



Reflections of Social Elements in Indian Short Stories

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Abstract

The short stories as a genre accommodate separate and specific expressions in a more precise and apt way. The various forms of events that come through and culminate are important as the techniques and themes that become a nature and find themselves set in the intricacies of a particular community and society. The present paper observes the domestic nature and universal prevalence of thematic confluence of Indian short stories in retrospect and in their present prospect with their richness that exemplifies the themes such as humanity, love, violence, isolation in the face of trying situations that test their resilience and courage. Fakir Mohan Senapati, R. K. Narayan, Anita Desai, Shivprasad Singh, Usha Priyamvada, Bhishma Sahni, and Banu Mushtaq have quite brilliantly produced an array of characters that has formed a creative niche abundant in the richness of life. The selected stories apart from representing different languages quite brilliantly showcase the society at various junctures in the lives of the characters and champion the common lives.

Keywords - Short Story, Indian Society, Indian Literature.

Introduction

Indian literature is a reservoir of human anecdotes with a wide range of experiences, nonhuman entities referring to their interconnectedness with the other life forms. Indian literature through many stories enunciates and reiterates all the things that are human and highlights the big, complex strenuous nature of life in all its beauty and homeliness. We have stories that predate the

modern times and their persistence throughout the various periods with differing contexts, big and small ingenuities underlying the true sense of being and collective individuality of society.

The genre of stories is an interesting and humanistic apprentice to life as the characters in the stories take hold of one's thought and mind and provide the humour and insight in the intricate web of inner self. The characters as they are called are often flawed and fulfilling but in an entertaining and satisfying manner. The way of thoughtfulness is sustained by some serious criticism of life in a manner which often appears to contradict wisdom and clouds judgment with human emotions. The Indian literary scene is amply influenced by folk tales that have often found themselves in the form of short fiction. It is a fascinating subject to discuss and explore with a treasure as rich as the melange of abundantly beautiful cultures of India. The world becomes a slightly better place when we sip a taste of stories and folklore that emanates from the lives as human as ours and merge in our being. The complexity of variables in different cultures also creates a sustainable environment in these stories for they are as varied as hardships one experiences in their lives. The facts are often superseded by their inherently transient social norms which pressurise all the human bits out on forefront. A few suspended moments are able to form stories as rich as one's psychological proceedings. The writers have been able to get their stories out in the open with a reception as disproportionate as the happiness one waits for in their life.

Background/ Literature Review of Short Stories

Short stories and fables have been present for centuries in various forms, such as Scheherazade, Boccaccio's Decameron, Arabian Nights and the Canterbury Tales, along with the Bible, subplots in dramas and novels, satires, and pamphlets, sagas, narrative poems, essays, journalism, the span of short stories is extensive and has been ever satisfying. American Writer Edgar Allen Poe, states that a short story is a narrative that "can be read at one sitting." The finest contemporary short stories exude a sense of intrigue and captivating depth—a layered complexity that eludes straightforward analysis. Poe, perhaps unwittingly, managed to do this at times, Herman Melville while crafting stories—he asserted that he wrote them solely for financial reasons. The Piazza Tales (1856), including "Benito Cereno" and "Bartleby the Scrivener," that the modern short story reaches a significant maturation, remarkably swiftly. In Melville's narratives, one can observe the initial true representations of the peculiar influence of the short story.

Aesop's Fables, Ovid's Metamorphoses, Boccaccio's Decameron, the Indian stories Jataka, Panchatantra, and Somadeva's Katha-Sarit-Sagara are some of the forerunners of the short story. After 1920, English-language Indian short stories were systematically produced in India. People were influenced by Gandhi's ideas throughout that era of Gandhian philosophy. In 1926, Shankar Ram penned the tale "The Children of Kaveri." He portrays Indian issues such as the caste system, poverty, and superstitions. His second noteworthy tale, "Creatures of All Show," was composed in 1933. The authors of the short stories concentrated on pressing concerns facing India. K.S. Venkatramani, K. I Nagarajan, and A.S.P. Ayyer were social reformers. Gandhi had a strong effect during this time, and ideas for national movement freedom were initiated forcefully. The short story in Indian English has been successfully expanded and is joyfully accepted. The greatest continental short stories provide ample proof of their technical and thematic development as well as their certain fluency in using the English language.

