

Modern Issues in the Selected Regional Short Stories of Abburi Chaya Devi Translated into English

Ronald Franklin
Rooble Verma

Abstract

Stories have a rich and ancient legacy. They were even present before written form, even before language could come into animation. The journey of the short story is quite long and glorious. There has been an account of the history of short story writing in various books that reveal that after the oral tradition of narrating the stories there are pieces of evidence of the present story as an organized form from around 4800 BC. One of the book *The World's Oldest Short Stories* by Apuleius Petronius gives us an account for the ancientness in the origin of the short story. The History of short story on Indian soil has a very ancient, rich and colorful background. *Pancha-Tantra* (600 AD) one of the oldest collections of Indian short stories. The rich Indian tradition of writing short stories began in the Sanskrit language which was confined to a restricted class of elites. But later on, it spread in the Hindi language that was appreciated by masses. Later with the invasion of Mughals stories were written in languages like Farsi, Arabic, and Urdu with many dialects and amalgamation of a new language which had words of different tongues. With colonization came English which changed the course of writing short stories. Writers not only produced stories in English but also regional short stories were translated into English language to reach to the wider readers. Many great Indian short story writers, both men, and women uplifted the regional spirit to national and even to international waters and all this were possible because of the vital role of translation. The translated work acted as a fuel to the original as it made it possible for the regional writers to present the various concerns and issues to those who are not of that geographical area. The present paper presents an account of the modern issues dealt in the two selected short stories of renowned woman short story writer Abburi Chaya Devi (1933-) Abburi Chaya Devi is a renowned name in Telugu language.

Key Words: Regional, Translation, Short Story, Modern Issues

Man cannot live as a un-inhabitant island, the mere instinct to communicate gave birth to language and with the establishment of language, came sharing of thoughts, followed by the birth of narration of experiences through stories. Stories were even present before written form, even before language could come into animation. The sign language, a powerful form was used between clans where people shared their experience, and the next generation remembered them in the form of stories. One of the books *The World's oldest short stories* by Apuleius Petronius gives us an account for the ancientness of the origin of short story. *The Tales of Khafri* (Egyptian, 4800 BC), *Stories of Buddha* (Indian 560 BC), Herodotus (485-425 BC), Petronius (1st Century AD), *Pancha-Tantra* (Indian 600 AD) and many more are examples that short story prevailed even before literature was known or studied in an educational world.

The History of short story on Indian soil has a very ancient, rich and colorful background. Two great epics *The Mahabharata* (400 BC) and *The Ramayana* (7th to 4th BCE) in Sanskrit language stand strong with the history of literature of India. It can be

Dialogue: A Journal Devoted to Literary Appreciation
Vol XIV No 2 December 2018

said to be a collective entity of many short stories within, each teaching a different moral and path for life. Pancha-Tantra (600 AD) one of the oldest collections of Indian short stories stand as a colossal figure. But short stories took a long time to touch the Indian masses in a way to be read, understood, enjoy and share, as a literary tool of entertainment. Though the country has a massive background rich in literature, most of the text was in Sanskrit which was confined just to the high-class society especially the Brahmins. Though the language was rich but also became a barrier in the spread of literature to interior grounds until late centuries where authors wrote in Hindi language which was read, understood and appreciated by the masses. With the invasion by Mughals came alien tongues like Farsi, Arabic, and Urdu with many dialects and amalgamation of a new language which had words of different tongues. With colonization came English which changed the course of Literature and writers such as Rudyard Kipling, E.M. Forster and many other from the western world started writing about the incredibility of the country. In 1793 San Dean Mahomed, the first Indian, wrote the first book *The Travels of Dean Mahomed*, in English language, creating a milestone for bilingualism. Later other great authors like Rabindranath Tagore, Dhan Gopal Mukerji wrote in their own regional language but by 1900 they took up writing in English or translating their work in the English language. Gradually the trend shifted from Sanskrit, Urdu, Farsi, Hindi, and other regional languages of India, to English and then finally to the translation of literature from regional languages to English. R.K Narayan, Mulk Raj Anand, Raja Rao were some of the great writers who took up Indian short stories to a new level in regional as well as in the translational world.

Slowly and gradually Short stories started spreading its roots in the regional languages and were translated into English that made them known to the world at large. Many great writers, both men, and women lifted the regional spirit to national and even to international waters and all this were possible because of the vital role of translation. The translated work acted as a fuel to the original as it made it possible for the regional writers to present the regional love and spirit to those who are not of that geographical area. With time translators changed the due course of action and now the translated version of the regional short stories are much more appreciated by English as well as the regional readers.

