

## **CHAPTER - I**

### **THE THEORY OF SHORT STORY**

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## CHAPTER I

### THEORY OF SHORT STORY

#### **(A) Origin and Development of Short Story :**

Story has been existing since the dawn of the human civilization. Different kinds of stories prevail : stories, tales, fables, parables, anecdotes and folk-tales in different languages in all countries. However, the short story differs from them. Only the common thing in them is story telling. Short story is a story first and then it is a short story. The impulses behind short story and other types of stories are the same viz. (1) The curiosity to know others (2) The desire for self assertion and (3) Love for story telling and listening.

Oral and written stories were found in the ancient times. Initially oral stories existed giving place to written stories. Afterwards such stories were called tales and they occur in *The Old Testament and The New Testament*. Most of the early stories were written in verse. The first short prose stories appeared during the Renaissance period. Its example is Robert Greene's *The Conney Catching Tracts*.

In the beginning of the 18th century short stories began to appear in the periodicals such as *The Tatler*, *The Spectator*, *The Adventurer*, etc.

A short story is a fictional prose form and it has developed besides the novel. The modern short story in its real sense of the term is a work of art. It is distinct literary form from the earlier types of stories. The modern short story originated in the second quarter of the 19th century in America, but its precursors are the earlier tales of adventures, the legends, mythologies, the tales told in the epics like *The Ramayan* and *The Mahabharat* Aesop's *Fables* and Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* etc.

The short story is relatively new literary fictional prose form. It has a brief history of 150 years only. The American writer, Edgar Allen Poe is regarded as the father of the modern Short Story and the publication of his story *MS Found in a Bottle* in 1833 is the first modern short story proper. His stories are known for his skill of his narration and the local colour. His technique was different from the earlier short story literature. E.A. Poe gave his concept of the theory of short story writing in 1842 in his review of Nathaniel Hawthorn's' *Twice Told Tales*, a collection of short stories. The other famous short story

writers in U.S.A. are Ambrose Bierce, O Brierce, Bret, Harte and Henry James.

The short story passed on from U.S.A. to Europe including England. The very well known European masters of short story in different countries are : Guy de Maupassant and Balzac (France), Anton Chekhov and Leo Tolstoy (Russia), Sir Walter Scott and Mrs. Gaskel (England). Indians such as Mulk Raj Anand, Raja Rao, R.K. Narayan etc. have also written short stories in English as well as in their regional languages.

It seems that the extreme machanisation of life due to heavy industrialisation is the root cause of the birth of the modern short story. Readers have no leisure to read longer novels and to witness longer dramas at a stretch in the modern times. Naturally, they depend on modern genre of short story to satisfy their love of the creative arts in one sitting of 15 to 20 minutes. The fragmentariness of the short story suits to the fast life in modern times as an entertainment.

The spread of education for the masses and consequently the rise of the magazines and periodicals helped the development of short story and its popularity in the public. Every magazine required short stories for its

every issue and thus short story became a separate and special feature of every periodical : weekly, fortnightly, monthly and quarterly. The stories in the periodicals provided the kind of entertainment the readers required. H.E. Bates remarks in this regard, “Even today the magazines are full with different short stories”.

**(B) Indian English Short Story :**

The story literature is not new to Indians. Most of the Indian languages including Sanskrit have marvelous treasures of stories. We find the shorter stories in ancient times in *Upanishads*, *Hitopadesha*, *Baital Pachisi*, *Panch Tantra*. The stories are also found in *The Ramayan* and *The Mahabharat*.

The modern western forms of literature came to be practised by the Indian writers in the early 19th century with the introduction of English education in Indian schools and universities. The Indian exposure to British literature brought a wave of literary renaissance in India. Indians adopted and adapted short story form and wrote short stories in English and in Indian languages.

The early collections of short stories written by Indians in English appeared in London in 1885 viz.

*Realities of Indian life* by Shoshee Chunder Dutt and *The Times of Yore* by Shoshee Chunder Dutt and Sourindra Mohan Tagore. Until the turn of the century there were only two short story writers i.e. Khetrapal Chakravarti and Kamala Sattianadhan. *Stories from Indian Christian Life* by Kamala Sattianadhan, a collection of short stories was the first published by Indian short story writer in English.

The Indian English 'short story proper' appeared in the first decade of the 20th century with the publication of Cornelia Sorabji's four collections of short stories. Therefore, M.K.Naik regards that Cornelia Sorabji is the first woman Indian English short story writer.<sup>17</sup> There are some famous short story writers during this period, i.e. S.M. Natesa Sastri, Dwijendra Nath Neogi A. Madhaviah and Sunity Devee.

