

**THE EVOLUTION OF SHORT STORY THROUGH THE AGES AS A DISTINCTIVE
AND AUTONOMOUS GENRE OF MODERN STORYTELLING**

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ABSTRACT

In the first half of the 20th century, the appeal of **short story** continued to grow. Literally hundreds of writers delved into this enigmatic genre, including few eminent poet and prolific novelist of the time, and had contributed vigorously in the publication of their short fictional prose .In the 20th century, Germany, France, Russia and the US lost their domination over the genre. That laid a way for innovative writers emerged in places, like *Japan_:Akutagwa Ryunsuke*, *Prague_:Franz Kafka* and *Argentina_:Jorge Luis Borges*. Literary journals with international circulation such as *Ford Madox Ford's Transatlantic Review*, *Scribner's Magazine* and *Harriet weaver's Egoist_* provided a deliberate exposure for young fledgling writers in honing their skills in the art. The short stories for its efficiency, lucid flow and its technical agility have gained immense popularity over the years. Above all, this particular genre is providing modern tellers, with a chance to experiments and come out with innovative ideas. The unerring preciseness, delicately emphatic characterization and extraordinary rhythm of effortless writings are some of the peculiar traits of modern short story writers. But, as in conventional term, 'short story' is a brief fictional prose narrative that is shorter than a novel and that usually deals with limited characters as such. The earliest precursors to short story can be found in the oral storytelling traditional ways ,as well as episodes from ancient Mediterranean epics such as '*The epic of Gelgamesh* ' and *Homer's 'Illiad* '. *Anecdotes*, *fairy tales* and *parables* are all example of oral storytelling tradition that helped in shaping this genre. The earliest tales from India comprises tales in Pali language '*the Jatakas*' having composed in religious frame and another hugely popular '*The panchatantra*'. The other noteworthy assemblage of formidable tales is '*Kathasaritsagar*' (*ocean of rivers of stories*), a series of tales recounted in narrative verse in the 11th century .Throughout the history ,Mankind have enjoyed various narratives, including *Jests* ,*Anecdotes*, *Short Myth* and *Concise Historical legends*. A **short story** constitutes a large part of the milieu that zeroed in on tendencies apparent in every modern society. The short story writing themes are ranging from mythological fable, to miniature epic of love, to savagely hilarious tales of sexual comeuppance. Tales that are also related to marital difficulties, human relationship with its alienating tendencies, illicit passion and the diasporic families dealing with their own dilemmas in their drastically alienated societies. These tales are an emblematic product of maturity_ forceful, vigorous and unclouded by illusions. These stories succeed in the trenchancy of its satire, in its manifestation of swooping indignation with growing resentment at social injustices and in its persistent humanity with which writers enliven their works. These

story writers have actually discovered what it's meant to be human while engaging in struggle with life intractable limitations, in an age of growing conflicts and utter confusions. These short story writers are honored for their epic sweep of their minds, which are also equipped with skills in rendering the minutes, the particular, the local and the parochial that are equally sublime. Several story writers from *Poe* to *Henry James*, were interested in impressionist story that elucidates on the impression registered by events on the character's minds, rather than the objective reality of the sequences. During the last two decades we have read thrilling tales with striking brilliance of words closely braided with stories by the amazing "Neo breed of writers", who also have achieved staggering success with their wonderful piece, engraved pages with their frank style of writing. Few of them writers are *Paula Bommer*, *George Saunders*, *Lorrie Moore*, *Joy Williams* and *Alejandra Zambra* etc; that are strange in all the best way, have excited in great deal with their striking ideas of gripping stories. These writers having the bold and wider perspective and have gained huge popularity. They aren't afraid of to take chances, always in the league of calling the shot, in terms of choosing plot for their experimental writing. These writers almost learned by chance, "how to break the rules of fiction before they learned the rules themselves" and are more interested in coining new metaphorical expressions. With them, the plot gets even darker, things bleaker, substance weirder and structure more realistic. The readers seem to be scarcely miffed with their experimental writings and seek to derive undiluted pleasures out of their narratives. In response to short story in **India**, We have *R.N.Tagore* who cuts almost unparalleled figure amongst writers, perhaps the most celebrated poet and short story writer of Indian origin. His almost supernatural insight into the course of wayward lives, his instinctive feelings for the beauty of the rural landscape and his power to invest that landscape with ethical attributes; all come together in an utterly fluent way into his epic short stories. A beloved monumental writer who has left a timeless legacy behind. However, writer like *Charita Bannerje Divakumar* and *Jhumpa Lahiri* have shown different facets of cultural diversity of diasporic families with existing problems of crumbling faith, broken ties and the saturation of their dreams in drastically alienated societies from their owns. Whether or not one sees the **Modern short story** as a fusion of sketch and tale or as a heady concoction of illustrative genre, in which the themes are traditional but new because of an innovative style of writing in which the narratives moves from *philosophical speculation* to *broad comedy*, taking in *pastoral*, *farce* and *fantasy with a fine blend of realism and idealism* on the way to its evolutionary journey. It is indisputable fact that the modern short story evolved as a distinctive and autonomous genre though still ever developing.