Short stories are considered to give short, compact and real visualizations of the society. Modernity may have changed many things, but cannot change the fine observation skill of a writer. Isolation, marriage, communication, love, inconsistency, mental/ physical health, nuclear family, generation gap, social disharmony, politics, human suffering, etc. are some of the major themes of the modern short story. Modern short stories in India in English is acting as a leisure room where people find some moments of relaxation, from their tight schedule of a day job and over hectic mental and physical stress. The compactness, swiftness, and relativity of short stories to the real world and real life situations and characters bind people to read them.

This paper deals with such minute observations of a well known regional

writer Abburi Chaya Devi (1933-), writing in her own regional tongue, translated into English, something about her own experience or a result of her creative mind with the blend of regional spirit along with the issues of modern times with different group of people/ individuals/ women. Abburi Chaya Devi, a writer of a number of awarded short stories along with receiver of Sahitya Akademi Award for her collection of short stories, is one of the most vibrant writers in Telugu fiction. Being a feminist writer it is said that her style is called "understatement at its very best." Presenting the worst of the plight of women, her prime message to womanhood is to have the courage to gain emotional independence. The stories of this wonderful writer are exceptional in addressing modern issues. The stories selected for the analysis include two of Chaya Devi's short stories namely "Bonsai Life" and "The Wood Rose". "Bonsai Life" is translated from Telugu into English by Alladi Uma and M. Shridhar and "Woodrose" is translated by E. Nageswara Rao. These stories present issues relating to family, work, norms; issues which are in contrast with tradition. Where materialistic value is more than sentimental value and humans are valued on the parameter of usability, where the disordered lifestyle of the modern era is the new social order and the ethical values of living is become traditional and out of fashion. Modern circumstances are such where nomadic life is found easier than earning a livelihood in a concrete jungle.

The very first story of the book *Bonsai Life and Other Stories* by Abburi Chaya Devi, with a very strong title "Bonsai". It is a Japanese art of cultivating huge trees in small trays which can be kept on the table, with the same realistic appeal and structure of a full-fledged tree, the only difference is the size. The literary observation of the word Bonsai comes from the art how it is cultivated. A huge banyan tree growing in a small pot, or a fruit tree as orange and apple nurtured on a balcony window, all in miniature form, is awe to observe and appreciate. The symbolic meaning is how the roots and branches are cut regularly diminishing its growth and allowing it to grow according to man-made desires. Wiring the branches to take shape not according to its natural habitat but according to the size and design of the room and the container in which it is suppressed to grow just as much desired by the owner.

The story "Bonsai Life" is a very short story with a strong symbolic representation of Bonsai through characters, with a couple of incidents and dialogues it swiftly comes to an end. There isn't any story development or elevation of characters, or climax which reveals something at the end. It is merely representation of today's modern scenario about people and their treatment of life. Some are bound to live a bonsai life and some willingly accept to trim their own freedom to disguise themselves as a bonsai.

The story opens with no specific names of the characters as the writer just presented the way modern people live through this story, a lady living in a city life receives a letter from her sister who lives in the village. The happiness and enthusiasm she recites while she sees the name of her sister clearly states that the story

is a decade old. As today the generation is internet addicted and needs superfast responses, so today the youth is sadly unaware of letter writing and the curiosity to receive a letter. The protagonist is curious to open up the letter of her 'akkaya' (a term used for sister in Telugu language). The letter states her near arrival to the city to greet her sister. She has never been to a city or stay out of the village in her entire life. The elder sister is not so educated as her Nannagaru (Telugu word for dad) didn't allow her to study after her 5th std, she was married to a village man, luckily the Baavagaru (Telugu word for brother-in-law) was educated and had higher ideals in life. The younger sister Ammalu (Telugu word for small sister) was lucky to be born a decade later when the time changed and girls were allowed to go further than the thresholds of house and take higher education, married to an educated person and now lives in the city. But things have changed from then up to now. The girl in the city is accustomed towards the modern lifestyle whereas her elder sister still nurtures a village within and is accustomed to village life.

The warm welcome was followed by the gifts brought from the village which were traditional fruits and vegetables, some raw and some dishes cooked by hand, which gave a mesmerizing feeling to the one living in the city. Maridi, gonguru pulusu, cucumber pappu, drumstick charu, appadams and vadiyams, were some items brought by the elder one. These names also present the food cycle and dishes of Karnataka.

The real sense of the unseen brutality jumps in the story with the conversation of the bonsai. It follows by an unalarmed sand storm which compels them to force shut the window and close themselves up in the room;

"What's all this? Everything was normal till now. Where did that dust and wind come from suddenly?" (Chaya Devi, 5)

"This is how it is in this big city, my dear. Before we know what is happening, the storm brings all the sand from the Rajasthan desert and hits our face..." (5)

The unseen and unexpected sand storm is a symbol of how problems are in a big city. It comes without any intimation to the lives of people, and they are all alone to face it. It is not as a village where people stand together at every problem and pain. The storm was followed by rain which forced her to bring the bonsai from the balcony to the living room, as to protect it. Here turns the story with its hidden message. The elder sister anxiously watches a full-grown turayi tree on the street and people taking shelter under it from the heavy rains. Two dialogues which wind up the entire story are:

Look how tall that turayi has grown... However powerful the sandstorm, it hasn't bowed a little bit... it has provided shelter to so many people, and is protecting them (6).