To paraphrase Isaac Bashevis Singer, a short story should have a beginning and an end, and there should be some feeling of what will happen at the end. It has a classic expectation that the endings of short stories symmetrically resolve the original seed of the plot. We read stories forward and expect endings to provide a certain conclusiveness to a course of action plotted from the beginning. Despite that expectation, major effects, such as poetic justice, comic relief, or tragic fulfillment, can seem to arrive out of nowhere, or from surprising quarters. (Kahn, Andrew) In Truman Capote's words, "When seriously explored, the short story seems to be the most difficult and disciplining form of prose writing extant. The tales tell a lot in a few words. Despite that, a tale holds the power to move perceptions and mindset. The plot of stories are more engaging with the intricate levels of awareness and the reaction they entail for their resolution, the rhetoric becomes complicit along with the language and purpose of the writer."

Themes in select Indian Short Stories

The short story in English language found great expression through Rabindra Nath Tagore, a multidimensional personality who was an artist, writer, poet, a painter and a musician. His stories are a testament of humane and creative art's value and its ability to strike the balance between reality of life and imaginative illusions that one harbors. Rabindranath Tagore presents a distinct and unique set of characters in his writings as his stories.

Fakir Mohan Senapati, an Odia writer of short stories presents a nuanced outlook along with a blend of the comic and fantasy, and reality clad life in his story, *Ananta, the Widow Boy*. This is the story where he has given an ethnic description of two communities. One *Gola* caste, a pastoral community whose occupation is herding the cows or buffaloes and here the story deals with the buffaloes that do not remain in the house but outside the village. Here the buffaloes are living in a jungle as those days most of the villages had village forests. The diction of the story captures the very mind and spirit of the reader with a tenderness and determination that calls for further probing and engagement in the rustic life of Subal Mahakur. The magnanimity of Devaki's life scrolled across the patches of complicity with her husband, the crescendo of their life when her husband, Subal Seth takes over as Seth, the chief herdsman and the final role he accepts as a Personal attendant of Sahib with yet another title- Subal Singh- unravel the interesting legacy he leaves behind. With each new title of her husband, Devaki adopts the power that each position brings along with itself. The pride and joy she lavish upon her son, Ananta forms something of a special bond between mother and son. The innocent, quirky and amusing nature of Aananta built up a reputation that people welcomed with all their heart as it pleased people in a good sense. Fakirmohan has created many characters in his stories and novels but Ananta is the most selfless and pro people hero. Here he carries the epic tradition where heroes do die. This has influenced his writing style. He belongs to the Golla caste; the caste has a number and financial strength to fight the hegemony of the upper caste. They fought in Kendrapara in the early 20th century against the domination of Brahmins and Khandayata and Karans by wearing thread which resulted in clashes between them. They fought against the bethi system imposed by the caste system that they had to carry the Palkis where these upper caste people used to sit. They succeeded in the whole state. They are in urban and rural areas. Here the story of Ananta makes us have a progressive sensibility of a person and his mother supports his adventurous activities.

R. K. Narayan's short story, '*A Pair of Mustachios*' is a perfect specimen of comedy, satire, and realism with an exquisite probe into post independent Indian society. '*A Pair of Mustachios*' is a thought-provoking story told in a humorous way by Mulk Raj Anand. It focuses on false motives of people to which they attach themselves to appease their false sentiments. The story tells about the types of mustachios popular in our country. In the second part, the writer tells us a person's false

notions about his decency. Whatever the type be, one thing is certain that it symbolises one's pride and prejudice. The lion mustache symbolises one's pride of Maharaja type sentiment. Man with such a mustache always tries to pose himself to be Raja, Maharaja, Nawab or a great emperor. The tiger type mustache symbolises the ranks of the feudal gentry who have nothing left but the pride in their neatness and a few mementos of past glories. Then there is goat mustache worn by the commercial bourgeoisie and the shopkeeper class. Charlie Chaplin mustache is for lower middle class, clerks and professionals who are of compromising nature between the traditional full mustache and the class-shaven. Curzon-cut mustache is often worn by the sahibs and the barristers. Some other types like sheep mustaches are worn by coolies and the lower order while the mouse mustache is worn by peasants. It has often been seen that there is a tendency to prove oneself superior to others on the basis of the style of mustache. The writer presents an interesting story as it satirises the false notion of the people. There was a grocer-cum-moneylender named Ramanand in the village. He was carrying brisk business. His goat mustache was a mark of his position. But his mustache was trimmed in such a fashion at the tips that they look nearly like a tiger mustache. Nobody seemed to mind it. Khan Azam Khan, a middle-aged handsome and dignified person claimed himself to be a descendant from an ancient Afghan family which handed noblemen and councillors in the court of the great Mughals, with a tiger mustache came to Seth Ramanand. Azam Khan always. He had come to Seth to pawn his wife's gold nose ring. He noticed the upturning tendency of the hair of Ramanand's goat mustache. So first he asked Ramanand to turn his mustache down. After a little discussion the veteran Seth did as Khan wanted. Khan was still not satisfied because he saw Seth had tricked him by lowering only one side of his mustache. Khan wanted the other side to be down also. To see the symbol of his honour imitated by a grocer was too much for him. The moneylender said that he would not do so even if Khan pawned all the jewellery he possessed. Khan was ready to sacrifice all his possessions, positions, pots and pans, his clothes and even his house just to see the grocer's mustache down. The grocer was ready to accept the bargain in the prospect of earning money with a shrewd manner. Azam Khan lost everything just to appease his false feudal sentiments. Thus, Narayan's stories provide a niche adaptable to common yet crucial accentuation of social issues with a comic flavour that blooms perfectly in rural settings with lively characters.

