

CHAPTER - I

***THE SHORT STORY***

## 1.1 THE SHORT STORY : A LITERARY FORM

To define literature is a difficult task. It has generally been thought that there is some sense in which literature should hold the mirror up to the nature. This means that we expect a writer, whether he be a poet, novelist or a dramatist, to pass on to us some feelings or ideas which we at once recognize as being either actually or potentially, a part of our own experience.

K. R. S. Iyengar, in his book entitled, *An Introduction to the Study of English Literature* (1966 :186) observes, "The short story is an even more recent literary form than the novel story telling as such has no doubt an ancient ancestry and we may cite the *Katha Sarit Sagara* and the *Arabian Nights* as proof of this; but the modern short story is the child of nineteenth century impressionism and it was in America that it first struck a path of its own in the works of the masters like Irving, Hawthorne and Poe.

"The truth about the good short story"; says Sean O'Faolain, "is poetical; it lies in a pointed vision, a sort of *eclaircissement* of an inward eye-flick, the fixing of an unforgettable "thing seen". (1966 :186). Like other artists, the short story writer too holds the mirror up to Nature and Life. The good short story is always reflection of a chosen little segment of life; but it is also, sometimes a warning and sometimes a prophecy - a warning of craters a head or an invitation to Pisgah heights of possibility". (1966 :186)

Walter Allen, in his book *The Short Story in English* (1982 : 5) says that the short story, before the modern short story came into being, was a manifestation of the romance. Its aim was to entertain. Its province was the extraordinary. The short story deals with, dramatizes a single incident and in doing so utterly transforms it.

In the book entitled *A Background to the Study of English Literature* (1950 :162) B. Prasad elaborates : "The short story is not merely a greatly shortened novel". It shares, of course, the usual constituents of all fiction plot, character and setting but they cannot be treated with the same detail as in the novel. Each has to be reduced to the minimum in the interest of the impression they are together intended to convey. All, in other words, take the shortest route towards the 'preconceived effect, the one pre-established design'. They are all a means to an end. The plot is confined to the essentials, the characters to the indispensables, and the setting to a few suggestive hints. Sometimes one of the three elements may

predominate over the other two. In other words, the writer may construct a story of plot alone, with characters and setting confined strictly to its requirements, or of character alone, with plot and setting just sufficient to display it or of setting alone, with plot and characters as mere subsidiaries. Further he adds : "To illustrate from Stevenson, *The Bottle Imp* is a story of plot, *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, a story of character and *The Merry Men* a story of setting. (B. Prasad, 1950 : 162). R.J. Rees elaborates in his book *An Introduction to English Literature* (1973 : 263) that the language of the short story should be the model of economy. Every word in it should contribute to its effect. A novel often has passages which could be scored out without detriment to the plot, but there is no room for these in the short story. According to Prasad, "Like a man of limited means, the short story cannot afford to spend two coins where a single one would suffice. (1950 :164) It requires the art word and the telling phrase. (1950 :164) The form of short story precludes indulgence in stylistic elegance or 'fine writing' for its own sake".

R. J. Rees elaborates in his book *An Introduction to English Literature* (1973 : 263) : "In every good literature, there should be 'moral awareness' that is to say a feeling on the part of the writer and conveyed to the reader. The short story is a form or genre having rules of its own. R. J. Rees quotes H. E. Bates :

"The basis of almost every argument or conclusion is the axiom that the short story can be anything that the author decides it shall be." (1973 : 263)

It is impossible to distinguish between a long short story and a short novel. Some modern critics have revived the word 'novella' as a name for the doubtful cases.

Rees further quotes H. G. Wells :

"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. The limits or the human capacity to attend closely, therefore, set a limit to it : it must explode and finish before interruption occurs or fatigue set in". (1973 : 268)

'Critics and literary historians sometimes speak of the short story as though it were something new- a product of the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth' (1973 : 263)

He notices that the importance of plot as an element in the short story has been questioned by some writers and critics in their time. Most ordinary readers as well as most of the great writers of the past, regard it as an essential in the art or story-telling :

"It is displacement of plot as the main element which more than anything else, distinguishes the modern short story from the type of story generally written before about 1910" (1973 : 286).

