

CHAPTER – I

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INTRODUCTION

1.1 Short Story as a Form of Literature :

Today, the Short Story is an international and essentially a modern form. It has evolved as a specific form of literature having its own organism and laws. It is the favourite form of the present day writing. Telling stories and listening to them is as old as the language itself. But the rise of the modern Short Story is the outcome of the contribution made by the writers such as Nathaniel Hawthorne, Edgar Allan Poe, Maupassant, Kipling, Henry James, Chekhov, Katherine Mansfield, Maugham. These writers have not only produced a number of great Short Stories, but also have contributed to the formulation of the theory of the Short Story.

In a review of Nathaniel Hawthorne's 'Twice – Told Tales' Edgar Allan Poe (1961:5) comments on the different stages in the formation of the Short Story and also on the literary artist's essential contribution as follows :

A skillful literary artist has constructed a tale. If wise, he has not fashioned his thoughts to accommodate his incidents; but having conceived, with deliberate care, a certain unique or single effect to be wrought out, he then invents such incidents—he then combines such events as may best aid him in establishing this preconceived effect. If his very initial sentence tend not to the outbringing of this effect, then he has failed in his first step. In the whole composition there should

be no word written, of which the tendency, direct or indirect, is not to one pre-established design. And by such means, with such care and skill, a picture is at length painted which leaves in the mind of him who contemplates it with a kindred art, a sense of the fullest satisfaction.

R.J. Rees (1973:203) calls H.G. Wells 'a master of the story-teller's art' and quotes his words on the form of Short Story as :

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.

Thus, Wells points out, "The limits of the human capacity to attend closely set a limit to it" and adds, "It must explode and finish before interruption occurs or fatigue sets in."

These definitions highlight the peculiar characteristics of the Short Story. Brevity and the unity of impression are the most obvious characteristics. A Short Story is a story that can be easily read at a single sitting. The plot is confined to the essentials, the characters to the indispensables and the setting to a few suggestive hints. We meet people for a few minutes and see them in a few relationships and circumstances only. The language of the Short Story should be a model of economy. Every word in it should contribute to its effect. Any superfluous detail only retards the progress towards the final effect.

According to Poe, (1961:4) "Unity of effect or impression is a point of greatest importance." A Short Story must contain one and only

one informing idea and this idea must be worked out to its logical conclusion with absolute singleness of aim and directness of method. The germinal idea must be perfectly clear and the interest arising out of it must never be complicated by any other consideration. The Short Story is the single effect, complete and self-contained. Attainment of this unity is one of the principal difficulties in the Short Story writing.

A Short Story is not a novel on a reduced scale. It differs from the novel not only in length but also in motive, plan and structure. By reason of its brevity and concentration the Short Story manifestly demands particular care in all the details of composition. Far more than in the novel, everything superfluous and redundant must be omitted, the proper perspective must be maintained, the emphasis justly distributed, the necessary values given to the successive movements of the narrative and the separate parts strictly subordinated to the whole. The writer of the Short Story must have the sense of form and the construction must always be logical, adequate and harmonious.

1.2 Nadine Gordimer : Life and Works

Nadine Gordimer was born in Springs, a small mining town outside Johannesburg in 1923, the daughter of Isidore and Nan Gordimer. Her parents were both Jewish immigrants, her father a watchmaker from Lithuania near the Latvian border, and her mother from London. From her early childhood, Gordimer witnessed how the white minority increasingly weakened the rights of the black majority. She was educated at a Catholic convent school, but was largely home-bound as a child because of her mother. The key event occurred in her childhood when she was 10. She fainted twice for no obvious reason and the family doctor discovered she had an unusually rapid heartbeat. It was nothing more threatening than hyperactivity, but her mother decided that Nadine had a

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weak heart. She stopped her daughter's participation in swimming, tennis, other games and ballet lessons and then removed her from school altogether. Deprived of normal education and social life between 11 and 16, Gordimer had only adults for company. Cut off from other teenagers, she became a voracious reader and writer. Home-bound and often isolated, she began writing at an early age, and published her first story in 1937 at the age of fifteen. Her first published work was a short story for children, 'The Quest for Seen Gold', which appeared in the Children's Sunday Express in 1937; 'Come Again Tomorrow', another children's story, appeared in *The Forum*. At the age of 16, she had her first adult fiction published. Her first short story collection *Face to Face* published in 1949. Gordimer studied for a year at Witwatersrand University, where she mixed for the first time with fellow professionals across the colour bar. She did not complete her degree, but moved to Johannesburg in 1948, where she has lived ever since. In 1951, the *New Yorker* accepted Gordimer's Story 'A Watcher of the Dead', beginning a long relationship, and bringing Gordimer's work to a much larger public. Gordimer has continued to publish short stories in the *New Yorker* and other prominent literary journals. She has been incessantly writing novels, short stories, essays and even screenplays. Today, she has achieved international status as one of the finest living writers in English. Her works have received literary recognition with numerous literary awards. She won the Booker Prize in 1974 for her novel – *The Conservationist* and Nobel Prize for Literature in 1991.

