

## **The Indian English Short Story: A Historical Perspective.**

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### **Abstract**

Literature is closely related to society. It reflects society and the Socio-Economic conditions of our lives. It also reflects as well as shapes the complete ways in which ideas and material conditions intersect the way men and women organise themselves, their interpersonal relationships and their perception of the socio-cultural reality. Literature is a product of and in particular moments of history. From the historical perspective, Indian English Literature has passed through several phases such as Indo-Anglican, Indo-English Indian Writing in English and recently Indian English Literature. Now it is a part of common wealth, literatures in English. This new literature in English is regarded as an important component of World Literature. In spite of diverse, cultures, races and religions, it has created a widespread interest both in India and abroad.

**Key Words: Society, History, Component, Investigation, Experience, Phenomena, Embodiment, Situation, Harmony, Narration, Dominant, Disillusionment, Consciousness, Custom, Tradition.**

### **Introduction:**

This article or abstract constitutes a comprehensive and upto date investigation into the origin, growth and expansion of Indian English Short Story which is commonly regarded as a leisurely offshoot of Contemporary Indian Fiction in English.

Indian-English short story has not been able to make such heading in the literary world. It has always been treated casually by writers, resulting in the neglect of the genre. It is also be called as a by-product of Indian English fiction because both fiction and short

story are the kindred branches of literature related to each other as the big and small sisters to their parents. Indian English fiction originated in the twentieth century, Indian – English short story cannot be thought of earlier than this time. The short story is a simpler and more popular form of communication and is deeply rooted in our Indian tradition which used to give us folk-tales, and fables from the earliest times. This tradition has always been enriched by oral as well as written tales. It is as old as Indian society and culture. When in comparison to the novel which is expensive, complex and epic, the short story is essentially, intensive, lyric, fixing out attention on small but brilliantly perceived parts of human experience. In the hands of a master the short story can both be a means of telling a good story tersely and of producing an affect and of conveying a kind of philosophy of life.

The earlier short story writer's of India had found their source of inspiration in the ancient tales of the Panchatantra and the Buddhist Jataka Tales which are dialectic in tone, gripping in narration and epigrammatically in structure. These works may be called as “*Best Fables*” in which animals symbolise human beings and their virtues or vices. There is another variety of tales known as ‘*Folk Tales*’ in ancient India which are preserved in the *Katha Sarit Sagar* and the *Dasha Kumaracharitan* of the noted Sankrit author, Dandin. Besides the ancient Indian tales are also found in several *Upanishads* and *Puranas* (like the *Bagvata* and *Brahmanda* and in the well known epics called *The Ramayana* and the *The Mahabharata*. The Jains have also contributed to this genre and added works like the *Padma Purana* by Ravisena and the *Mahapurana* by Jinasena and *Gunabhadra*. One can say that all these works provided stimuli and motivations to Indian short-story writers. H.E. Bates has remarked that it can be anything from a prose-poem without plot or character to analysis of the most complex human emotions and that it can deal with any subject, from a death of a horse, the loss of a cloak, to a girl's first love-

affair. The theme may be ‘anything’ but it must be presented in such a manner that it carries the impression of being ‘unified’ and ‘whole’ in a limited sense. H.G. Wells correctly declare that a short story has to be read within twenty minutes.

A short story is the best answer to recognise it by the brevity, economy, short length. However a more serious attention to this genre acknowledges that it is relatively a short narrative (under 10,000 words) which is designed to produce a single dominant effect and which contains the elements of drama. A short story concentrates on a single character in a single situation at a single moment. A short story exhibits unity as its guiding principal. However the traditional notices associated with the short story are continuity and design, presentation of psycho analysis – the obvious results of a tension ridden age, enveloped in ‘discontinuities and ‘disillusionments’. According to A.Walton Litz, the hallmarks of a well made story are consisting of style, rationality of structure and steadiness in view point.

To add, the Indian short story writer in English is an inheritor of British legacy by such eminent practitioners of O.Henry, John Galsworthy, Somerset Maugham and Rudyard Kipling who themselves were greatly inspired by the French author Maupassant. The fact that the Indian short story writer in English began its work under the impact of the west and that slowly yet steadily spread the wings to incorporate the charms of a finished form and a natural prose style.

Thus began the history of Indian – English short story towards the close of the nineteenth century with the publication of *Kamala Sathianadan’s Stories from Indian christian Life*. In this genre some sporadic writings were done to arouse national consciousness, to effect social reforms or to have moral and philosophical brooding. Amongst those who cultivated this form in the early stages were K.S. Venkataramani and K.Nagarajan, while Venkataramani contributed two collections of short stories under the

titles *Paper Boats (1921) and Jatadharan and Other Stories (1937)* Nagarajan gave us a single volume called *Cold Rice (1945)* Besides these two, a third important author of the early Twentieth Century was Rabindranath Tagore, an internationally known literary personality who wrote his short stories mostly in Bengali and himself translated into English Language. Some of his popular stories are “The Cabuliwallah, “Subah”, “The Postmaster”. Moreover writer like S.K.Chettur and G.K.Chettur excelled in producing short fiction to evoke the sense of awe and strangeness including the super natural.

