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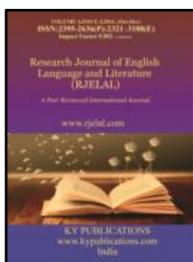
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THE EVOLUTION AND GROWTH OF SHORT STORY

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ABSTRACT



Though short story as a distinct literary genre flourished in the nineteenth century its origin is as old as the human civilization. Story telling was prevalent in the community of human civilization from time immemorial since it was an ideal means of diversion and pastime. The ancestors out of which modern short story grew as a special form of literature are myth, legends, sketches, pictorial essays, folktales, fables, exemplum, anecdotes and so on. These forms of antiquity incorporate the milieu from which short story developed. It is still a developing branch of literary study. A critical enquiry is made in this paper to trace out the development of short story as a special genre of literature.

Keywords: Short story, Genre, Short Fiction, Tale, Folktales, Exemplum

Before going to analyse the development of short story it is convenient to examine the very essence of short story. Literary scholars as well as authors do not reach in a unanimous consensus regarding the definition of short story because of the proliferation and endless experiments of this literary form. In 1942, Edgar Allan Poe while reviewing Hawthorn's *Twice Told Tales* expressed his epoch-making theory regarding the essential perspectives of short story that it is a prose narrative that requires half an hour to one or two hours for its perusal; and it aims at producing a single vivid effect (Cuddon 817). H.G. Wells, himself an eminent practitioner of this literary genre, observes short story in the following terms :

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 of human capacity to attend closely therefore set a limit to

it, it must explode and finish before interruption occurs on fatigue sets in. (Rees 203)

A short story is thus a short fictional prose sketching a single segment of life against the setting of a single incident; and dealing with only few characters for its pointed, sharp and concise effect at end. Like all works of major literary genre a short story corresponds to the five-fold structure: the opening action, rising action, development, climax and an apt denouement. The opening action should be catchy so as to draw the attention of the reader at the outset. Then the action moves forward and draw the highest suspense in the climax; and ends with a satisfying denouement. Chekov an experimentalist of short story objected about the presupposed design of a short story. He dealt with slices of life in which impressions, reflections, moods of characters are sketched. Henry James revolutionary theory "central intelligence" dominates his major short stories in which he analyses the events with an objective personae. James Joyce, by large, portrays the undercurrent of human mind instead of

outward events. So it can be said that the experimentations with the forms of short story are endless and numerous. Somerset Maugham remarks that a short story contains 1600 to 20,000 words. The vast majority of short stories falls within this range. M. H. Abrams observes the affinity of short story with novel:

Like a novel, it organizes the action, thought, and dialogue of its characters into the artful pattern of a plot directed toward particular effect on an audience. And as in the novel, the plot form may be comic, tragic, romantic, or satiric; the story is presented to us from one of many available points of view; and it may be written in the mode of fantasy, realism or naturalism (295).

Short story, like its counterpart one act play, wonderfully serves the purpose of modern world of restlessness and mobility. A short story, in a nutshell, can be said a complete fiction within a narrow space. It is narrative in mode and lyrical in essence. Like a lyric poem, it provides a vivid glimpse of life. With the emergence of the master story teller like Chekov, Maupassant, Henry James the form of short story becomes conspicuously critical and challenging as their unparalleled experiments exert a new way of looking into short story as a distinct genre of literature. H. E. Bates points out that the history of novel can be dated back to two hundred years back when Richardson rendered it a vital shape but the history of short story cannot be traced out (13). The cryptic roots of short story lies in the womb of antiquity in the forms of folktales, fables etc. Folktale and fables existed in the human society from ancient time. A folktale whose authorship is unknown is a narrative in prose transmitted orally (Abrams 105). Fables, legends, fairytales and ghost stories belong to this category. Moral value and poetic justice are often inserted explicitly or implicitly in folktales. A fable is a short narrative either in prose or in verse to convey a moral note. The characters of a fable are animals or non-human creature. It is an allegorical portrayal of life. Fables have great literary merit in the sense that fables endow a poetical or imaginary account of the vital events of life. In literary practice human beings

