



Exploring The Challenging Journey Of Indian English Short Story From Kamala Sathianandan To Preeti Shenoy

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BIO-NOTE

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ABSTRACT

Short story is the oldest genre of literature which evolved in crude form even before the written language developed. But with the development of English Language and Literature, this crude form began to be polished and refined. It has, with the passing time, come a long way, from the oral form to the present refined type. In this article we are going to trace this development in a nutshell and analyze the short story writing of the present time. This research work focuses on the short story writers of the present time. The article will analyze different themes employed by the writers of 21st century in the genre along with their writing skill and technique. As is said, 'literature is the mirror of the society,' the article will lay bare the 21st century society before us with the description of the works of the galaxy of writers penning various aspects of their society.

KEYWORDS: Short story, mirror, society, immemorial, contemporary, panorama, plot, melancholy, poignant, spellbinding, traversed, decipher

INTRODUCTION

Short story has ever been an integral part of human society. Even before being categorized as a genre of English Literature, it has existed in society. There was the existence of short story in the ancient times as well, in the form of fables of animals narrated to people, much before language developed. It is the oldest form of literature, existing in many forms such as myths, fairytales, ballads and parables. In-fact it could be said that the literature tree has its root in short story which has branched itself in various other forms such as drama, novel and poetry.

However with the advancement of English Language and Literature, short story has been evolved as a distinct category. Short story refers to a fictional work of prose that is shorter in length than a novel. It may or may not have a moral attached to them and is written to provide respite. H.G.Wells, in 'The Contemporary Novel', said, "A short story is, or should be, a simple thing, it aims at producing one single, vivid effect; it has to seize the attention at the outset, and never relaxing, gather it together more and more until the climax is reached."

Edgar Allan Poe, in his essay, 'The Philosophy of Composition', said, "A short story should be read in one sitting, anywhere from half an hour to two hours."

LITERATURE REVIEW

Since the beginning of the writing of literature, there has been a parallel attempt by intellectuals to understand and critically examine it as well. This study makes literature more decipherable to the reading mass, and at the same time increases the importance of literature as well. Short story, being a genre in a whole, has been minutely studied, analyzed and comprehended by intellectuals every now and then. This detailed study has made short story carve a distinct niche for itself in the world of literature. Various studies have been performed on the evolution and elements of short story since time immemorial by scholars and intellectuals which has left to almost no stone unturned in the study of short story. However, there is felt a void regarding a detailed study of the short stories of twenty first century, which the present paper wishes to fulfill.

EVOLUTION OF INDIAN ENGLISH SHORT STORY

In India, English short story marks its beginning with *Stories from Indian Christian Life* published in 1898 by Kamala Sathianandan. It was co-authored by her husband Samuel, each of them contributing six stories, chiefly consisting of religious parables. On the foundation laid by Sathianandan, further bricks were added by writers like Mulk Raj Anand, R.K.Narayan and Raja Rao to make the palace of Short story stand erect itself alone and be worthy of notable existence. They penned various prevailing topics of their time, ranging from social activity to exploration of nature of life and reality.

SHORT STORY TILL 20TH CENTURY

The genre was carried forward in a grand style with writers like Ruth Pravar Jhabwala, Bhabani Bhattacharya and others. Bhattacharya's 'detached involvement with the Indian situation', Ruskin Bond's 'easy and conversational prose', Khuswant Singh's 'concern of man and reality', Attia Hosain's 'political interest' provides different sparkling shades to the short story of the time.

Ahead of them, we have a galaxy of short story writers in the 19th and 20th century, laying focus on the social, political, psychological and emotional aspects of their society in their works.

SHORT STORY IN THE 21ST CENTURY

In the 21st century, the legacy of the genre is being grandeurised by the pens of various eminent writers expressing their ideas on almost all the areas of human existence. On the wake of the century, Arvind Adiga came with *Between the Assassinations*. The title refers to the period between 1984 assassination of Indira Gandhi and the killing of her son Rajiv Gandhi in 1991. It consists of 14 stories marginalized by these two milestones from both ends. Residing in a fictional coastal town of Kittur "between Goa and Calicut", the people dominating his collection belongs to all classes of society. Ziauddin, with whom the book opens is one of "those lonely men with vivid eyes who haunt every train station in India. Ramakrishana's "Xerox", who has been arrested 21 times for selling photocopied books to the students. Raos, a childless couple, who seek refuge within their own circles of inmates and many more. Adiga has moulded the book in such a form that though the stories are different and unique in itself, all of them could be linked to form a larger narrative as stories of different individuals inhabiting Kuttur and serve as its guidebook.

Yet another writer, Neelum Saran Gour, marches further carrying the flag of short story with four of her collections titled *Grey Pigeon and Other Stories* containing 19 short stories, *Winter Companions and Other Stories* containing 18, *The Song Without an End* comprising 15, and *Allahabad Aria* consisting of 8 short stories. In these short stories, the writer deals with a panorama of life experiences such as suffering of human body, interpersonal relationships, mental dilemmas, suppression of desires, various kinds of repentances, regrets of deeds and emotional crisis of different magnitudes. She chooses out of the box themes and deals with them as if one is traversing a flowery path. The uncommon doctor patient relationship in *The Song Without End* is dealt spellboundedly by Gour. Similar spellbinding narration is in the story *The Second Attack* which portrays a mother, who after succumbing to cancer comes to know her near end, and instead of being glum and losing interest in life, begins to enjoy her life to the fullest. She begins to wear her seldom worn silk saree and gold ornaments, use her expensive favorite perfume daily. A remarkable feature of the writer is the sudden introduction of twists in the plot as if she is using a dice in narration, which she masters skillfully and smoothly that the readers do not feel the jerk of the twist and swims smoothly with the flow of the art.