In mid-thirties of the twentieth century saw the publication of a genuine artistic in this genre, and it is Mulk Raj Anand’s *The Lost Child and Other Stories* which proved to be an immediate success. With Anand begins the era of big names, such as Manjeri Isvaran, R.K. Narayan, Raja Rao and Khushwant Singh. Anand is with the poor and the downtrodden, voicing the concerns and predicaments of the lower classes in our society and siding with the lost ones and the sufferers. The humanism of Anand is so evident in his short stories and he lashes at the lies shams and hypocrisies of the people with relentless vigour and robust satire. The social injustices and the high blow prejudices move him most and he forcefully ventilates his strong feelings against them, as may be gathered from his stories like “*The Old Watch In His Long Short Story “Lament on the Death of a Master of Arts”*”, Anand takes a satire to hit at the rotten and inhuman social customs and conditions – the proud parents, the child marriage the stubbornness of the elders, hypocrisy, insanitation, cruelty in education and so many other things.

Another notable writer is Raja Rao who has a different make-up both in his novels and short stories. He is a soberer and more serious in evolving a proper atmosphere for the flowering of Indian thought and tradition. He works mostly on social and political scenes around him with a natural ease and philosophical resignation. Though he is not so prolific writer as Mulk Raj Anand or R.K.Narayan, he has certainly made a mark in the

genre under reviewed with his two collections, known as *The Cow of the Barricades of Other Stories* (1947) and *The Policeman and The Rose* (1978) both published by the Oxford University Press. Raja Rao goes to the folk-tales and the epic legends to evolve a form of her own with all the simplicity and credulity of a myth maker. He often writes on such subjects as the popular myths, national upsurge and rural characters. As a short story writer the real charm of Raja Rao lies in his profundity of vision and in his deep rooted Indianess. He appeals to us for his unflinching narrative technique – as though the tale has gushed forth from a dark, deep cavern and his masterly handling of the English language.

The next in the order of merit comes Manjeri S. Isvaran who “occupies a conspicuous place among our pioneers.” Having published about ten volumes Indian writer who confines himself to the life of a low and middle classes in the erstwhile Madras state now known as Chennai. In his tales he observed fidelity to facts and his own experiences. He manages to write skillfully from different angles on a wide variety of subjects. In a true sense he is the most powerful story teller who is equally at home in narrative and dialogues.

Among the most popular short story writers Khuswant Singh is a short story writer of free India and he made his debut in this form with the publication of his work “*The Mark of Vishnu & Other Stories*” (1957), *A Bride for the Sahib & Other Stories* (1967) and *Black Jasmine* (1971) These four volumes greatly consolidated the position of Khushwant Singh as a short story writer of outstanding merit. He comes down heavily with which is repugnant, repulsive and hypocritical and highlights the inherent evils of a democratic system of Government in which elections play a dominant role, but these elections are often won by hardcore criminals like Ganda Singh at the cost of deserving candidates like Baba Ram Singh in his short story “*The Voice of God*” V.A. Shahane has rightly pointed

out that “The predominant quality of Khushwant Singh as a short story writer is his comic spirit informed by the sense of incongruity and by the bewildering phenomena of contradictions in life”.

In addition to the above mentioned established short story writer, there are some other memorable literary personalities of yester years. Here we can mention the names of K.A.Abbas, G.D. Khosla, Bhabani Bhattachary, Chaman Nahal and Ruskin Bond. They have contributed in their genre. K.A. Abbas is a well known name in the film industry but he has also created a place of himself in the niche of Indian English short may by dint of his five collections. His two volumes “*Blood and Stones of Other Stories*” (1947) and “*Cages of Freedom of Other Stories*” (1952) treats the political issues whereas his works like “*Rice and Other Stories*” (1947) and “*One Thousand Night on a Bed of Stones and Other Stories*” (1957) highlight some of the glaring social evils of the society.

G D Khosla is also a short story writer in English who gives us a peep into the multi-faceted personality of Mother India through his wide ranging themes. His characters are both types and individuals and portrays them with sensitivity and objectivity. All walks of people from rickshaw pullers to businessmen, from film heroines to defiant loving ladies, all find a berth in his creative world with his four volumes. “*The Price of a Wife*” (1958) “*The Horoscope cannot lie of Other Stories*” (1961) “*Grim Fairy Tales and Facts and Fancies*” (1966) and “*A Way of Loving & Other Stories*” (1973). Steeped in humour and realism, khosla earned an abiding place for himself at the social evils like untouchability and ill-matched marriage.