Ek koi Doosra (To That Other One) a short story by Usha Priyamvada, strikes and amplifies the experiences of love, affections and the slight these emotions become when faced with conflict and inner struggle and identify the challenges of raw emotions felt by the characters. The vacuity of space induced with fear and guilt forming an instability of insecurity and complexity overwhelm them as human relations are always in a flux. Nilanjana, her Sister in Law and Dr Kumar, the three of them function in a familiar circle but all of them possess different values that strive and at times block their own abilities. The humane levels of youth and adolescence that they carefully tread along in search of new and exciting life. The character of Nilanjana's sister in law, a mother figure in a sense to her pulls her back into the traditional family life whose sweet fruit she has yet to taste, examples of which around her made her disillusioned with the prevailing social traditions. Her encounter with her Doctoral supervisor shakes some cords in her and she approaches him with a caution that future has yet to reveal her immalleable bond with their family devoid of any pollution and raise her from tenebrous bottom into a reality from where the view of the world appear sham and unreal. The rapport between her and her friends that they had shared previously presents itself with various fault lines that she has now crossed over with her altered and syllogistic understanding of herself. The story delineates a young woman's descent into a world of academia in a modern sense and the tiny conflicts she watches over as she counts her steps as to prove her academic fervour to her ideal Dr. Kumar while aspiring to be perfect. To find something that can inspire you and motivate is a real venture in life. Nilanjana approaches life in a guided and smart manner. The understanding of self and the drive to move forward with a confident individuality is the essence of the story, *Ek koi Doosra (To That Other One)*. The writer has elegantly put forward the simplicity of emotions and the comprehension of seriousness in a charming manner. The juncture where the protagonist finds herself in her life is quite common and the abstract power that holds her ability to make decisions is exquisitely rendered.

Games at Twilight, published in the short story collection by the same name takes the readers into their own childhood. On a scorching summer day, a group of children convinces their mother to let them play outside, as long as they stay inside the periphery of the house. They decide to play hide and seek, but an argument breaks out over who should be "It." Mira, one of the girls, suggests a fair way to decide, and an older boy named Raghu ends up being chosen. The children scatter to

hide, and Raghu quickly finds a younger boy, Manu, who becomes the first one out of the game. Meanwhile, Ravi, a younger child, sneaks into a locked shed by squeezing through a small opening in the wall. Though proud of his clever hiding spot, he feels uneasy in the dark, musty shed, which smells of decay and animals. His imagination runs wild, and he starts to think a snake might be slithering past him or that insects are crawling on him or watching him. Raghu continues searching and tags several other children. At one point, he taps the shed with a stick, startling Ravi but also reassuring him that Raghu is close by. Ravi feels a tickle on his neck and, after a moment of panic, crushes a spider that had crawled onto him. Exhausted, he stays still, hand on his neck, as his eyes adjust to the darkness. He notices old furniture around him and decides to sit in a familiar bathtub. As time drags on, Ravi wonders if Raghu will find him, which would mean he could rejoin the others outside. But he also dreams of being the last one found, a rare victory against the older kids. He imagines the pride and excitement he'd feel if he won. As the shed grows darker, Ravi stays hidden for what feels like hours, unsure if the game is still going or if the others have already finished.

“He had wanted victory and triumph - not a funeral. But he had been forgotten, left out and he would not join them now. The ignominy of being forgotten - how could he face it? He felt his heart go heavy and ache inside him unbearably. He lay down full length on the damp grass, crushing his face into it, no longer crying, silenced by a terrible sense of his insignificance.”(*Games at Twilight*) The story reinforces the idea of victory and its inconsequentiality in the course of events that follows. The thinking process through logic and reasoning doesn't fare well in Ravi's experience. The feeling of being neglected despite winning the game creates isolation and despondency in him. Desai etches brilliant insight into a child's mind through the character of Ravi.