Rees observes Maugham who thinks that the short story that it is literary convention which is as old as the hills. Its object is of course, to achieve credibility, for when someone tells what he states happened to himself, one is likely to believe that he is telling the truth than when he tells what happened to someone else. It has besides the merit from the short story tellers' point of view that he needs only tell what he knows for a fact and can leave to one's imagination what he doesn't or couldn't know. (1973 : 292)

The American short story writer, Poe, states in the book entitled, *The Short Story in English Literature* of Walter Allen :

"A skillful literarist has constructed a tale. It wise, he has not fashioned his thoughts to accomodate his incidents; but having conceived with deliberate care, he then invents such incidents, he then combines such events, as may best aid him in establishing this preconceived effect. If his initial sentence not to the outbringing of this effect, then he has failed in his first step". (1982 : 6)

Walter Allen further says : "That the relation of the modern short story to the other parallels that of the novel to the romance. In other words, we assume in the short story, as in the novel, that probability and realism, truth to psychology, and to history, are pre-conditions of its being. In fact, as a form it was a later development in prose fiction than the novel, and it arrives more or less simultaneously in disparate literatures, and in English unequivocably in the nineteenth

century'. The short story should be rooted in a single incident or perception that principally differentiates it from the novel. One should feel that it is the reading that is the fruit of a single moment of time, of a single incident, a single perception". (1982 : 7)

According to Barnet, Berman and Burto in their book entitled *An Introduction to Literature* "The modern short story is sometimes criticized for being neither short nor a story. (1961 - 89)

They further states that the modern short story is not an anecdote and is not an abbreviated novel. The novelist usually covers a long period of time, presenting not only a few individuals but also something of a society. He often tells of the development of several many-sided figures. They argue that in contrast, the short-story written having only a few pages, usually focuses on a single figure in a single episode, revealing his character rather than recording his development. They also observe that the revelation in a story is presented through incidents, of course, but the interest commonly resides in the character revealed through the incidents, rather than in the incidents themselves. Contemporary short stories, hence, are necessarily better than older short narratives. (1961 : 90,91,93)

## 1.2 THE SHORT STORY IN BRITISH LITERATURE

A. S. Collins says, in the book, *English Literature of Twentieth Century* (1951 : 263) "The short story was the late development in England. Until about 1890 it had only a casual existence as the occasional by-product of a novelist. In the eighteenth century, Fielding, following the example of Cervantes, had used the short tale as an insertion in a long novel, and a century later Dickens did so too. By 1860, however, in America, France and Russia the short story had become a notable literary form. In America there had been the tales of Edgar Allan Poe, in France those of Balzac, in Russia those of Gogol and Turgenev. In the twentieth century Maupassant and Tchekhov were to have a particularly strong influence on the English short story, but when about 1890 the English short story first showed signs of becoming an important and popular literary form. It was from the originality of Kipling and Wells that its power came, with some indebtedness on the part of Wells to Poe.

Collins points out : 'Individualism indeed marks the first considerable development of the short story in England. The early years of the twentieth century saw the humorous stories by W.W. Jacobs, Kipling, too, had produced a wide variety of short stories, opening up Indian life

more fully, deeply, both human and animal, writing of machines and sea-serpents and many moving and adventurous matters on land and sea". (1951 : 263)

According to him, "Saki applied a highly stylised individual wit to the English upper class, social and domestic scene, and of his very different social scene. Arnold Bennett contributed to the two volumes of short stories. On the whole, the second decade of the century saw the continuation of the earlier tendency to apply an individual power of narrative in an English way, neither influenced by nor akin to the French or Russian examples in any marked degree.

As Collins says, "E. M. Forster's collection of six short stories was another individual experiment for the most part sketches in fantasy of the kind of people and themes of his novels." He adds : "It was in the nineteen twenties that the short story came fully into its own. Then a writer could make himself known entirely as a short story writer. The public had come to recognize the pleasurable existence of the form, and while popular magazines had for some time offered a scope to writers of the more direct story, now a literary periodical gave an outlet to writers of the more Modern Short Story." (1951 : 264)

Of the dominant older novelists of the third decade, Wells and Galsworthy contributed largely to the widespread vogue of the short story. But perhaps above all kinds of short story, the trinity of direction, mystery and horror made the most spectacular advance in public favour. Collins elaborates : "The great appeal of detection, mystery and horror may well have been that such tales provided some escape from the monotonous drabness of industrialised civilisation, offering a wider release than the books and essays of country life whose popularity had a similar origin, but their appeal was to doubt in part increased by the turn which the short story was taking in the hands of those who wrote for the more consciously literary public." (1951 : 265)

