who present the first flowering (1935-45) of this genre, responded to the national movement, each in his own way. Each one of them being committed to the form in his own way, the short story in their hands acquired a form typically Indian and a conscious handling of technique and exploring the English language to express what was till then alien to it gave an identity to the short story and a representative status. With their stories, the reformist and the realistic narration acquired new dimensions.

Mulk Raj, the social activist, presented a true vision of Indian life. His stories have a lyrical quality about them quite often, while he also handles comedy and satire superbly. Anand provided a delineation of the lower strata of Indian society. He is

Dickensian in his ultra sensitivity to the existence of social evils in protean forms. In fact, it is the keen awareness of the human predicament that propelled him into creative writing. Therefore, the themes which Anand has chosen for his novels are based on such problems as casteism and human sufferings caused by a variety of factors - political, economic, social and cultural. Anand's collections of short stories are: *The Lost Child and Other Stories* (1934), *the Barber's Trade Union and Other Stories* (1944), *The Tractor and the Corn Goddess and Other Stories* (1947) and *Reflections on the Golden Bed and Other Stories* (1947).

R.K. Narayan with his perception of the average as positive, exploring the nature of life and reality. The cultivation of a landscape, and topography around the semi-functional Malgudi, as representative of a south-Indian small town, complete with railway station, main street, school, etc. is R.K. Narayan's special forte. The subdued irony and the gentle humor has endeared him to all readers- the academic as well as the casual. He comically reveals the life and yet does not allow the cynicism or mockery to enter the world of his creation. His new collection of stories includes *Old and New* (1981), *Malgudi Days* (1982), and *Under the Banyan Tree* (1985). Irony is the key note of many of his stories.

Manjeri Isvarana is an important short story writer as well as a critic or theorist on the form of the short story. He not only is the most productive of Indian English story writers, he is also the first major writer with an awareness of the artistic awareness of this form. He has expressed his views in this regard in the *By Way of Preface to a Madras Admiral* (1959). He states, A short story can be a fable, or a parable, real or fantasy, a true presentation or a parody, sentimental or satirical, serious in intent, or a light hearted diversion. Isvarana's probing of the middle class female mind is touching and gentle while his picture of the fisher folk are at once intimate, graphic, uninhibited and revealing.

Raja Rao is definitely of a different mental make-up in both his novels and short stories. He writes mostly on social and political scenes around him with natural ease and philosophical resignation. *The Cow of the Barricades* (1947), his first collection of short stories, breathes an unmistakable Indian character with regard to the choice and treatment of the theme. *In Khandesh* describes the villager's reaction to the viceroy's special train as it passes by their village. Raja Rao goes to the folk tales and the epic legends to evolve a form of his own with all the simplicity and credulity of a myth-maker. He often writes on such subjects as the popular myths, national upsurge and rural characters. He focused on 'spiritual India' both in his characters and landscape.

K.A. Abbas has also created a place for himself as a short story writer. Abbas seems to be impatient with the present day life of poverty, ignorance, inefficiency, hypocrisy, selfishness and unemployment. He is no less disturbed by the holocaust of partition of 1947. His two volumes *Blood and Stones and Other Stories* (1947), *Cages of Freedom and Other Stories* (1952) deal mainly with the problems people had to face in the wake of partition. *Rice and Other Stories* (1947) and *One Thousand Nights on a Bed of*

Stones and Other Stories (1957) highlight some of the glaring social evils which cause anxiety. Abbas's passionate commitment to the cause of the deprived and down trodden betrays itself in the slackness of artistic control making his stories sentimental and melodramatic. As he aims at visual effects he offers us a series of memorable images of events and experiences.

The twentieth century is a landmark in the development of the short story. These stories deal with the individuals' intense inner feelings that have gone into their very consciousness. Sometimes they hit the nail on the head, sometimes they shock and sometimes they make one laugh at oneself, but they invariably enrich one's mind by identifying the complex and intriguing forces - psychological and occult, at work in our lives. However, the modern short story is not a purely modern product. Swinder Singh Uppal rightly considers that it has its roots in the hoary past. It has evolved its modern form after passing through several stages and by getting the warmth of its innumerable lovers through so many centuries.

Since then the Indo-Anglian short story has seldom looked back. Most of the short stories of late 19th century and early 20th century are sorts of retelling of the folktales, legends and parables. They are simple in art as they tend to be anecdotal, sentimental and didactic. With the dawn of independence in 1947, the tone and temper of Indian literature changed. After independence there came a change in the vision and perception of the writers. They were facing new situations now. Making new India was the principal concern of the nation as a whole. Hence, dreams, promises and plans for a better India form the main concern of the creative writers.

The Indo-Anglian short story, in its fidelity to the existing social context, has portrayed the paradoxes of Indian society. Many short story writers, while portraying contemporary Indian society in a state of transition, have not been ignorant to the persisting elements in the Indian social context. The role of faith and religion in day-to-day life is one such aspect which has been captured by Indian short story writer.