are presented as animals; and this is not parallel to the fables produced in the primitive society. This genre probably flourished in ancient Greece. *Aesop's fables* (6th century BC) is a landmark in this regard. Anonymous in origin, myths are stories involving supernatural beings or supra-human beings conveying a ritualistic note. It is an imaginary account of the events and probably not true; but which was believed to be true by a particular cultural group. Myths, in a sense, are the primitive people's explanation regarding the significance of life, nature and cosmic forces. Classical writers were fortunate that they had readymade myths, whereas the modern writers invented myth out of older material or from imaginary accounts. Legends differ from the myth in the sense that in legends the protagonists are humans while in myth the protagonists are supernatural beings. According to Cuddon, exemplum is a term used to denote a short narrative to impart a moral lesson (294). The term is mainly used to point out the medieval sermons. Gradually it entered the realm of literature. Chaucer in *The Pardoner's Tale* and *The Nun Priest's Tale* profusely used exemplum. The short narrative - verse as well as prose - is one of the ancient forms of literary study. The east (especially Egypt and India) was the breeding ground of short fiction. The oldest Babylonian narrative like *The Epic of Gilgamesh*, "The War of the Gods", "The Story of Adapa" were in verse which appeared around 2nd millennium BC (Britannica.com/art/short-story). The extant Egyptian tales "The Shipwrecked Sailor" containing a moralistic note that initial struggle in life leads to happiness at end was composed in 2000 BC. In around 1250 BC "The Tale of Two Brothers", rich in folk motifs appeared. The great legacies that India left behind in the development of short stories are The Vedas, *Jataka Kathas*, *Kathasaritsagar* and the two exquisite epics *The Ramayana* and *The Mahabharata*. The Brahmins of Vedas appeared around 900-700 BC. M. Rama Rao aptly observes the dominating role of ancient Indian literature in the development of short fiction:

We have had in India stories which lie embedded in the hymns of Rigveda, or scattered in the Upanishads and the epics, the stories which constitute

the *Panchatantra*, the *Hitopadesha* the *Sukasaptati*, the *Dasakumaracharita* and the *Vetalpanchvimsati* in Sanskrit, the Buddhist *Jataka Kata* in Pali and a host of similar stories in modern Indian languages. (216)

The *Jataka Kathas* deals with religious element as well as with practical wisdom. The carving on the Baharut Stupa, clearly evinced that *Jataka Kathas* dealing with the previous births of Buddha and many religious digressions was produced in third century BC. The *Panchatantra*, one of the world's most favorite books, contains moralistic animal fables. It renders an inherent message that hard work and practical wisdom are necessary in life to achieve success. Another noteworthy collection of short stories *Kathasaritsagar* (Ocean of Stories) written by Sanskrit writer Somadeva contains folk motifs. The *Brihat Katha* of this collection is older than *Panchatantra*. M. R. Anand, one of the versatile authors of India considers this book as a finest specimen of art of story telling. Around 2nd to 4th century BC the narrative form of Hebrew Bible was composed. It contains the stories of Ruth, Jonah, Esther etc. Nearly all the collections of ancient tales were didactic in tone. The early Greek civilization endowed a valuable scope in the development of short fiction. Most of the earlier extant of Greek short fiction was moralizing animal fables. Hesiod, Homer, and the great tragedians of Greek literature borrowed much for their poetical works from Apollodorus of Athens who compiled a handbook of tales around 2nd century BC. Xenophon's *Cyropaedia* that appeared in 4th century BC is probably the first love story in the western literary tradition. The Greeks had much contribution in the development of the romance that is a long form of prose fiction. The analysis of earlier Greek short fictions clearly indicates that the Greeks travelled in the deviated routes from the norms of didactic literature. There was no remarkable work in the earlier Roman literature except Ovid's *Metamorphosis*, a reshaping of popular tales in a thematic context, in the development of short fiction. The medieval and Renaissance periods in Europe were marked by the rapid growth of short fiction though the refinement in its form was not

visible until Chaucer and Boccaccio appeared in the leading role. In the late middle age against the traditional romance and exemplum, there appeared fabliaux and fables as short narratives. The major impetus that exerted in the succeeding writers to come in the development of short narrative was Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales* (1387-1400) and Boccaccio's *Decameron* (1349-1351). Both these versatile writers infused in their works the element of fable, fabliaux, exemplum etc. One of Boccaccio's successors Francho Sacchetti, an Italian writer composed many stories based on ordinary life of man. Two famous writers of short narrative Giovanni Fiorentino and Giovanni Sercambi whose works appeared in the 14th century were very much indebted to Boccaccio. Many of the medieval collections were written with a larger organism that may be called novella. But all resembled to the scope of the short story in a way that they were written with brevity and a point of focus. When William Painter in England collected a large portion of stories from French stories in 1556, the novella was a popular form of study for the Englishmen. His *The Place of Pleasure* (1556-77) adopted the narrative essence of the French; and it resembled to a large extent the form of Italian stories. Around 15th and 16th centuries, Spain had a major role in the development of short fiction. Cervantes's short fiction threw a new light on the scope of short fiction since his was secular rather than didactic themes. The 17th and 18th centuries were marked by the temporary decline of short fiction. In England the Elizabethan short story did not survive due to the counter-popularity of the drama, that was more exciting and sensational than the short story. Besides no writer of comparable genius appeared in the field of short story. Similarly, the development of short stories in the eighteenth century was overshadowed by the rise of the four outstanding novelists Richardson, Fielding, Smollett and Sterne. The nineteenth century is the most fertile period in the development of the modern short story. The modern short story flourished almost simultaneously in United States, Germany, France and Russia. Poe and Hawthorne took the leading role in the growth of short story in United States. In Russia, there appeared the prolific writers like