The Indian English short story matured fully during Gandhian age. The notable contribution to the development of short story was done by the male novelists. T.L.Natesan is its early example. A few short story writers of this period are, A.S.P. Ayyar and K.S. Venkataramani. Apart from these novelists the most significant contribution to the short story was made by the leading novelists such as Mulk Raj Anand, R.K.Narayan and Raja Rao. Over all, the Indian

English writers neglected short story though it is suitable literary form to depict Indian life. Murli Das Melwani states,

“The short story is the most flexible form of writing and thus eminently suited to portray the variety of Indian life.”<sup>1</sup>

Indian women writers' contribution to short story is not found during this period. There are many Indian short story writers in English during the post independence period viz. Bhabani Bhattacharya, Khushwant Singh, Manohar Malgaonkar, Chaman Nahal and Arun Joshi etc. But their short stories were rather by-product of novel writing.

Women short story writers' contribution should not be neglected. They have contributed in a good deal of quantity and quality to Indian English short story. These women writers are from different states having different backgrounds of their regional languages. To cite some of them are : Ruth Pravar Jhabvala, Anita Desai, Shashi Deshpande, Gouri Deshpande, Kamala Das etc. Jai Nimbkar is one of such leading Indian English women short story writers and novelists in Indian English literature.

Jai Nimbkar was born in Pune in the year 1932. She is a daughter of Iravati Karve, internationally well known Indian sociologist. Being also a grand daughter of late Dhondo Keshav Karve, the renowned socialworker and educationalist in Maharashtra who dedicated his whole life for women's education and improvement of women's lives through education. With this legacy, Jai Nimbkar has dealt with so many social issues related to Indian women's lives.

She was educated in Pune and Arizon in U.S. She married to an agricultural scientist. Now she is living in Phaltan in Satara district in Western Maharashtra.

Jai Nimbkar began her career as a short story writer and has written nearly seventy short stories. She has two collections of stories to her credit. *The Lotus Leaves and Other Stories*, 1971 and *Phantom Bird and Other Stories*, 1993. She has now turned to novel writing. She herself states " I have turned almost entirely away from short story after writing about 60 to 70 and now try my hand at novels".<sup>2</sup> The titles of her novels are : (i) *Temporary Answers*<sup>3</sup> (ii) *A Joint Venture*<sup>4</sup> (iii) *Come Rain*.<sup>5</sup>

She is a living writer and continues to write novels even today.



**(C) The Elements and the Parameters of Short Story :**

**Definition :**

The term ‘Short Story’ first occurs in *Oxford English Dictionary* (supplement of 1933). There are available many definitions of short story by the critics and practitioners of short story. H.E.Bates states, that many definitions have been and always are being attempted. Bates gives some such definitions in his book on short story. However, “the short story has never been adequately defined”.<sup>6</sup> Even the short story writers do not agree with regard to the exact nature and scope of short story.

*Oxford Advanced Learner’s Dictionary* defines it as, “Short story is a piece of fiction that is shorter than a novel, especially one that deals with a single event or theme”.<sup>7</sup>

Similar broad definition is given by *New Webster’s Dictionary* as “A short prose narrative usually less than 10,000 words.”<sup>8</sup>

Harry Shaw defines Short Story as :

“A relatively short narrative (under 10000 words) which is designed to produce a single dominant effect and which contains the elements of drama. An effective short story consists of a character (or group of characters)

presented against a background or setting through mental or physical action".<sup>9</sup>

S.K. Kumar quotes Edgar Allan Poe's definition :

"Short Story is a piece of prose fiction which can be read at a single sitting, it presents an artistic and unified impression of life through many devices especially theme, characters, action".<sup>10</sup>

Encyclopaedia Britannica defines short story as :

" A kind of prose fiction distinguished from the novel (roman) and the novelette (nouvelle or novella) by its compression and intensity of effect".<sup>11</sup>

Sir Hugh Walpole's definition is more comprehensive:

"A short story should be a story : a record of things happening, full of incidents and accident, swift movement, unexpected development, leading through suspense to a climax and a satisfying denouement." <sup>12</sup>

### **The Elements :**

The aspects or the elements of short story are : Plot Character, Dialogue setting, theme, narrative technique or point of view. These aspects are common to the other types of stories as well as the novel. Therefore, sometimes a general reader calls novel as a longer short story and short

story as a shortened novel. But this comparison is unreal and surface level because novel and short story are two distinct literary forms and a short story is not a novel cut down.

**(1) Plot :**

The action i.e. events, in the short story are the subject matter of short story. But short story is told in an artistic manner with selecting and arranging the events into a plot with an intention. The short story writer organises the incidents with a definite purpose to present his ideas or picture of life or human experience in a particular way. The short story writer has a small span and space for the development of plot. He immediately plunges into the course of plot and rapidly reaches the end. In the middle of the plot the story points to the approaching end which is surprising, shocking and sudden. Sometimes the end of plot reveals the hidden theme of short story in a flash. The end of the story is considered to be the most important characteristic of short story. The end of short story throws light back on entire structure and gives it a new meaning. There is an unexpected end coming as a shock or a surprise which is called twist ending or ironical reversal of the situation.

