



THE STORY OF SHORT STORY

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The Short Story is a favourite form of present-day writing. The Story of short story became the chief literary food of millions of readers and established itself as a favourite art form in modern times. The aim of Short Story is to educate and entertain the readers. It is a pastime to people of all walks of life, to a child, to old people, to men and women in leisure times.

Short story is one of the most popular and a recognized literary form, the nature of which is implicit in the words comprising its name. The Short Story however, is a story that is short. A short story involves narration of series of events or simple incidents involving individuals in mental or physical activity one after the other. According to M.H. Abrams, "A Short Story is a brief work of prose fiction, and most of terms for analyzing the component elements, the types, and the various narrative techniques of the novel are applicable"¹. Thus like all fiction, it portrays different incidents and its success depends on the immediate understanding between the reader and the subject portrayed. Short story, however, cannot affect the immediacy by means common to the novels, such as leisurely characterization, detailed description and repetition. Instead short story has to portray with mirror swiftness and completeness. For this reason, the short story is most powerful through graphic narration. That is, the subject matter can be simple, realistic and least restricted of all the literary forms, for its length permits treatment of subjects.

The evolution of the Short Story began before man could write. The early story teller aid himself constructing and memorizing tales, often relied on stock phrases, fixed rhythm and rhyme.

1. M.H. Abrams: *A Glossary of Literary terms*. (Bangalore, Prism Books Pvt. Ltd., 2004), p.286



... the desire to listen to stories appears to be as deeply rooted in the human animal as the sense of property. From the beginning of history men have gathered round the campfire or in a group in the market place, to listen to the telling of a story¹.

It is in the Twentieth Century that short story became popular, though it is one of the oldest form of literature. In the oldest literature, story first appeared in *Histories* of Herodotus (C 480 – 425 B.C.) a historian. He had no idea of the short story as an art form. His *Histories* contain many readable tales and these show him as a master of simple, direct story telling. Next, in The Bible, *the Old Testament* is full of short stories, from which many writers extracted and imitated because of the excellent stories it contains.

In English literature, *the Canterbury Tales* of Chaucer, were short story in verse and In Italy the Boccaccio's *Decameron* in prose, both written in the fourteenth century, show how individual creativeness could breath life into a form that were already the heritage of short story. These drew freely from the great spontaneous stream of story telling that started with human history and flowed from the East through the continent and into England.

With the advent of science and brisk style of living the need was felt for a simple prose style blended with new directness and simplicity. The apt examples are Ren'e Descartes' *Discourse on Method* (1637) and John Locke's *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1690). These tendencies regenerated the novel, but the short has been buried too long to be quickly resurrected. In America with Nathaniel Hawthorne the short story gained consciousness, chiefly because he saw it as a means to question and probe as well as to portray aimless scene and character. Hence his plots lightened into allegory, by which the could represent ideas in terms of concrete symbols. The short story shares the

1. As quoted by R.J. Rees: *English Literature, An introduction for Foreign readers.* (Madras, the Macmillian India Ltd., 1993), p.203



usually constituents of all fiction – “ ... plot, character and setting”¹. some times one of the three elements may Pre dominate over the other two.

Short story as a form or genre is a product of the Nineteenth century. This mainly due to increase of literacy in Britian and America after 1800, created a demand for periodical literature of all kinds. Its immense vogue is the result of many co-operating causes; among them, the rush of modern life, naturally afforded for tales that can be completed in a single sitting and enormous development of the magazines.

Edgar Allen Poe in 1842 in a magazine *The Definite Review* established short story as an independent form because of its brevity, consequent emotional intensity and unity. According to him the short story is “ ‘The prose tale’ as a narrative that can be read at one sitting of from one-half to two hours and that is limited to a certain unique or single affect”². He expounded certain fundamental principles of short story regarding its technique. According to Poe, the short story must be of moderate length as to be read in one single sitting ; must not contain one word that in meaning or tone fails to point to that preconceived effect and must convey the impression finality. W.H. Hudson opines “ 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”³. When writers were relieved of the existing restriction of formal plot, which is regarded as traditional form, they were free to give to the short story a more significant content than it had ever before receive and by applying the technique of abstraction and implication they achieved a higher degree of individuality. The horrible, the psychopathic, the fantastic and the mad are the aspects of life which appealed to Poe’s imagination. Poe’s *Credo*, aims at singleness and totality of effect.

1. B. Prasad : *A Background to the Study of English Literature*. (Madras, Macmillian India Ltd., 1992) p.163
2. M.H. Abrams: *A Glossary of Literary terms*. (Bangalore, Prism Books Pvt. Ltd., 1994), p.158
3. W.H. Hudson : *An Introductions to the Study of Literature*. (Calcutta, Radha Publishing House, 1982) p. 340



Henry James is universally accepted master of short story writing James approach is very simple. “*The Turn of the Screw*” is a long-short ghost story and all his characters are ordinary men and women of day-to-day world.

Short stories and short novels began to appear in the last phase of nineteenth century. Major British writers and novelists turned to short stories as they felt some themes are better suited to short story. Rudyard Kipling is a major author and one of the great master of short story writing. He wrote the hundreds of short stories which appeared in book form like *Plain Tales from The Hills* (1888), *Soldiers three* (1888) and *The Phantom Richshaw* (1888). Joseph Conrad came out as a successful English writer learning English as foreign language and wrote a number of short stories. *Heart of Darkness* is a long short story, H. G. Wells’ *The stolen Bacillus and other Incidents* (1895) is his collected stories which seems to be known as parables. He widened the field by applying his imagination to scientific discovery. Somerset Maugham produced collection of shorts of public interest.

The next important writer is D.H. Lawrence, who invented of new type of story in which the plot is always a secondary importance and what matter is situation or atmosphere or sensuous evocation of nature. In the modern short story the displacement of plot as the chief element is the only difference of stories generally written before 1910. Readers can find a follow up of Lawrence’s style in writing stories in the works of James Stephens, Caradoc Evans, Fran O’ Conner, H.E. Bates and Katherine Mansfield. H.E. Bates was able to produce the best short stories on signification themes with new techniques like point of view and stream of consciousness. In *The Mower* Bates had the power of creating earthly characters like Lawrence.

Katherine Mansfield, played a vital role in the evolution of short story. She became the remarkable short story writer of her generation, for her themes of small incidents of everyday life like some personal meeting or conversation—and remarks the scene and the atmosphere usually in a space of few pages. Children appear in many of her stories In *the Voyage*, the simple narration given through child’ eye, makes Katherine Mansfield one of the best and most typical story writer.

The early Practitioners of short story in America were Washington Irving, Hawthorne, O Henry and Poe. Sir Walter Scott and Mary Shelley in England and Gogol, Pushkin, Chekhov and Turgenev in Russia. This form has flourished well in America and its master include Mark Twain, William Faulkner, Katherine Anna Porter, J I Powerts, J.D. Salinger, and Johan Cheever.