Gogol, Turgeniev, Dostoevsky and Tolstoy. The eminent French practitioners of this genre were Balzac, Merimee and Daudet. The substantial creations of short story in 19th century, irrespective of country or region, flowed in two different channels: either they were supernatural or garbed with a hue of realism. German writers like E. T. A. Hoffman (1776-1822) and Heinrich von Kleist (1777-1811) who excelled in sketching supernatural and ghost stories rendered the firm foundation to the short story. Kleist sketched the psychological as well as metaphysical predicaments of humans in the face of eerie world. Edgar Allan Poe is attributed as the originator of modern short story. Though he excelled in creating the atmosphere of suspense, a sense of melodrama and dream world, he had drawn much inspiration from the German romantics, Hoffman and American writers Hawthorne and Irving. But it is an acknowledged fact that it was Poe's criticism that gave short story a refined shape. Poe's short stories are the hallmark of mathematical exactness, the atmosphere of horror, hypnotism and morbid psychical state. The imprint of Poe is apparent in many writers of succeeding generation like Arthur Conan Doyle and H. G. Wells. Two remarkable facts contributed largely in the evolution of short story in 19th century: first, there arose a public taste for this newly developed genre of literature, though novels and the longer form of verse were also in vogue; and second, the rise of the magazines in large numbers giving platform to the writers of short story. Poe's stories can be classified as the tales of ratiocination such as *The Gold Bug*, *Muders in the Rue Morge*, the tales of mystery or horror as *The Fall of the House of Usher*, tales of marvellous adventure like *MS Found in a Bottle* (David and Varshney 67). Poe's stories broke the age old convention of didacticism. Alexander Pushkin in Russia was the first notable writer to exploit the realistic short story. Gogol was the real progenitor of modern short story in the truest sense for he observed the common life with its different shades and portrayed it with objective realism. The modern short story deals with the man of common clay; superhuman heroes have little bearing upon modern short stories. Gogol, in this sense, conveyed a valuable service in the

development of short story. Countless writers were indebted to him in formulating realistic short stories. The influence of Gogol is clearly visible in the works of such writers as Coppard, O'Flaherty, Sherwood Anderson, Saroyan and many other writers of modern world. David and Varshney aptly observes that appearing on the literary horizon of America in the nineteenth century Washington Irving (1883-1859) shows himself as an inheritor of the literary tradition of both the classical and romantic period (49). His imitation of the classical writer, his deep concern for form and polished idiom with accuracy levelled him as a classical writer; whereas his love for natural world and fascination for supernatural are the traits of a romantic writer. Yet, Irving was an original and gifted writer. He introduced a peculiar brand of humour and a delicate satire that were new in the domain of short story. The works of Nathaniel Hawthorne, an almost contemporary of Poe, were steeped in moral ideas while Poe's works were dominated by emotional effects. Hawthorne centered his creative pursuit on a single situation and gave the whole tale a unity of impression. Instead of elaboration and portrayal of external events he focused on symbolism and the psychological traits of the characters. His tales are almost allegorical with morals attached, but his attitude towards his material is that of an artist, detached, critical, sceptical. Turgeniev, a noteworthy short story writer of Russia showed a great potentiality in the growth of short story. His collection *A Sportsman's Sketches* (1847-51) was an influential work in the evolution of short story. Its influence was clearly visible in remote England in the works of Conrad, Galsworthy, George Moore, Sean O'Faolain and Arnold Bennet. Tolstoy, too composed a large number of short stories which were infused with great artistic integrity. His remarkable works are *Happy Ever After* (1859), *The Cossacks* (1863), *The Kreutzer Sonata* (1890) etc. The French writers did not lag behind in producing artistic short stories. They were much fascinated in the precise forms of art. Around 1829 to 1831, with the publication of the works of Merimee, Balzac and Gautier, the short story came to the forefront of literary practice. Merimee's important works were *Colomba* (1841), *Mosaique* (1843), *Nouvelles* (1852)