KEYWORDS: *Evolution, Distinctive, Autonomous, Genre, Innovative, Diaspora*

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Introduction

In the first half of the 20th century, the appeal of short story continued to grow. Literally hundreds of writers delved into this enigmatic genre, including few eminent poet and prolific novelist of the times, and had contributed vigorously in the publication of their short fictional prose. In the 20th century, Germany, France, Russia and the US lost their domination over the genre. That laid a way for innovative writers emerged in places, like *Japan_:Akutagwa Ryunsuke, Prague_:Franz Kafka and Argentina_:Jorge Luis Borges*. Literary journals with international circulation such as Ford Madox Ford's *Transatlantic Review*, Scribner's *Magazine* and Harriet Weaver's *Egoist* provided a deliberate exposure for young fledgling writers, honing their skills in the art. According to W.B.Yeats,

*“The themes of universal significance,
artistically crafted and diligently knitted into
stories are monuments of their own
significance, gathered into artifice of eternity”.*

The short stories for its efficiency, lucid flow and its technical agility have gained immense popularity over the years. Above all, this particular genre is providing modern tellers, with a chance to experiments and come out with innovative ideas. The unerring preciseness, delicately emphatic characterization and extraordinary rhythm of effortless writings are some of the peculiar traits of modern short story writers. The contemporary short story is charged with a lack of narrative structure. Critics accustomed to an older type are baffled by the evolution of new edge writings. Hence, they maintain that the modern short stories are plotless, static, fragmentary, amorphous, frequently a mere character sketch or vignette or a mere reporting of a transient moment, or the capturing of a mood and nuance - everything, except a story. But, despite that much of the appeal of short story lies in its incompleteness. It raises doubts, questions, and ambiguities. Usually, it raises more questions than it answers and sort of arouse curiosity as why do certain characters behave as they do and what could be the next step of them?

It often seeks to communicate feeling or emotion which is perhaps impossible to put into words. Somewhat, it shares some qualities with poetry, as it often takes us into the realm of unbounded imagination, in which we court difficulties in describing. It seems no accident that through the annals of history, poets like Walter de la Moore, Dylan Thomas, and Ted Hughes have also contributed to literature through short stories.

The evolution of short story through the ages

In conventional term, 'short story', is a brief fictional prose narrative that is shorter than a novel and that usually deals with limited characters as such. The evolution of short story began before human could write. To aid in formulating and memorizing tales the early storyteller often relied on stock phrases, fixed rhythm, and rhyme. The earliest precursors to short story can be found in the oral storytelling traditional ways, as well as episodes from ancient Mediterranean epics such as 'The epic of Gilgamesh' and Homer's 'Iliad'. Anecdotes, fairy tales and parables are all example of oral storytelling tradition that helped in shaping this genre. In fact 'Aesop's fables', first collected in the 4th century B.C may have been the first anthology of short literature in western literature. Many of the old narratives are in verse. But, the ancient Egyptians inscribed their narratives largely in prose. The highly provocative and profusely detailed story "The tale of two brothers" was written around 1250 BCE, is perhaps the richest in folk motif with intricate plot. The books of Ruth, Esther and Jonah need no distinction in mentioning to those familiar with biblical theology. Nearly, all of the ancient tales were fundamentally didactic. Norse legends, Irish ballads and Gothic ghost stories, have enriched both its structure and subject matter. In Europe, short story received its most refined treatment in the middle ages from Geoffrey Chaucer and Giovanni Boccaccio. 'The Miller's Tale', 'The Nun's priest's Tale', and 'The Pardoner's Tale' create a brilliantly revealing sermon, replete with a narrative exemplum. Chaucer's 'Canterbury Tales' may be the first assemblage of short stories in English literature, composed in middle English dialect and written in the early 14th century. The tales are told by pilgrims on their way to the shrine of 'Thomas a Becket'. 'The legend of Sleepy Hollow' by Washington Irving in 1820, adapted from German folktale, the story owes much of its style and form to the Gothic horror traditions.

