

Short Story: A Vehicle for Reflection of Socio-Economic Concerns of the Nation

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Abstract

The history of the short story is as old as human civilization. The parable, fable and folk tale are its different forms and all of them, share their origin and pattern with poetry. After the maturity of the novel as a genuine genre, the descendent craft of the short story writing sprang up from a variety of soil late in the nineteenth century, previously, the short story was assigned an inferior status, mostly recognized as a little piece of literature that an author/writer tossed off between major productions. At present, the prolific writers in this field have considered the modern short story as a complex form, making in depth but lacks in length.

With the advent of literary art, the yearning for tales has acquired new dimensions. The range and scope of the stories has become extensive, wide and universal. Now the writer of short stories endeavours to explore various manifestations of life which primarily include inter-personal relationship, man's association with nature, the learning experiences of life and other social issues. The human relationship continues to be the nucleus of any literary work. In a country like India, anyone, who wishes to be a writer, has to shoulder moral responsibility. The author through his work provides an outlet to his innermost unexpressed feelings and frees his mind from these emotions. Sometimes he brings to the notice of his readers his observations of social and cultural setup, thus performing the role of a social reformer. As a genuine artist the author needs to shoulder the responsibility to interpret life in all its shades and colours for the common man. The prominent Indian practitioner's of short story as a literary form included K S Venkataramani, K Nagarajan, Raja Rao, Rabindranath Tagore, Mulk Raj Anand, Ruskin Bond, R K Narayan, etc.

Keywords: Parable: A simple story to illustrate moral; Prolific: Productive, Fertile; Downtrodden: Oppressed; Zeal: Enthusiasm; Sanity: Soundness of Mind; Pathos: Poignancy, tragedy; Clamoured: Yell, shout loudly; Persistent: Tenacious; Endeavour: Effort

Introduction

Story has always been an area of interest for humans. It has turned out to be a boon for him. It has treasured his memories, crystallized his dreams, and has always quenched his thirst for adventures. It is perhaps the best mode of communication to all stages and ages of life. Finally it has proved itself as a never failing source of joy. The history of the short story is as old as human civilization. The parable, fable and folk tale are its different forms and all of them, share their origin and pattern with poetry. After the maturity of the novel as a genuine genre, the descendent craft of the short story writing sprang up from a variety of soil late in the nineteenth century, previously, the short story was assigned an inferior status, mostly recognized as a little piece of literature that an author/writer tossed off between major productions. At present, the prolific writers in this field have considered the modern short story as a complex form, making in depth but lacks in length.

The short story existed as an oral tradition dates back to the prehistoric times. Since the birth of human civilization, it has flourished as a social art. The various forms of oral and emergence of short story as an apt literary form marks man's slow progress from his animal status. The different types of short stories facilitate us to recreate history and form identity.

Ever since the language came into the existence, nearly all the societies had their myths and legends. Narrate how the universe came into being, how the different civilization have evolved, how the tribes have emerged and sustained through the hard times. In this context, “if asked to cite an example of a story, many people would recall tales from the old testament” or Upanishads or The Jataka Tales. The two great epics The Mahabharatha and Ramayana have provided abundance material for creative writers. While assessing the place of the short story, in modern literature, M. Rama Rao rightly observes,

“we have had in India stories which lie embedded in the hymns of the Rig-veda or scattered in The Upanishads and the epics, the stories which constitute The Panchatantra, The Hitopadesha, The Suksaptati, The Dasakumaracharita and the Vetalanvimsati in Sanskrit, The Buddhist Jataka stories in Pali and a host of similar stories in modern Indian languages.” Although these tales appears funny, their intention is intensely serious. Introducing a collection of Indian short stories, Shiv K. Kumar comments: “Ingeniously conceived and skillfully structures, most of these stories, both about human beings and animals, offer an inexhaustible source of pleasure even to the contemporary reader”

These are the tales of practical wisdom and illuminating commentaries on epic and religious myths. In this context R.K.Narayan says that “every story has implicit in it a philosophical or moral significance and our understanding of the distinction between good and evil.”

The short story has always remained as an informal oral form but later in 19th century the mass middle class literary group emerged in the west, and the periodical market was invented to meet the desires and the preferences of the new reading public. Having realized the readers passion, the short story writers suddenly discovered that they had a new literary form in their hands. The short story writing became full fledged in the middle of the 19th century.

The short story arrived in India at a crucial period in the history of Independence. A massive movement for liberation from foreign rule was raging in the country. The British were reluctant to withdraw easily. The struggling was long and grueling. it

involved, in particular, the imaginative youth and the creative talent of the country. Commenting on the Independence movement, Meenakshi Mukharjee remarks:

“It was an emotional as well as an ideological experience spread over a much longer period of time than any other nationalist movement in history.”

A considerable number of short stories written in Hindi, Urdu and Punjab during the period reflect the struggle for freedom. Our short stories delineated the inhuman attitude of the Raj and the grim fight of the people against it. It took different turns, non-violence here and violence there. It was the story of the common man and his problems. The poverty stricken and the down trodden, the toiling millions and have-nots came to be portrayed and glorified. We have vivid evidence of the exploitation and the despotic rules of the foreigners & also firm determination of the spirited people fighting for their birth right.