Karmnasha ki Haar, a hindi story by Shivprasad Singh on the different aspect is a narrative of blind faith, the hierarchy of society that has wheeled through the system of discrimination and oppression with various forms of pre-established prejudices excusing and justifying the oppression in the name of culture and religious superiority. It accentuates the piled up ignorance with generations of power of religious concentration with reduced reality and limited beliefs that bring the people of a community together in cursing and condemning the inter-caste communication and relationship. The naïveté of youth and transgression of age-old traditions comes into direct conflict

with the passion and desire of adolescence that fails to resist the temptation of newfound love. The new age and old traditions encounter the best of their times, fetters recounting the frail pictures of the past in an religiously concentrated self and its dry consequences revelling in the face of deluge taking over the village. The ants, soil dwelling invertebrates slithering and the overflow of Karmnasha that suffocates human life indicate the fears and cowardice and bravery when their dogmatic beliefs are challenged. The idea of good and soiled reputation can bring about the thinness and dissimulation in one's existence and the eventual propellation to the understanding the championship of the human, love and the coexistence without bringing forth the discrimination to the fore.

Bhishma Sahni's *Amritsar Aa Gaya*(We have reached Amritsar) is a story that details the nuanced emphasis on the communal disturbances that run underlined by the fact of cultural narrowness and human gullibility. The departure of train from Lahore in an communally tense atmosphere soon attains its revelling in the unpleasant anxiousness and fear when the passengers' boarding on the train is scanned through the lenses tinted with religious outlook. The sense of acute awareness of belonging to the better religion takes over as people while attempting to retain their religious superiority loses humanity. The anxious concern raises alarms in their minds and the reaction to the prospect of danger eventually directs them to violence towards the people from other religions and communities. The human tendency to defend at the prospect of impending offence is arbitrary and prone to the ongoing politics that entertains the rise of communal violence and riots. As the train reaches Amritsar, the looming fear and tension among the passengers escalate and the anxious silence hovers over. The group of refugees travel to Amritsar from Lahore by train presents a picture contaminated by communalism and its eventual ripening the individual fears laced with communal defense in the situation of partition of India. The horrors of violence during partition that bridge the gaps between communities shriek the lives out of homes and unsettles the souls of millions of families.

Banu Mushtaq's short story, *Stone Slabs for Shaista Mahal* published in the collection, Heart Lamp, translated from kannada by Deepa Bhashthi, translates the woman's language, its comedy, its will to be on its own, highlighting the trait of validation laced behavior, privilege brimmed carelessness and a deliberate avoidance and careful aversion to female education and progress. The

theme of motherhood and child care and lack of proper help are the main focus of the story. The sacrifice of the female body in the process of child bearing without being properly cared for and nurtured only reinforces that the default perception of patriarchy and the tropes of its privilege throughout the system clearly limits the space of life for girls and women. The trouble reflected in the gender norms is very well explained in the story. The themes of motherhood, girl education, the habitual internalized acceptance of gender roles and the role love plays in all of this is worth noting.

The structural consistency of a short story is conducive to the purpose of it altogether. The openings, the setting, use of irony and satire, point of view, economy of few characters and language central to the main idea work in an impactful manner. As in the short story, “atmosphere is passively present, easily reached to for the context”.(Kahn, Andrew) The elements of the story consist of brief moments packed with linear singularity culminating in reinforcing the intentional goal of its writer. A reading of these tales evokes laughter, angst, “The short story is an imploding universe. It has all the boiling energy inside it. A novel has shrapnel going all over the place.”(Colum MacCann)

Conclusion

The account of these stories emanating from different languages, Hindi, English, Oriya encapsulates the rich tapestry of human emotions and human moulded by circumstances, the system brought about by transition period etches a perfect imagery of comedy and tragedy mixed with satire, comic relief, acquiesce and relish each faction of life in its entirety. The scenarios presented in these stories explore caste inequality, identity, and urban -rural rapport in the society. The issues highlighted in these stories have proper exposure with a fun and laughter readers find themselves gulping with a zeal indicating the brilliance of the writers’ penmanship. The themes dealt with in the stories aptly indicate the grave situation at different point and more often the consequences of the scenarios born out of them becomes people’s live, sometimes muffled, at other occasions internalized to the point of oblivion and giving way to constricted traditions. These stories are great representations of instances of compromise, the intent of freedom not just of country but the freedom of self and the repercussions of obstinate belief and the downfall of those age long beliefs, the improvement of situations with promising new apprehensions about life to move forward. The protagonists find themselves amongst new and challenging waypoints in their lives and they learn

to navigate through as conceptions and perceptions dissolve and materialize into the culminating inference of their stories/lives. The lives and actions of these characters suffice to reminisce about the then atmosphere of each faction. The undertones of stories are promising and certainly provide the comic fodder to readers in pursuit of amusement and enlightenment.

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