The second flowering (1960-70) looked for answers to the question often raised in academic circles: Can the Indian sensibility be expressed in English?

In the post independence period the short story has emerged as the most popular literary form next only to the novel in Indian writing. The short story has been able to document as well as interpret the wide variety of experiences the Indian society has passed through in these decades. The modern Indian short story has helped us make sense of the content of our thoughts and speech in a changing world. It has provided us metaphors to map the mindscape of our society; there have been bold innovations in the form of the short story in this period.

The post independent period has seen the advent of a number of short story writers articulating their impressions on more current topics -Independence and its aftermath, East-West relationship, the alienated individual and the like. Prominent

among them have been Bhabani Bhattacharya, Khushwant Singh, Arun Joshi, Anita Desai and a few others. When individuals like Khushwant Singh, Kamla Das or Bharti Mukherjee publish either a complete collection of short stories or a selection; it is another indication of not only the popularity of the form but of the fact that these writers have arrived.

Khushwant Singh made his debut in this form with the publication of *The Mark of Vishnu and other Stories* in 1950. Khushwant Singh published three other collection: *The Voice of God and Other Stories*, *A Bride for the Sahib and other Stories* (1961), *Black Jasmine* (1971). Khushwant Singh comes down heavily on what is repugnant, repulsive and hypocritical in life. V. A. Sahane has rightly pointed out that, the predominant quality of Khushwant Singh as a short story writer is his comic spirit, informed by the sense of incongruity and by the bewildering phenomenon of contradictions in life. Khushwant's Singh's stories are sweet, sour and peppery, but they are always pleasing. While generally they lack the vast panoramic vision of the major writers, they are fully aware of what they are writing about; their authenticity assures them recognition. He too attacks on hypocrisy.

Ruth Prawar Jabwalla has published the following short story collections: *Like Birds, Like Fishes* (1963), *An Experience of India* (1966), *A Stronger Climate* (1968) and *How I Became a Holy Mother* (1976). She is a keen observer of Indian life and the social mannerism. She writes on the follies and foibles of the modern Indian life. Her detached involvement with the Indian situation and Bhabani Bhattacharya's professionalism and the easy readability of his stories supply some answers to that question. The 1970s more than fulfill the expectations of the 60s. The decade is marked by endless variety in the handling of themes and variations, coupled with varying modes and techniques of narration influenced by Russian and American short fiction.

Another famous writer of short stories is G.D. Khosla who combines the historian interests with his sharp perception to reveal the various facets of Indian Life. His characters are both types and individuals and portrayed with rare sensitiveness. People from all walks of life- from rickshaw pullers to businessman, from film heroines to the housewives all find place in his short stories. With his four collections: *The Price of a Wife* (1958), *The Horoscope Cannot Lie and Other Stories* (1961), *Grim Fairy Tales and Other Facts and Fancies* (1966) and *A Way of Loving and Other stories* (1973). G.D. Khosla has undoubtedly earned an abiding place for himself among the practitioners of the genre. The issues that interest him are social evils of untouchability, incompatible marriages and social disparities. His stories are often long and dull despite the dashes of humor.

Ruskin Bond and Manoj Das are among the prominent contemporary Indian short story writers in English. It is a coincidence that both of them were born in the same year-1934.

Ruskin Bond is the only story writer who has been honored by Central Sahitya Akademi with its annual award in 1992. Ruskin Bond has brought out a number of collections of short stories. *Neighbour's Wife* (1966), *My First Love and Other Stories* (1968), *The Man Eater of Manjeri* (1972) and *The Girl from Copenhagen* (1977). He has also written several books for children. Ruskin Bond projects a part of his personality into his stories to make them authentic and interesting.

The Indian English short story writer Manoj Das is usually thought of as a satirist. There are few stories of Das in which the organizing principle is the attempt to diminish a subject by ridicule and satire. Manoj Das has written four collections of short stories. *Song for Sunday and Other Stories* (1967), *Short Stories* (1969), *The Crocodile Lady* (1975) and *The Submerged Valley and Other Stories* (1986). Das is different from other writers. The dreamy quality and the ethereality of the atmosphere are the distinguishing qualities of Manoj Das.

Bhabhani Bhattacharya, Chaman Lai, Anita Desai and Arun Joshi, they have produced single volume each of short stories. Bhabhani Bhattacharya's *Steel Hawk and Other Stories* (1960) is satirical in tone and social in theme as some of his novels.

Though Anita Desai and Arun Joshi have not written much in this genre, as craft person their stories evince rare understanding of the mind and motif of their characters. They excel in laying bare some deep hidden human motives and emotions and in making some subtle psychological analyses of characters.

Anita Desai has written *Games at Twilight and Other Stories* (1978). She handles the subject like temperamental differences in the marital life, various psychological complexes and the social sensibilities. Anita Desai, for example writes about the psychological problems of the Indian middle class with insight and intensity. She published her second collection titled *Diamond Dust* in 2000. If she presents the picture of a crude and greedy woman in *Pineapple Cake* and in *Private Tuition* she depicts the plight of a poor teacher who is compelled by poverty to give private tuition to supplement his meager income.