Look at the bonsai you have tended so lovingly! It looks proper and sweet, like a housewife. But see how delicate it is... It can't even withstand a small dust storm or

squall (6).

"... that a woman's life is like that of a bonsai?" (6)

Though being educated, sophisticated, and ethical the city life has made a woman a working lady, or a housewife or sometimes even both. The lifestyle has depreciated to unnatural habits and delicacy of style. The real storms and torments of life are unbearable for those living in the city. Life in the city is not divided into happiness, relations, and freedom. But is scheduled to work, food, money and personal space, where everyone lives a bonsai life, getting compressed by the situations and moderating their ways of living.

The other short story of Abburi Chaya Devi, "The Woodrose", gives a very symbolic representation of the modern society and its issues through the story of a woman without a name in the entire story, who represents all the elderly in a family, stuck between modernity and generation gap. An old woman in a modern setting of city life, where she is compelled to just sit in the balcony and watch the passers-by, as all the other members of the family are busy and indulged in their lives as the modern lifestyle offers them. An introduction of a new species of plant called the Woodrose, presentation of correlation between the elder lady and the plant due to its attributes. City life and its tantrums, and finally destruction of the plant by her son shattering all her dreams and the means of her investment of time with a sense of herself to be thrown out one day as the wood rose were treated. Observing the character sketch, the old lady is the prime character around whom the story revolves. Her son and daughter-in-law, grandchildren, the husband of the lady is not shown anywhere in the story. The prime character or the old lady is not been given a name in the entire story. It may be the writer wants to depict this story not only confined to a single woman at this age but presenting a story related to many more who suffer at the treatment of modernity in city life.

It opens with a scene in city life where an elderly lady is sitting in a balcony and watching the passers-by, strongly reflecting the state of loneliness and helplessness of an elderly woman, in the hands of modernity and fast-growing city life. "What can you do? Please go and rest." (7)

Leaving a sarcastic comment often used to elderly in modern families, treating them to be useless and unproductive. This can be compared to a rural family or even with a modern one where modernity has not ruined the family values and treatment of the seniors of the house, where elderly are a source of knowledge, blessing, and shelter. But the blessing of modern society and lavishness has its own hidden cons. The lead character encompasses the difference between growing old in the village to that of town. The intimacy and bond which is shared by the villagers are missing in those who live in the waves of modernity, where the neighborhood is washed away by personal space and sharing the sorrow of others by frequent visits are replaced by minding one's business; "In this big city everyone is for himself; no one seems to care for others." (7)

The story very soon develops and the daughter-in-law is seen planting a new variety of flower plant which is very figurative. The name itself of the species is symbolic which is also used as the title of the short story by the Abburi Chaya Devi "The Woodrose". It is a highly contrasting word in itself. Wood which is a symbol of something which is dry, without life, a product of nature which has lived its life and awaits its use on its owner's will and pleasure. As a wood log though dry, can either be cut, burnt, or used in construction or furniture, till it is not decomposed by nature. Lifeless, idle, but still of worth. And Rose on the other hand which is a symbol of love, pureness, nature, beauty, delicacy is in pure contrast to the first-word wood. With a minute observation of the coining of these two words in comparison to the prime character of the short story (the mother-in-law), we acknowledge similarities or a character sketch of the protagonist. The lady though old and sarcastically announced to be useless by the daughter-in-law "What can you do? Please go and rest." Finds similarity to the wood, as she is old, not productive enough to the parameters laid down by the wave of modernity, but still holds the attributes of a rose, to be cared for, delicate, with its own beauty of life. If the complete word is taken together The Woodrose, it gives us a sense of artificiality, mere a presentation of something which is real, and may possess more qualities as it is a manmade product of modern times but lacks the natural genuineness which nature provides; "Do they have any fragrance?" Can they be used for puja?" (8).

They have no fragrance, but they are very beautiful to look at. They won't fade if we keep them in a vase (8).

This conversation of two lines can be an indication of what modernity has brought along with it. It can create even those things which nature cannot, and with more perfection and modifications, but lacks behind with the elements of real beauty which only nature can bestow. Life is not something to be secluded or kept behind bars. But modernity has forced us to live a life of freedom in an imaginary prison created by man. The protagonist has to live life as the trend prevailing in the city.

