

Of Short Story

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Literature represents the enthusiasm and apathy, hope and despair, thrill of joy and state of pain in the history of any nation. In fact, literature is not of one age but all ages, not of one country but all countries. Literature consists of many genres. Each age has its own particular line of interest and its own particular way of thinking and feeling. The environment, the body and the atmosphere are necessary for the creation of any work of art besides the heart and soul. In that way, the short story as a special genre has got utmost name and fame among the readers of literature, generally of any time particularly present lovers of literature. A short story is one that is not too unorganized, but a narrative in style. It is a work of prose fiction, and most of the terms for analyzing the components parts, the types and the various narrative techniques of the novel are applicable to the short story also. This paper tries to throw light upon some of the aspects of short stories as enunciated by the experts, literati, and researchers of short stories.

KEYWORDS

Genre; Aspects of Short Stories; History and popularity.

The Short Story as a Special Genre

A short story differs from the anecdote in which a single incident is narrated simply. Whereas a short story organizes the action, thought, and interaction of its characters into the artful pattern of a plot, which has a beginning and develops through a middle to some sort of denouement at the end. It is full of one dominant theme told with a maximum length and minimum organization.

The plot or theme of a short story may be comic, tragic, romantic, or satiric. The story is presented to us from one of the many available points of view. The story may be written in the mode of fantasy, realism and naturalism. The focus of interest is on the course and outcome of the events in the story of the incident as in Poe's *The Gold Bug* or other tales of detection.

Stories of character focus on the revelation of a state of mind and motivation, or moral qualities. Nothing more happens than an encounter and conversation between two people in some of the stories of character by the Russian master of the form Chekhov. *A Clean, well Lighted Place*, Ernest Hemingway's classic consists only of a curt conversation between two waiters about an old man who gets drunk every day and stays in the cafe until it closes, followed by a brief meditation on the part of one of the waiters. There are some stories capable of maintaining a balance of interest between external action and character.

Edgar Allan Poe, the originator of the short story as a specific genre, is the first critical theorist. He defines it as a prose narrative requiring half an hour to one or two hours in its perusal. It means

that the short story must be read in one sitting. At the same time, it is not novel in reduced measure. His comment applies to many short stories and it points out the economy of management, particularly, in which the tightness of the form is always imposed to some degree. One can say that the short story writer introduces a very limited number of characters and it is not possible to afford the space for a leisurely analysis and a sustained development of character, and he cannot undertake to develop a detailed social milieu as dense as the novelist does.

A short story writer begins his story close to the climax, minimizes both prior exposition and the details of the setting, keeps the complications down, and clears up the denouement quickly in a few sentences. The central incident is selected to reveal as much as possible of the totality of the protagonist's life and character, and the details are devised to carry maximum significance. This technique in the narrative often offers an artistic appearance to a good short story as well as to a good novel.

Many well-known short stories deviate from this paradigm in various ways. It must be remembered that the name covers diverse prose fiction from a short story which is a slightly elaborated anecdote of perhaps five hundred words, to such long and complex forms as Melville's *Billy Budd*, Henry James's *The Turn Of the Screw*, and Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*, whose status between the tautness of the short story and the expansiveness of the novel is sometimes indicated by the name 'novelette.'

The short story is a product of the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth century. But it is one of the oldest types of literature. In the Bible, the Old Testament is full of wonderful short stories. The language of the short story is minimal. Every word in it should contribute to its effect. There is no room

for unnecessary passages and elaborate descriptions in a short story.

The short story writer is supposed to use minimum words and produce maximum effect. It contains not more than one idea mostly. It must be developed to its logical conclusion. The theme of a short story may be a love for a beast, a boy's yearning for his home, an important moral teaching etc. It may be written in one or two pages or stretch a little more. According to Henry James, a short story can contain six to eight thousand words. Somerset Maugham opines that the smallest short story contains about one thousand six hundred words and the longest about twenty thousand words. Such rules may vary from time to time.

Popularity

A short story is a prose narrative. It has firmly established itself as a favourite form in modern literature. The reasons for the popularity of the short story today may be any, but some of them are:

- The magazine boom--- this required authors who write short stories, which could be published within one issue. This also opened up a readership of millions.
- The frenetic pace of life automatically took away from the time given over to leisure, and readers preferred to read short stories, which they could finish in one sitting. (or) The fragmentation of novels into short stories or the growth of the short stories offered expression to the frenetic pace of life.
- It narrates the incident quickly.
- The arresting beginning and ending.
- It is difficult to conventional opening.
- A minimum number of characters.
- Dialogue unfolds the action.
- It quenches the thirst of someone who really wants to read something in a short period.