Arun Joshi established himself as a novelist before he brought out *The Survivor* (1975). The universe of his short stories is peopled with representative characters drawn from different sections of Indian society. The first story in this volume is *The Gherao* which brings into sharp focus the clashing attitudes of two lovers of freedom. Another story *The Frontier Mail is Gone* depicts the secret dream of a lonely girl. The story *Home Coming* is told with great objectivity and center's on a soldier's evaluation of the two sets of social realities: the one at war front and the other in the city.

Shashi Deshpande is a major short story writer today. She has five volumes of short stories to her credit. *The Legacy and Other Stories* (1978), *It Was the Nightingale* (1986), *It was Dark* (1986), *The Miracle* (1986) and *The Intrusion and Other Stories*. She deals with the house wives and her problems like marital discord, separation and depression in love, boredom and lack of understanding in the marital life among others.

Nevertheless, her female protagonists are not feminists. They still seem to be giving importance to reconciliation, stoicism and self-denial as the guiding principles. The concerns of the writers shift from society and community to individuals.

Kamala Das is concerned with the condition of women and the way in which they are betrayed by society. So from the political, social and spiritual levels, the short story modulated into the personal, the private and the psychological. New sexual moves, fresh possibilities in human relations marriage, motherhood are explored. Her second collection of short stories titled *Padmavati and the Harolt and Other Stories* appeared in 1992, fifteen years after her first collection of stories, *A Doll for the Child Prostitute* (1977) was published. Kamala Das is a prime example of this, but women's writing has expanded the significance of the genre, widened its horizon and made the short story a potent vehicle for social and psychological change.

Some of our well known poets like Jayant Mahapatra Shiv K. Kumar and Keki N. Daruwalla published their collection of stories in the post modern period. Jayant Mahapatra's *The Green Gardener* contains eighteen stories. His stories are different from the conventional stories in the sense that they focus not so much on the thematic content as on the subtlety of form. Shiv K. Kumar has published two collections of stories in recent years. The titles are *Beyond Love and Other Stories* (1980), and *To Nun with Love* (2001). Kumar dives deep into human psyche and recreates characters in their own situation. Keki N. Daruwalla published his second collection of stories titled, *The Minister for Permanent Unrest and Other Stories* in 1996. The locale of his stories varies from state to state.

Keki Daruwalla, Anita Desai, Shashi Deshpande, Arun Joshi, Kamala Das and a host of others- participating in the ongoing process of openness in form, reliable and unreliable narration with multiple points of view, and shifting focalization. The period between 1980 and 2008 reflects in the words of Melwani, a "burgeoning creativity." As the decades moved on, other emphasis took over. Here one sees a shift from what Sudhakar Marathe in his paper calls 'country' fiction to the city and urban experience with its attendant problems and conflicts and its search for values.

Woman's contribution to the short story is invaluable. Both women writing and the short story form have developed simultaneously in the twentieth century, especially in its later half. Some of these women writers have also become famous all over the world. The medium of English language, which they chose, has a lion's share in their popularity. They have also excelled themselves in fiction-writing.

The women short story writers place their protagonists in the social milieu and portray them convincingly. The cultural pattern runs through the stories like a thread. Despite provincial differences, the representation of the modern Indian woman, with her typical social and psychological realities and problems, is authentic, recognizable and inclusive. The authors seem to agree that the travails of the Indian woman are not yet over and till the new awakening comes about fully, women have

to share in the commonality of experience of violence, denigration and exploitation and break their silence to voice their particular experience. The comparative study has the potential to stimulate thinking on issues relevant to the Indian society as a composite whole.

Authors like Kamala Markandaya, Shashi Deshpande and Anita Desai have chosen the problems and issues faced by the women in today's male dominated world as the main theme of their books. For instance, some of the novels of Anita Desai like *Voices in the City* and *Where Shall We Go This Summer*, she has portrayed the complexities between a man and woman relationship. She has tried to explore the psychological aspects of the lead protagonists. The women novelists try to create awareness that this is the time to proclaim with definite precision. In India, the women writers are doing very well and their contribution is immense.

Finally, modern short story in English is already standing at the crossroads, and it has to make cautious moves to pull itself through. Keeping in view the international standards, it has to strive consistently to arrive at a safe destination. For this, it has to overcome its deficiencies and evolve fresh measures of invigoration and energization. We have only to wait and watch for a better future of the short story, and not get bogged down in the morasses of *unhealthy speculations and pessimistic tendencies*, realizing the truth that 'The best is yet to come.'

To conclude, this article on Indian English short story, I should say that it has come up age, both in theme and in technique, Indian English short story has broken new grounds. The future of Indian English short story is bright. The panorama of *Indian English short story* spanning over a period of seven decades (i.e. from 1930 to the present) reveals that thematic range of this body of literature is very wide in keeping pace with the contours of change in Indian society.

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