The earliest tales from India comprises tales in Pali language 'the Jatakas' has composed in religious frame and another hugely popular 'The panchatantra'. The other noteworthy assemblage of formidable tales is 'Kathasaritsagar', a series of tales, recounted in narrative verse in the 11th century. The contribution of Romans to short narrative was limited and constrained. Ovid's long poem 'metamorphosis' is basically a reshaping of over hundreds of short popular tales into a thematic pattern. The middle ages in Europe, from the mediaeval era to the Renaissance, short fiction was the adapted style by various cultures for their own purposes. In contrast, the romantic imagination, with high spirits of Celts continued to manifest in their tales, whether they appeared in Ireland, Wales or Brittany stories steeped in magical grandeur. A format of juxtaposition of several stories, each of them relatively autonomous, a flexible format

devoid of organic unity, was preferred by storytellers of mediaeval times and is used in ‘*The seven sages of Rome*’.

In the United States, the short story evolved in two strains_ one is the realistic story, that deal with seemingly real places, events or persons. Bret Hart, George W Cable, Sarah One Jowett belong to this kind. On the other hand, we have the impressionist story, a tale shaped and given meaning by the consciousness and psychological attitudes of the narrative. The short prose of Nathaniel Hawthorne are about symbolic events viewed subjectively the central character. Several story writers from Poe to Henry James, were interested in impressionist story that elucidates on the impression registered by events on the character's minds, rather than the objective reality of the sequences. Poe, himself a creator of influential impressionist techniques, believed that the definitive characteristic of the short story was its unity of effect and said,-

“A skillful literary artist has constructed a tale”

The Structure and Themes of Modern short story

The short story writing themes are ranging from mythological fable, to miniature epic of love, to savagely hilarious tales of sexual comeuppance. Tales that are also related to marital difficulties, human relationship with its alienating tendencies, illicit passion and the diasporic families dealing with their own dilemmas in drastically alienated societies. These themes are included in its entirety and the shape of which reveal their subject. Such technical agility for precision of language and expression of genuine feeling, never been ostentatious but rather seems quite limberous in prose. These writers draw vivid characters in universal situation articulating profound truth in plain language. These tales are an emblematic product of maturity, forceful, vigorous and unclouded by illusions. These story writers produce a dazzling display of their mind over brilliant surface of a darker depth of reality. There is also a sense of background danger of lurking catastrophe continually informs its readers throughout the story. These short story writers are honored for their epic sweep of their minds, who are also equipped with skills in rendering the minutes, the particular, the local and the parochial, that are equally sublime. The modern short stories is often based around a single key moment and incident in the life of the characters, and this could also be conceived as a turning point in character's life. Some moments can be trivial and ordinary, others seem quite dramatic and way too more ordinary. It is often perceived that a good short story reflects life and vaguely it does, in dealing with black and white characters and is very particular about in general selection of themes. There are problems, unresolved conflicts, heightening tensions, harrowing ordeal and hideous experiences that man has always faced and would continue to face irrespective of time and place. They are of universal significance such themes have greater depth and endurance. In James Joyce words,

“A short story must have ‘epiphany’ which means revelation or getting a sudden vision of life. This is a self-awareness and a sense of profound insight”.