etc. Daudet's stories reflect a broad range of interest and technical dexterity. The short story found its most refined treatment when Guy de Maupassant, a French writer, American Henry James and Russian Anton Chekov emerged with their outstanding short stories. Maupassant's stories envisage the psychological depths and complex motivations of the characters. His works sketched the various spectrum of French society. His remarkable works are "La Folle" ("The Mad Woman"), "La Maison Tellier" ("Madam Tellier's Establishment"), "Le Horla" ("The Horla") and many more. His stories dealt with war, marital infidelity, religion etc. Maupassant is a master of objective short story. Henry James with his impressionist technique in his stories made a lasting contribution to the growth of short story. No other writer so subtly in an objective manner weaves the short story as Anton Chekov does. In Chekov's story nothing important occurs outwardly, yet much is revealed through the characters. His notable works are *A Dreary Story* (1889), *My Life* (1896), *The Lady With the Little Dog* (1899) and many others. In the later half of nineteenth century many short story writers of considerable merit like Melville, Twain, Bret Harte, O. Henry, Stephen Crane, Jack London appeared in the literary scene of America. Britain was somewhat late in producing short stories of true literary merit. Major writers of Britain inclined towards novel as a medium of their artistic thoughts. When Stevenson and Kipling arose in the literary scenario of England short story found a definite ground there. There were the short stories of Meredith and Hardy. But their works resembled much to novel than short story. In Stevenson's stories one can find the elements of picturesque romance and a deep moral analysis. From his pen, the exquisite stories that were created are *A Lodging for the Night* (1877), *The Merry Man* (1882), *Markheim* (1885), *Dr. Jeckyll* (1886) and so on. The most influential figure in producing short stories of artistic merit has been Rudyard Kipling. The works of Bret Harte largely influenced young Kipling. But unlike Harte's mid-Victorian sentimentality he nourished in his works the high romantic enthusiasm. With the production of *The Man Who Would Be King* (1888), *Without Benefit of Clergy* (1890), *On Greenwood Hill* (1890)

Kipling established himself as an artist of local colour. With *The Jungle Books* (1894-1895) he entered in the realm of high romanticism. H. G. Wells went further to broaden the scope of short stories. He anticipated completely the taste of modern world for dream world and scientific fantasy. In Arthur Conan Doyle's stories there is an echo of Wells's technique where fancy is tied to the earthly circumstances, and horror arising out of everyday actions. With Doyle's *The Adventure of Sherlock Holmes* (1892) and *The Memoirs of Sherlock Holmes* (1894) detective stories came in the forefront of literary practice. Thomas Hardy who was a contemporary of Henry James wrote many stories like *Wessex Tales* (1888), *A Group of Noble Dames* and many others. The scope of short stories was developed in England in the later period by the writers like E. M. Forster, W. W. Jacobs, George Moore, Joseph Conrad, Somerset Maugham, Katherine Mansfield and a host of writers of the succeeding generations. In the 20th century, the fundamental way of structuring a short story underwent a major change since the writers of 20th century were more interested in the subtle actions and psychological undercurrent of the characters. In the hands of the writers like Ernest Hemingway or Mansfield short story took a totally different shape because they structured many stories around psychological crisis rather than on physical conflict. Likewise in D. H. Lawrence's stories psychological conflicts envisage the actions. In the 20th century a number of Russian, German and Italian writers enriched the genre. In Russia from Gorki's pen came the beautiful stories like *Twenty Six Men and a Girl* (1899), *The City of the Yellow Devil* (1906). In Italy too, the short story became an established genre in the 20th century. The eminent practitioners of short stories in Italy in the 20th century were Carlo Gadda, Mario Soldati, Alberto Moravia and Cesare Pavese. German writers were also prolific in this genre. The distinguished writers of the 20th century Germany were Anna Seghers, Luise Rinser, Heinrich Boll and Wolfgang Borchert. Short story attained a most revitalising form when two internationally acclaimed writers of Spanish America Luis Borges and Gabriel Garcia Marquez produced many unparalleled stories. Borges devised a new form of

short story that can be said story -essay. His themes and technical dexterity are idiosyncratic and highly finished. India has also produced the short story writer of dazzling brilliance. Mulk Raj Anand, R. K. Narayan, Raja Rao, Manjeri Isvaran and the contemporary writers portrayed the various shades of Indian society. Short story has come a long way since its inception. We have still to wait to know in which direction this elusive literary genre flows before formulating any final conclusion since the experimentations on the part of newly arising prolific authors open new vistas of critical enquiry among the scholars.

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