The short story became a new tool in the hands of the creative writers to project the men and matters. It lent itself admirably in advocating the cause of the poor, under privileged and the have-nots. The main focus of the short story writer during these years was the freedom movement, No sensitive writer could remain uninfluenced by the mighty struggle launched against the foreign rule. There was various parties and diverse roads but the goal was the same. The short story written in various Indian languages in the nineteen forties reflect the vitality of a people devoted to a noble cause.

India’s contribution to the tradition of short story is quiet exceptional. Even in English language, which is a language entirely alien to them, Indian’s have made significant contribution. Today Indian literature in English is a reality. There was a time when most of English and American critics underestimated Indian writers in English and did not consider them on par with their British and American counter parts. They felt that Indians were unable to express themselves creatively in English as effectively as the native writers since it was not there first language. Hence there could be no spontaneous ‘overflow of powerful feelings’ for them in this language. Now the things have changed considerably and this change altered the narrow outlook of the western world towards Indian writings in English. In this connection, Uma

Parameswaran quotes David McCutcheon, "By a strange irony, Indian literature in English has been flourishing since independence more successfully than it ever flourished before". Indian writers in English have made how made their presence felt in literary world with their novel writings.

After prolonged struggle, Independence came. The foreign power withdrew dividing the country into two parts. During the partition, communal fury caused unprecedented dislocation and misery. Millions of the people migrated from one part of the country to the other, thousands were massacred, women were abducted and raped. Children sprung as spears and property burnt and looted on an unprecedented scale. This frightened mass fury left the sensitive writer stunned. A series of stories were written based on the partition of the country, the havoc it created and plight of the refugees. There was a great deal of strain of despair in the writing of that period. Highlighting the social, political and cultural issues, K.S. Ramamurthy opines:

"The earliest writers like Bankim Chandra, Toru Dutt and Ramesh Chandra Dutt were by no means 'Imitators' but conscious experimenters which were specifically Indian."

Mulka Raj Anand was the most prolific writer of this period. His stories were well received by the common man as K.R.S. Iyyengar remarks: "He is the advocate of the downtrodden and underprivileged."

We find considerable number of Writers who made immense contribution in their own way to this literary genre. Describing the aim of a short story writer Dr C.V Venugopal Opines,"to present an overall satisfying and unifying picture of a vast area, through a general observation of the men and the land, has perhaps been the dominating motive behind every Indian short story writer in english what he wanted in a direct way is to establish a quick rapport with The reader".

Notable among the pioneers in the Indian short stories are K.S. Venkataramani and K. Nagrajan. K.S. Venkataramani had contributed Jatadharan and other stories. Gandhian ideals are clearly visible in his short story. In his search for the new themes he has "renounced the larger world in favour of the inner man and has engaged himself in a search for essence of human living."

His stories are realistic in approach and they exhibit the interest of the author in the social revolution. He exposes the social evils prevailing in the society. For instance, "The Erode Waits" depicts the anxious but futile efforts of Subramania Sastri to find a suitable bridegroom for his daughter.

Rabindranath Tagore did not write any short story original in English. He authored all histories in Bengali but his short stories were translated into English by different writers. He is a typical Indian in his selection of themes and their treatment. He tries to focus on the attention of his readers on the major social concerns of the day. In his short stories, Mulk Raj Anand sympathizes with the downtrodden of society. His zeal for reform through finds full expression in his short stories and attacks the hypocrisy of the people. In a nutshell, the power and strength of Anand's realistic portrayal of men and matters give his short stories a tremendous convincing outlook.

The Secret of RK Narayan's great success as a short story writer lies in the fact that he provides complete aesthetic satisfaction to his readers. He interprets Indian life purely for the 'The art for readers'. In his fiction, the comic vision operates in the form of irony. The close Ironic observation of little incidents of life and a healthy sense of humour coupled with irony and satire are the key elements of his short fiction. Humour and pathos are blended in some of RK Narayan's short stories. In this connection P.S Sundaram rightly observes, "it is his sense of humour, his capacity to see the funny side of even the most tragic situation, his essential sanity and moderation which made the great writer he is". He makes use of wit as a powerful verbal expression deliberately countrywood to create surprising and unexpected effect often resulting in mirth and admiration.

The traditional Indian concept of a community culture that existed for a long period in rural India gradually lost its relevance resulting in the collapse of conventional social structure. Important new issues clamoured to be addressed. The social and the economical backward sections of the society demanded representation as they become a compelling, disturbing and persistent feature of the new economic setup. Thus, the theme of suppression

emerged as a major pre occupations of the writers of the mid twentieth century. The writers endeavored an exploration into the rapid changing face of the Indian social reality and their works vividly depicted the issues of poverty, justice and exploitation.

Conclusion

Man's aspirations and desires have also undergone immense changes resulting in the abundance growth of both physical as well as psychological complexities. So the writer needs to play a pivotal role in the society. He has to interpret the complex and intricate patterns of human psychology. He has to redefine the importance of human relations and keep the question of identity afresh. Thus the short story occupies a prominent place in the literary world. It has traveled across many boundaries of countries to find room in their cultures. It feed us with morals, evokes interest and leaves an indelible impression on the mind of the readers as well as listeners. Hence the short story can be considered as the best method of literary expressions and the most effective genre in the human culture.

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