**(2) Character :**

There are a limited number of characters in short story and therefore their interrelation is very close and tense. There are two types of characters, major and minor. The minor or insignificant characters are kept in the background or drawn with no details. They are called flat characters which have no growth and change. Short story focuses on major characters. A short story writer tries to go deep in the 'psyche' of some characters that are round characters. They grow and develop in the action. Sometimes they are unpredictable and complex.

**(3) Dialogue :**

The speech of characters in a story is called a dialogue. Dialogues reveal the emotions, moods, intention and attitudes of the characters to themselves or to others. Dialogues help us to narrate several incidents not actually happening in short story. So dialogue is a very good device to report such events and characters' attitudes to readers.

**(4) Setting :**

The plot, the character and action i.e. incidents - all this does not take place in a vacuum. There is a definite physical background to a story against which the characters move and incidents happen. This background is called

setting of a short story. Compared to novel in short story the setting is brief and constant. So the setting includes the landscape, locale, the place, the scene used as active or passive background of the action.

**(5) Theme :**

The short story writer allows the characters to move in the action of story with an intention to suggest something. His efforts may be to arrive at certain conclusion not on characters themselves but as on human experience itself. This may be truth, a principle operating in human experience, some reflection, some moralising or vision of life. This is the theme of the short story. This is the highest purpose of a short story writer as an artist. The theme concerns with the final impression of the story.

**(6) Narration :**

The short story writer uses some narrative techniques. He plans an order of events to create a surprise at the end. He uses different techniques of narration. He may use chronological narration. Sometimes he may use a flashback technique. A flash back technique is that one in which the later events leap into the past to give some meaning to the present. Occasionally a short story writer may use stream of consciousness technique. Its intention is

not just to comment on the events of the past with those of present but its aim is to expose the state of mind of the character by bringing to surface the thoughts and emotions and everything that is floating on the stream of mind. This stream of mind is constantly moving in a zig-zag manner touching the past , present and even the future.

Similarly, the writer accepts a specific point of view to satisfy the need of his narration. It is rather first person point of view or third person point of view. In the first person narration the writer is omnipresent in the story and often it is subjective. But in the third person narration the writer is outside the story and he has objective view of life. This method is author omniscient method. The second method is more popular in short story writing.

### **The Parameters :**

In spite of the common aspects the short story differs from novel on the basis of its peculiar parameters viz. brevity, economy and the singleness of effect. If a short story deviates from these parameters, there is every fear that the short story may cease to be a short story and it may take a shape of a tale or novel. So the main task of a short story writer is to observe scrupulously the above parameters and

it is like dancing on a rope. J.A. Cuddon remarks, "This (short story) is one of the most elusive forms".<sup>13</sup>

The brevity is an important parameter of short story relating to its length. The short story is called short story because it has brevity (shorter length). Its usual norm is that it should be in about 3000 to 6000 words in length. The excellent short stories are written even in 1000 words. The brevity, to be used effectively, implies command over language and control over incidents. In a good short story every word and every incident contribute to the final effect. Some of the definitions of short story cited above refer to its brevity. Joseph Shipley states the importance of brevity in a short story, "This brevity dictates the structure"<sup>14</sup>

The short story strictly allows the parameters of economy. It implies the economy of words as stated in the above parameter regarding length. B. Prasad states,

"The language of the short story should be a model of economy. Every word in it should contribute to its effect".<sup>15</sup>

The economy implies also the economy of incidents and characters. A good short story usually has 2 or 3 characters and a few incidents numbering 4 to 5 with minimum characters passing through minimum incidents. The short story writer effectively shows one dominant personal trait of

a character or a single experience of life or a single moral of life. This is done alone in short story and it is possible due to the small canvas of short story. It is rather a skill to write effective short story with economy.

The most striking parameter of a short story is its singleness of effect. The strength of a good short story is its ability to produce one deep single effect. For doing so the short story writer has to control all the narration from the beginning to the end. This is the singleness of effect. All incidents, all characters, narrative technique, the setting - all these elements should contribute in the end to singleness of effect. It may be in the form of relief or pleasure or shock or surprise or moral teaching, conveying the conclusion of the story or conveying of the theme etc. Other forms also require unity of action but it is the fundamental principle in short story. W.H. Hudson states, "Singleness of aim and singleness of effect are, therefore, the two great canons by which we have to try the value of a short story as a piece of art".<sup>16</sup>

To sum up, the short story is a fascinating form of literature. It operates both on the real and other different levels of experience. It gives many insights into life : personal life, interpersonal life, moral life or socio-



economic life. This form has been developed over the years. It is one of the most effective forms of literature in the modern world.

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## CHAPTER - I

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