The Short Story

The origin of the short story lies in fables, anecdotes, fairy tales and folklore. This emphasises the fact when the first settlers landed on what today is the USA; they kept moving west in search of new or unknown lands. They had lots of tales to tell about all their experiences, and a good storyteller was called a 'liar'. There were no negative connotations attached to the word in those days.

The short story comprises scenes, characters, structure and point of view like a tall story, novella or novel. But the main thing is brevity, to be used effectively, implies a mastery over language and a control over situations. In a good short story actually, every word contributes to the main effect and central theme. Descriptive passages are useful when they are absolutely necessary and contribute to the main idea.

It is believed that a short story may have 3000 to 6000 words in length. Even so, within 1000 words, many good short stories have been written, for instance, John Steinbeck's *Breakfast*, R.K.Narayan's *Father's Help*, Kate Chopin's and Ruskin Bond's *The Photographer*. In the short story, the characters are found in a crucial place. They are shown as they are. Hence, only three to six characters take part, thereby no character development or exploration is possible.

Though the norm for the scenes of a short story is only two to three, modern writers avoid scenic descriptions. Instead, they exploit locales that the readers are familiar with such as cafes, hotels, stations, restaurants and pubs. The setting is also described in concrete terms so that the readers can visualise them. Well-chosen details reveal the scene, depict the characters and show the actions that take place.

All over the world, the short story becomes the dominant literary form. It plays an integral role in the development of literature. The short story, the genre of

imaginative literature which gives artistic form to the relationship between man and society, was conspicuously absent until the twentieth century. One reason for this absence may be found in the fact that the short story as an art form came to India with the British and it was new to every Indian literature.

The famous Tamil Literati and Speaker Valamburi John states:

If any writer chooses the 'Novel' form rather than 'Short Story' for his creative expression which is very well fit in the short story form itself, it means that the creator somewhere mistakes or insults his readers.

It is considered a favourite form of present-day writing. Though its popularity can be accounted for, it also depends upon the magazines carrying it. Since the time of Stevenson, the influence of the short story has been widespread. Its popularity has grown and spread to England, France, Russia, America and India. The French author Guy de Maupassant had a troop of followers in every country. The Russian Chekhov has considerably influenced short story writers between 1900 and 1920, while the Americans Earnest Hemingway and William Saroyan have been widely imitated even today.

H.G. Wells widened the field by applying his imagination to scientific discovery. Since 1900 John Galsworthy, Joseph Conrad, D.H. Lawrence, Aldous Huxley, and James Joyce have all written memorable short stories in addition to their work in the realm of the novel. While responding to a question raised by Neena Bhandari in *The Week Manil Suri*, a US-based Indian Professor, says:

They (Indian Writers) are definitely hard to dismiss anymore. They have put their stamps and they are here to stay. But you know, When people ask me if I am an Indian author, I say, I have been doing mathematics

for 25 years no one asks me if I am an Indian Mathematician, the question would be absurd."

The writers who emerged from India are often bound to Indian tradition and culture. The term may be rephrased as "Writer in English from India".

The predicament of Indo-Anglian writer is indeed different. He is writing about the people who do not normally speak and think in English. One could add as a second problem, the fact, that he himself is writing in a language that is not his own, unlike the writers from America and Australia. To delineate characters and portray subtle nuances and distinctions prevailing in society, one has to create a new technique. The Indo-Anglian writer generally deals with non-English people in non-English situations.

Meenakshi Mukerjee aptly says:

"A writer's first obligation is to remake it for his own particular purpose. In this sense the Indo-Anglian writers' experiments are no different from the experiments of creative writers anywhere in the world."

The short story in English has flourished in many nations. Frank O'Connor has called it the national art form of American Masters including William Faulkner, Katherine Anne Porter, Eudora Wetly, Flannery O'Conner, John O'Hara, J.F.Powers, John Cheever, and J.D.Salinger. It is deep-rooted in India also. There are a good number of distinguished short story writers in India too who write in English as well as in their own language of communication.

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