Short story of the Indian panorama

In response to short story in India, We have R.N.Tagore who cuts almost unparalleled figure amongst writers, perhaps the most celebrated poet and short story writer of Indian origin. His almost supernatural insight into the course of wayward lives, his instinctive feelings for the beauty of the rural landscape and his power to invest that landscape with moral and ethical attributes; all come together in an utterly fluent way into his epic short stories. His stories are completely flexible and its essence is poetry, which seeks undiluted pleasures out of verse narratives, that also demand heightened participatory of auditory awareness. In some of his themes we find, his moral and spiritual preoccupation like renunciation of the world, the realization of religious duty and the true attributes of divinity. His short stories, are highly reflective of the social and cultural climate of his time. The characters are never artificial but rather very natural. They are ordinary men, women and children whom he met in his life during his stay in the estate. His stories have wide canvas of reality through which one can have a glimpse of widest sections of society like peasants, petty official, poor worker, Brahmin priest, manipulative traders, and Bengali intellectuals. His stories carry a heavy flavour of the local milieu, used a language enriched in traditional styles. He wrote nearly 100 short stories during his 60 years of literary career. The tragic characters of woman in all roles of life as a wife, mother, daughter, sister are drawn vividly through scores of characters in his story. His domestic stories were treated with realistic fervour, mostly set in rural Bengal. He has profound admiration for the classic and immense veneration for the traditional ethos. His modern short stories are a gift to Indian culture. It carries setting of a natural world, a simple rhythm of rustic life and a lurking uncanny background of India independence struggles, with a lingering presence of naturalism and patriotism. Critics highly praised him for blending poetic lyricism with social realism, and for deep human quality of the characters. Not only Tagore's character have life and spirit, even the houses, the surrounding and the atmosphere are full of life and spirit. He was a practitioner of psychology and social realism. To say that Tagore was only a prolific poet, dramatist, socialist would be understatement. Reading him is a kind of refamiliarisation with variety of modes, style and form.

Then we have the most talented, Kamala Surayaa. She was known for her bold poetry, and thought provoking short stories. The poetess' life was riddled with an eventful narrative of unrequited love and deep rooted sensual obsession, which broke all religious and social barriers. She was born a Hindu, but converted to Islam after allegedly falling in love with a Muslim following her husband's death. She never went public about her love and was buried at Palyam Juma Maszid in Thiruvananthapuram after her death.

Few Indian diaspora writers like Jhumpa Lahiri in her short story 'The last and final content' and Kavita Daswani in her 'For Matrimonial Purposes' have portrayed positive aspects of diaspora experiences which broaden the scope of the perception and bring change in the subjectivities of their characters. However, writer like Charita Bannerje Divakumar along with Lahiri have also shown different facets of cultural diversity of diasporic families, crumbling ties

and the saturation of their dreams in drastically alienated societies from their owns. According to Vijay Mishra –

“The latest progress of information and communication technology and the fastest means of transportation have enabled ; “.....the late modern diaspora make the cultural assimilation faster ,bring global cultures together and transplant and reinvent their home culture in new lands” .

(Mishra,2000 : 67.85)

Lahiri's short stories delineate sensitive dilemma in the lives of Indian immigrant settled in USA. Such as Marital difficulties, human relationship and the disconnection between the old and new generation of immigrants. Her ‘Interpreter of Maladies’, this piece of meticulous collection has received universal acclaim and prestigious Pulitzer prize (2000) for fiction in short story writing. Diasporic writers mostly talk about immigrants’ distress and their perpetual dilemmas in other countries, in terms of social and cultural differences.

Contemporary Innovators of short stories

During the last two decades we have read thrilling tales with striking brilliance of words closely braided with stories by the amazing breed of writers, who also have achieved staggering success with their wonderful piece and with their frank style of writing. Few of them writers are Paula Bomer, George Saunders, Lorrie Moore, joy Williams and Alejandra zombre etc, that are strange in all the best way, have excited in great deal with their striking ideas of gripping stories. These writers having the bold and wider perspective, have gained huge popularity. They aren't afraid of taking chances, always in the league of calling the shot, in terms of choosing plot for their experimental writing.

For many, in the mid-nineties, the short story start with Lorrie Moore. She coined new metaphors and the pages are embedded with complete original signage and with them, a new way of seeing.

Then, we have George Sounder, his ‘Sea oak’ is a masterpiece and the story was anthologized in the O’ Henry prize stories in 1999. Saunders has figured out a way in the unexcelled art of writing about downtrodden, to cut through clichés and sentimentality. At ‘sea oak’ there is no sea and no oak , just a capped up sizeable subsidized apartments and a rear view of Fed-Ex .