Gordimer's writing has been a mirror of South African history. She is a literary witness to the country's tragedies. One of the major themes of her works is the unjust policy of apartheid and its corrosive effects on the people's life. She condemned apartheid through both her writing and activism. She joined African National Congress

when it was still listed as an illegal organization by the South African government. She hid ANC leaders in her home to aid their escape from arrest. She made her only court appearance in 1987 as an expert witness in a trial of the leaders of the United Democratic Front. She also regularly took part in anti-apartheid demonstrations in South Africa and travelled internationally speaking out against South African apartheid and political repression. She refused to accommodate the system while choosing to live in South Africa unlike many other writers who preferred exile. The South African government banned several of her works, two for lengthy periods of time. *The Late Bourgeois World* was banned in 1976 for a decade. *A World of Strangers* was banned for twelve years.

Gordimer's activism has not been limited to the struggle against apartheid. she has resisted censorship and state control of information. She refused to let her work be aired by the South African Broadcasting Corporation because it was controlled by the apartheid government. She also served on the steering committee of South Africa's Anti-Censorship Action Group. Being a founding member of the Congress of South African Writers, Gordimer has also been active in South African letters and international literary organizations. She has been Vice President of International PEN. In the post-apartheid 1990s and 21st Century, she has been active in the HIV/AIDS movement which is a significant public health crisis in South Africa. In 2004, she organized about 20 major writers to contribute short fiction for *Telling Tales*, a fundraising book for South Africa's Treatment Action Campaign, which lobbies for government funding for HIV/AIDS prevention and care.

Works :

Novels :

- *The Lying Days* (1953)
- *A World of Strangers* (1958)
- *Occasion for Loving* (1963)
- *The Late Bourgeois World* (1966)
- *A Guest of Honour* (1970)
- *The Conservationist* (1974)
- *Burger's Daughter* (1979)
- *July's People* (1981)
- *A Sport of Nature* (1987)
- *My Son's Story* (1990)
- *None to Accompany Me* (1994)
- *The House Gun* (1998)
- *The Pickup* (2001)
- *Get a Life* (2005)

Short Story Collections :

- *Face to Face* (1949)
- *The Soft voice of the Serpent* (1952)
- *Six Feet of the Country* (1956)
- *Not for Publication* (1965)
- *Livingstone's Companions* (1971)
- *Selected Stories* (1975)
- *No Place Like: Selected Stories* (1978)
- *A Soldier's Embrace* (1980)
- *Town and Country Lovers* (1980)
- *Something Out There* (1984)

- *Jump And Other Stories* (1991)
- *Loot : And Other Stories* (2003)
- *Beethoven was One- Sixteenth Black* (2007)

Essay Collections:

- *The Black Interpreters* (1973)
- *The Essential Gesture: Writing, Politics and Places* (1988)
- *Writing and Being* (1995)
- *Living in Hope and History: Notes On our Century* (1999)

Edited Works:

- *Telling Tales* (2004)

Plays :

- *The First Circle* (1949)

Published in Six One- Act plays

Other Works:

- *On the Mines* (1973)
- *Lifetimes Under Apartheid* (1986)

1.3 Relevance of the Study :

An apparent glance at Gordimer's literary career is enough to know that she has equally contributed to the Novel and the Short Story writing. Gordimer's novels have been widely read, praised and won her many literary prestigious prizes. She is mainly appreciated and critically evaluated as a novelist. There is considerable research and critical work available on her novels. Comparatively, her short stories have not been given that much attention. The present research aims at exploring Gordimer's contribution to the Short Story writing. The researcher intends to concentrate on the thematic aspect of Gordimer's stories. Three of Gordimer's Short Story collections are selected for the study. They

are- *Livingstone's Companions* (1971), *Something Out There* (1984), and *Jump And Other Stories* (1991). The dissertation consists of the analysis of major and minor themes found in these three collections. It also includes the detailed analysis of South African Apartheid and Liberation Movement as the background study to the Gordimer's thematic concerns and preoccupations.

For Gordimer, both forms- Novel and Short Story are equally important. In fact, Short Story is the form with which she started her literary career. Along with the Novel writing, she has been incessantly writing Short Stories. Her own statements regarding the form of Short Story occur in her Introduction to the collection- *Selected Stories* (1975):

A Short story is a concept that the writer can 'hold', fully realized, in his imagination, at one time. A novel is, by comparison, staked out, and must be taken possession of stage by stage; ... A short story occurs, in the imaginative sense. To write one. is to express from a situation in the exterior or interior world the life- giving drop- sweat, tear, semen, saliva- that will spread an intensity on the page, burn a hole in it. (1975:15)

According to Gordimer, a writer's choice of the form- between Novel and Short Story depends upon the concept which he wants to express. In the same Introduction she tells that Short Story is the first form in which she wrote. Now she writes more novels and fewer Short Stories. But she also asserts that she would never stop writing stories.