Same as the Woodrose with its blend of artificial and natural beauty, is imprisoned in a vase to just observe the outer world, kept on the balcony, bounded to grow on the wired mesh created by the daughter-in-law. Is compared to the situation of the prime character where she is allowed to do nothing but to live her life in the city cage called home and watch the world from the perspective she is allowed and given in the concrete jungle.

The story moves further with many more symbolic incidents used by the writer, artistically presenting the blend of old age and new, modern life and village life and modernity along with traditional values. Kamala (daughter-in-law) is cleaning the house and arranging a flower pot, with a combination of red and yellow rose along with a strange appearance rose with the color of sandalwood. When the mother-in-law inquired about it, she acknowledged it was Woodrose. (This type of peculiar arrangement of old and new flowers, or a combination of different type of species of

flowers arranged together is a Japanese technique called Ikebana /ɪkɪ'b ɪnfl/. It does not have a regular pattern of arrangement, but depends on the person who arranges them, so every time it gives a different feel and a different symbolic meaning)

Abburi Chaya Devi has very artistically dwelled the story and life of the protagonist along with the Woodrose plant. In the story, the arrangement of the flowers is shown for the amalgamation of two different generations, mother-in-law and daughter-in-law, old age and youth, enthusiasm and static life, tradition, and modernity. With the attributes of the Woodrose, the lead character (mother-in-law) started comparing her own life. Life along with no fragrance, freedom to live yet bonded to be a climber, open to the world yet hung upon the balcony window to grow and spread based on the will of its owner, she starts living the life of the plant. The picture of modernity is colored at the end of the story by the writer, with the colors of a modern scenario of treatment of a son to his mother, destruction of nature for the fulfillment of better accommodation, a husband-wife relation, and the advancement of the younger generation towards an unhealthy future.

Moving towards the end of the story, the son is found ruining the fully grown and spread Woodrose to bits, the destruction was not of the plant but symbolically of the old women who found serenity in it as she compared her life with that of the Woodrose, lived and enjoyed every moment from the time it was a tiny shoot until it was fully grown and widespread to the terrace and all over the grill of the window. The only means to pass her time and feel moments of pleasure at this age of life was destroyed to pieces. The relation of mother and son was changed now, the one who used to care for every need of the mother during his childhood was now a grownup and revolting entity. It is the way modern times has taught him to do according to one's own will and destroy whatever comes is the way;

I went to the balcony again and told him it wasn't good to pull out a creeper in full bloom. He shouted at me then. I moved away quietly (10).

How affectionate he was as a boy! He couldn't bear even a casual remark against me from his father... He has grown up (10).

The modern lifestyle changed the value and respect the younger generation showed to the older ones. The materialistic lifestyle of lavishness has ruined the emotional and caring aspect of relations. The act of destruction of the Woodrose tormented the lady as if she was being ruined to ashes. It is as a glimpse into the future and her premonition that she could also be thrown out of the house one day in the same way as the Woodrose. Modern society has brought relations at the verge of extension, luxury, materialism, hypocrisy, adulteration, prostitution has made the society sick and the innocent to be its victims.

Modernity has changed the term 'life' to 'lifestyle', but the moral element is diminishing as we are more technological prone and getting addicted to a strange

attraction towards loneliness. Though the present century has given the world at our fingertips we have produced and cultivated a new world of individualism and priority. Demands of modern scenario is changed from food, shelter, and clothing to that of personal space, money, and success for which the modern man can go to any extent and wants to attain it by hook or crook method. Through the reading of the selected stories, we acknowledge the necessity of a positive human instinct which is losing its value day by day. Stories of Abburi Chaya Devi give a glimpse into the incarnated new world of modern people where serenity has replaced by a lone and eggshell life. Where artificial is beautiful and blood relations are ugly. The modern issues are meant to be dealt with utmost understanding, keeping relation, family, life, and freedom of each individual top at the priority index. It can be finally said that though humans have changed the world which they live in, but are incapable to see the change within which is a by-product of the new world.

Works Cited

- Chaya Devi, Abburi. *Bonsai Life and Other Stories* (Telugu Stories in English Translation). Delhi: Authorspress. 2012. Print.
- Fisher, Michael. H. *The First Indian Author in English*. New York : Oxford University Press. 1996. Print
- Nair, Janaki and Mary E. John, eds. *A Question of Silence : The Sexual Economies of Modern India*. London: Zed Books. 2000, Print.
- Natarajan, Nalini. *Handbook of Twentieth-Century Literatures of India*. US: Greenwood Press. 1996. Print.
- Smith. A, Patrick. *Thematic Guide to Popular Short Stories*. Westport: Greenwood Press. 2002. Print.
- Tharu, Susie and K. Lalita. *Women Writing in India. Vol II : The 20th Century*. New York: The Feminist Press. 1993. Print.