The journey of study of contemporary short story is completely incomplete without the mentioning of Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's *Arranged Marriage*. Women has ever been an important center of discussion in every literary art. So is in this genre, with the masterpiece of Divakaruni. Her work presents a psychoanalytical perspective of female after marriage. She paints all the shades of a woman's life after marriage on the paper in monochrome ink. The feminism presented in the collection has claimed immense applaud from the readers and critics. It has, as a result, won an American Book Award, a Bay Area Book Reviews Awards, and a PEN Josephine Miles Award. The canvas of Divakaruni's collection portrays 11 women on the verge of transformation. These women toy their best to adopt a new world while holding on to their old cultural belief. All her stories act as a bridge between two world values which a woman witnesses and acts accordingly. Also, the range of women dealt here with is varied. In 'Clothes', she deals with a young bride whose all emotions and vision of settling in America is shattered when her husband gets murdered. She is left alone to face the future on her own. While 'Meeting Mrinal' displays a proud middle aged divorcee determined to succeed, the unique style of Chitra is the skillful fusion of prose with poetry in her work, though the traditional norm of short story demands the narration in prose form.

The Wait by Srutimala Duara is yet another artistic work of the genre. The wife waits for her abducted husband to return in vain. One can understand the interplay of id, ego and super ego in her psychology, when despite being educated and intelligent, she takes help of a sadhu in finding him and wears yellow clothes everyday as per his suggestion in wait of her husband. When the news of her husband's death arrives, her super ego restricts her to accept the truth and she locks herself up in bathroom to prolong her futile wait.

Anjum Hasan has added to the glory of the tradition of short story with her masterpiece, *Difficult Pleasure* published by Penguin/Viking in 2012. It is a collection of 13 stories dealing about the need to escape and the longing to belong. It centers around lonely people and their melancholic emotions. There is a delineation of characters seeking pleasure full of trepidation. The collection is accomplished but is full of surprises. All the stories in the collection adheres to the title 'Difficult Pleasures' as all the stories have somewhat a kind of pleasure obtained with difficulty.

In line to the melancholy of Hasan are the poignant short stories of Jhumpa Lahiri which have been presented in *Interpreter of Maladies* and *Unaccustomed Earth*. While the former work has won the Pulitzer Prize for fiction and the

PEN (Hemmingway Award) , the latter has won the Frank O'Connor International Short Story Award. She is an American author and is celebrated for her poignant account of immigration and Indian American life.

Another young experimental writer Mridula Koshy is known to use her expertise of being a proletarian in her pen. *If It Is Sweet* from her treasure adds to the genre. *The Good Mother* deals with a single mother and her difficulty in raising her child. Koshy boldly experiments with literary forms which is visible in her works. In *Today is the Day*, she has crossed between a novella and a short story dividing her work into seven sub heads.

Indu Menon is an experimenting writer who has given space to topics like gender and sexuality in her work. She comes out bold in dealing with the theme of love making in her work, *Kathakal*, much similar to the manner in which Kamala Das wrote a few decades back. Hers is the voice of a 'New Woman', who chooses to boldly explore new world rather than traversing the general path of the that other female writers are proudly dealing with.

Ayan Pal is another budding name among the current short story writers. He is a promising writer with an IT background. He tops the list of bestsellers on Amazon. He has many awards and titles to his credit from his IT background. He also has his name in the 'Limca Book Of Records' for his splendid contribution in the writing of India's first composite novel *Crossed and Knotted*. In short story, his share is the penning of *Chronicles of Urban Nomads* and *21 Tales to Tell*.

Preeti Shenoy adds to the glory of the genre with her remarkable works like *The Nameless Relationship*, *The Obsession*, *The Frogs*, *Poker Face* and *Somebody that I Used to Know*. *The Nameless Relationship* is a bold attempt by the writer to pen the reality of extra-marital affair in the modern society. She deals with an illicit relationship of an elite woman with a boy of her son's age in the story. However, she does neither glorify such relation nor condemns it and ends the story openly letting the readers decide the end on their own according to their own take over such topics. *The Frog* is superficially a plain story, but at the core it deals with suspense created by the deaths of two characters by heart attack by a lady with medicinal knowledge of trees. All her stories are engaging which has made her earn a fame for herself in the niche of literary world.

Apart from these, there is a galaxy of writers penning short stories like Ritu Lalit whose *Ripples and Other Stories* is a collection of short story for kids. Priya A.S, Susmita Bagchi, Subhas Chandan and many more have excelled in the field. They deal with life from all angles and with all shades, and at the same time they do not hesitate in experimenting various styles rather than sticking to the traditional way of writing.

CONCLUSION

Indian English short story that had begun in ancient India in the form of fables and parables passing orally from one to another has till date traversed a glorious path all these decades and has bloomed into various colours to delight, please and entertain people. The contemporary world of short story has a galaxy of writers experimenting and crafting different features and aspects of human life and society. From social to political, from religious to recreational, from individual to social, no stone has been left unturned in penning of the 21st century short story. These crisp writings is the most popular form of reading today as it fits well with the busy lifestyle of people having very less time. Also, writers experimenting with the narrative form and technique in their works today are a new experience that makes reading a pleasure. Truly, literature today has mirrored the society and enclosed it in the beautiful frame of monochrome letters that traverses smoothly on the canvas of the writer. Short story may be short in different aspects but its future is long and lasting keeping in view the busy life of readers and the permanent impression and joy it inculcates in the people.

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