And in Alezandra zambra, the stories are urgent but still slack, knitted loosely and quite funny, because he enjoyed putting the squeeze on the plot, has confidence that provoked him to fiddle with emotions and to tickle the funny bones, with his inimitable arts which also arouse taste buds of myriad emotions. In the title story of his collection ‘My Documents’, zambra writes- “My father was a computer, my mother a typewriter”. Thus, with this kind of writing, he has mastered

the art of being a people's writer, just striving vigorously to emerge on the scene in literary prominence.

Another writer on the cusp of literary brilliance with a gripping story is Sam lipsyte. It takes a bundle of nerves and spate of courage to be able to swirl in the heart, to have that sort of guts to know that something as tiny as a pack of cigarettes, is going to get us traipsed down the memory lanes, into alleys of childhood and also lost love, including parent's death. His story collections *Venus Drive & The Fun parts* should make him a wild hero to short story writers.

The next prolific writer is Lydia Davis. She, rarely exceeds her word count, his writings are structured with pithy revelation, condescend and fleeting memories. She can actually do in a paragraph or in a sentence what most writers crippled with paucity of words, scarcely been able to or can't do in whole narratives. "*There are also men in the world*", begins a story called "*Men*", Davis knows that half of her reader will get the joke. She knows, the readers will get everything even if the meanings are overshadowed by playful quipping.

Kevin Barry, The Irish writer , has only two collections, credit to his name. They are *little kingdom* (2007) and *Dark lies the Island* (2012).Both of which are, outstanding, hilarious, poignant, bizarre, parochial, starkly flawless, frightening and above all innovative in approach. The spontaneous utterances in his prose, his local idiolect, his use of imagery and his peerless dialogue, these all point toward his being a genius in writing.

Then, we have also in the league is Sarah Hall, with her only to date release is just one story collection "*The beautiful indifference*"(2011) but, it holds a lot of ammo to blow your gasket. Her stories are enormously emphatic whether the subjects, being decaying relationship or an imminent death.

Yiuan li , is a Chinese based in US ,writes about modern facets of China in a really understated elegant way. She's the recipient of Mac_Arthur fellowship and have also won the Frank O' Connor international short story award for '*A thousand years of good prayers*'.

The one from Ireland, the most promising is Claire Keegan, who won almost all the awards that Irish literature has to offer. She writes about rural Irish life with a degree of delicacy and empathy. Her first collection '*Antarctica*' published in (1999) and with her second- '*Walk the blue fields*'(2007) that made everyone sit up and pay attention.

Joy Williams is also not that far behind, Rebecca Schiff says of her, that-

"Her stories make craziness seem so natural that I have become convinced that sanity is construct, something we keep around because we are too scared to look ourselves in the eye".

Conclusion

These writers almost learned by chance, “how to break the rules of fiction before they learned the rules themselves” and are more interested in coining new metaphorical expressions. The plot gets even darker, things bleaker, substance weirder and structure more realistic. They have the confidence, that enable them to fiddle with their inequitable art, and tickle taste buds of myriad emotions. The readers seem to be scarcely miffed with their experimental style of writings and only seek to derive undiluted pleasures out of their narratives.

The modern short stories incorporate many sided coherent vision of existing society, on the verge of its continuous evolution. These stories succeed in the trenchancy of its satire, its fleering contempt, in its manifestation of swooping indignation with growing resentment at social injustices and its persistent humanity with which writers enliven their works. These story writers have actually discovered what it's meant to be human who engaged in struggle with life intractable limitations, in an age of growing conflicts and utter confusions.

Throughout the history, Mankind has enjoyed various narratives, including jests, anecdotes, short myth and concise historical legends. But a short story constitutes a large part of the milieu and zeroed in on tendencies apparent in every modern society that helps in the emergence of this modern style of genre. Short story fiction is nearly as old as the language itself, in this sense, it may seem to imbibe a uniquely modern features. Whether or not one sees the modern short story as a fusion of sketch and tale, or a heady concoction of illustrative genres. It's indisputable fact that the modern short story evolved as a distinctive and autonomous genre though still ever developing.

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