Ruskin Bond and Manoj Das are also the redeeming figures for contemporary Indian English Short Story. Stragenly, some Indian English poets have also experimental with the short story form and Margaret Charterjee, K.N. Daruwalla and Shiv K Kumar are the significant names in this direction.

While undertaking the historical perspective study of the great Indian short story writers in English, Anita Desai deserves a befitting companion with George Eliot, Thomas Hardy and George Meredith because she is an adept in creating an atmosphere through the use of words and mechanism of setting that even ordinary looking events become live with the feelings the writer really wants to create. If her novels are psychological studies on a macro level, her short stories are certainly and micro one. If Sita, the protagonist in “*where shall we go this Summer?*” is a psychological study on a big scale, par in “*Scholar and Gipsy*” a famous short story name “*Pinapple Cake*” is the portrayal of the pessimistic mood of victor on the one side, and the ironic and worldly behaviour of Mrs.Fernandez, on the other. “*Private Tuition*” gives an insight into the teacher’s psychology of Mr.Bose, who does some ridiculous acts in the presence of his pupils. “*A Devoted Son*” studies the attitudinal consent between the father and his son, Dr.Rakesh, the son, thinks quite differently of old age from what his father does “*The Farewell Party*” is a study of the sentimentality of the Romans’.

Her sketches of full grown men and women too are quite convincing but her treatment of good through these characters is more appealing than that of vice Her stories may have a then substance, but even there is certainly the substance, the elixir of life that sustains us.

Another most popular writer who occupies a prominent place in short stories of lighter vein and style is R.K.Narayan, without allowing his stories to b lose in structure, he ends most of them on a happy note. R.K.Narayan usually fixes his gaze on those aspects of an incident or a character which are appealing to him. He is a fine partner of the ludicrous and the humorous in his stories like, “*Attila*”, “*Engine Trouble*” and “*An Evening Gift*”.

R.K.Narayan has written more than four score of short stories, and they are included in the collections. “*Malgudi Days*” (1941) *Dodu and Other Stories* (1944) *An Astrologer’s Day and Other stories* (1947) *Lawley Road* (1956) *A Horse and Two Gouts* (1970) and *Old and New* (1981). Out of his short stories of good number of them are based upon the principle of simple irony of circumstance unfolding to his readers the pleasure of discovery or surprise.

The setting of all his short stories is in the imaginary small town of Malgud in South India – a place representing the world in miniature. As a creative artist, much of the finest achievement of Narayan has been in the comic rather than the tragic mode. The short stories of Narayan are readable due to their quality of finish and the role played by irony in them. He is an embodiment of the comic spirit and the eccentricities of his characters are quite fascinating. He treats his characters deafly and deceptively. We find almost no satirical portrayal of his characters in his works and when satire is expected, one can find mild comedy Narayan’s ironic vision of life is due to the fact that he is fully aware of the irremediable incongruities with which life is constantly confronting us. All the short stories of R.K.Narayan have got a clear out technique, they are compact and neatly structural.

Thus as a short story writer, Narayan’s real strength as a stylist lies in his strong ironic sense. His fiction and stories are examples of the harmony of style with subject. Regarding his style in narration. Narayan seems to be at his strongest. He is quite competent in the presentation of his dialogue. But at his best, Narayan “succeeds in turning his every limitations into artistic assets” and deserves the rank of universally acknowledged master pieces.

**Conclusion:**



To conclude a cursory glance at the Indian English short story convinces the readers that it has traversed a long course of journey (nearly of one hundred years) and has now reached a stage, through the salutary efforts of a few talented writers where it can make a break through by exploring certain new areas and techniques. The short story has made some headway and has become truly Indian after shaking off the initial foreign influence. The short story witness have come to realise that their own tradition of both folk-tales and fables has been rich enough to feed and support them in moments of necessity and that they have just to look around for their keen and lively subjects to which they have tailored their modern techniques. This shows that the modern Indian short story in English has grown in variety and vitality, and credit for this mainly goes to a few gifted writers.

Our writers have unquestionable added variety of theme and diversity of technique to this art form, but they have yet to rise above and cultivate the qualities of brevity, economy and signification in their works in order to be able to complete with the international masters of the genre that is Maupassant, Henry James Hemingway and Katherine *Mansfield*.

Indian short story in English has to make cautious moves, and has to strive constantly to arrive at a safe destination. For this, it will have to overcome its deficiencies and evolve fresh measures of invigoration and energisation. One has to wait and watch for a better future of the short story, realising the truth that “The best is yet to come”

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