"The modern short story often" according to Collins, "very far from being a story in the normal sense, was not for all, and it appealed naturally rather to the younger readers than to their elders and to the literary rather than to the average readers" (1951 : 265). He further informs : "In the thirties, a new generation, both of writers and readers had arrived, a generation whose boyhood or youth had been in the years of the First World War, With their appearance

the new short story, after the example of Katherine Mansfield and A. E. Coppard, took pride of place in the field of the short story". (1951 : 266)

The publishing of short stories was fascinated by the appearance of more periodicals and magazines. Indeed, the writers of the short stories in the nineteen thirties rivalled the new poets in exciting and fecund activity. In addition to those in magazines and periodicals and to collected short stories of single writers, there were many volumes in each of which examples of some twenty different authors' work were to be found, which showed that regional inspiration had passed from the novel to the short story .

B. Prasad, in his book *A Background to the Study of English Literature* (1950 :165) observes : "The short story is a favourite form of present day writing. Many novelists like Arnold Bennett and Hugh Walpole have treated it as a sideline, and Elizabeth Bowen has described it as the obvious medium for the unsuccessful poet. From the time of Stevenson, the influence of the short story has been international. Its popularity has grown and spread to and from England, France, Russia and America. As a youth, Kipling achieved a world-wide success with his tales from India. 'To return to English writers, Kipling was a pioneer in describing life overseas. There was a sharp contrast between the work of this type and that of Oscar Wilde and other writers of the 1890's who concentrated upon the beauties of an elaborate prose style and themes very remote from the problems and possibilities of a materialist industrial civilization.' They studied the art of the short story with great earnestness, but so far as the ordinary reader was concerned, the most memorable work of this decade appeared in a series of quite outside their influence-the world famous Sherlock Holmes stories".

Prasad admits : "In the forties the output of short stories naturally diminished as war interrupted the writing of the younger authors or turned their literary energies into different fields. The nervous tension inside the individual, so characteristic of much modern writing and reflecting so truly much modern experience is intensely presents, together with a sharp sensuous impression of unusual acuteness and rare precision of expression". (1950 : 166)

A. S. Collins comments on the development of Short Story :

"*The Dead*, one of the greatest short stories, the half century was to produce, is typical of the form the new short story was to take.

The short story had grown nearer to the lyric and close to a psychological mood poem. Lawrence in 'The Prussian Officer' volume similarly united poetry and realism, but the fusion is one of the greater passion. But after 1920 the short story entered the atmosphere and influence of the continent, that is to say principally those of Maupassant and Tchekhov. The short story of Maupassant was in tone materialistic and realistic, it did not seek draw its readers affections sympathetically to its characters, it's treatment was clear and logical." (1951 : 260)

He further comments :

"The writer who outstandingly accepted the inspiration of Maupassant was Somerset Maugham, but on the whole, however, much a writer like Bates owed to Maupassant, the English short story evolved much more closely after the kind of Tchekhov. It chose the significant moments in the lives of people, invested them with the appropriate atmosphere, and dealt with them with a notable sensitiveness". (1951 : 260)

He agrees :

"It was natural that women writers should excel in this form with its semi-poetic sensibility. It was natural too that this new form should come into its own in the days of the cinema, with whose technique of the selective psychological spotlight it had much in common. It may be noticed too that it came in the time or a happy rebirth of the essay, with whose technique also it had its similarities, for as the true essay is a patterning of reflection, carefully but unobtrusively controlled, so the short story reflectively, like a prose lyric turning on a single theme'. (1951 : 261)

He points out :

'In Katherine Mansfield's stories, the people were ordinary people,



the bustling husband the dreamy wife, the inhibited young girls and so others. They had their reality as individuals, but it is the total idea of how such a community's life goes from sunrise to night that was Katherine's purpose. So well achieved that it appeared to the reader's inner eye like a perfect example of artistic television". (1951 : 261)

He agrees :

"The first modern short story in English is by Walter Scott, whose fiction marks one of the great water sheds of literature. He was at once the writer of romance in the old style and of novels in the new. He adored the magical, the supernatural, the irrational, all that was sanctified by age and custom. But at the same time he was an extraordinarily acute observer of the behaviour of men in society and men in specific areas of society". (1951 : 262)

