

A Critical Study of Indian Short Stories in the Light of the Short Stories Written by Ruskin Bond



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Abstract

Short stories in the English speaking world, as well as in other European languages have attracted readers, with the change of times in the scientific era, its sequel industrial revolution brought significant impact on the lives of people, people became more occupied with less time in their hands and their overburdened lives eventually made life stressful, as an escape from the monotony, it offered to the reader a recipe of varied characters to stimulate and appease the senses. Over the years long stories became shorter, packed with the emotions of contemporary times. Indian writers are no exception. Writers like Ruskin Bond, Das, R.K Narayan has till now contributed with required flavor, for the readers making life bearable against the odds. The paper focusses on the development and origins of short story writings highlighting the contribution of Indian writers, specifically Ruskin Bond.

Keywords: Short Story, Indian Short Story, Indian Short Story Writers, Indian Writers, Ruskin Bond.

Introduction

Short story belongs to the oldest kinds of literature, which has thrived in the form of fairy tale, ballad, myth, parable, etc. The structure of modern short story is an improved form which took a proper shape in the first half of the nineteenth century in America. Before short stories came into being, different genres of literature could be seen in varied ages such as, in the eighteenth century essay was the center of attraction, but in the nineteenth century it lost its name. It was then that novels and short stories came in the scene.

Short story as a genre has taken a long time to get in its modern form. It was fairly influenced by fiction as it is a kind or type of this art only. It is a difficult process to find out the earliest form of prose literature because with passing time many forms of literature disappeared or lost their value and this process of change has given them an altogether new shape.

Objectives of the Study

There is a short history of story writing is given. The second objective is the characteristics of the short story. The third consists of how Indian story writing got evolved. The last but not the least objective of the paper is why Ruskin Bond has chosen to write short stories.

Modern Short Story and its role in Literature

Modern short story which used to be regarded as one of the types of literature, having deep roots in the ancient fables and parables were in reality narrative in style and had an impression upon some moral and spiritual truth. The same concision and truth is presented in short stories that are written nowadays. Short stories are supposed to be straight forward and focused compared to a novel. It is because it consists of not many plots, incidents and characters as there can be in a novel. In the lengthier fictional works or long stories consist of dramatic overtones like exposing or the introduction of setting, situation and lead characters, conflict, moments of crisis and climax for the protagonist, resolution and a moral or some lesson given from the story. Short stories do not necessarily follow such kind of pattern. For example, modern short stories hardly have any exposition.

Professor Perry of Harvard has thrown some light on both the advantages and disadvantages of this form of literature or writing. He is of the opinion that both the short story writers and novelists attract the attention of readers by presenting a particular person doing certain

activities in given circumstances. The characters, plots, settings and dialogues are created by the short story writers knowing it fairly well that there is a limited scope in everything and that they can't elaborate or give an expansion to anything. Therefore, they create a few characters and dare not focus much on character development. Also there are not many experiences and instances that are taken into account. The one aspect that is given a lot of consideration is that the central character in a short story is a principal and an imposing being.

A short story, like a novel or drama, also has a certain theme and character. The structure of a story has to be constructed carefully because the number of incidents it contains speak directly of the plot which the readers feel connected to. In a short story it is not possible to create full characters. It can hardly focus on more than a single character and that's the reason why it is known as "one-man story."

The impact of Short Stories on readers and its characteristics

Short stories have the strength to create an appropriate environment with an intoxicating touch. The writers began to write in such a manner that the English language became enriched in all the ways possible with a little borrowing from ancient writers. And the new authors used it to raise the standard of their work and writing. The authors have taken full advantage of them and the knowledge they gained, taught them how to use words economically which provided their writing with simplicity and vigor. During seventeenth century a different kind of style came into being which was more direct and decorative and therefore Dryden who was a major writer from this age had a writing style characteristically smooth, simple and full of energy.

In modern literature there are authors who have provided a new form or structure to short stories by making them supple, extending the scope by using them for their own purpose and lending the readers with amazing specimens of narrative techniques and thus making this kind of art superior. Several writers have tried their hand in this form of creative writing. There was Vergas in Italy, Kjelland from Norway, Turgnev from Russia. All of whom have brought their own characteristics into short stories keeping in mind perfect form, unity, simplicity and harmony, originality and variety. They found these traits of short story readily applicable to life events around them. They provided the short stories a richness of content and brought it closer to life and its realism. Poe never thought of all the aspects of short stories because he had focused more on the structure of plot compared to characterization.

A short story is very much similar to fiction as both belong to prose writing and are often written in the narrative style. A short story is precise in its structure. It was provided with a name of novella in the 20th and 21st centuries. A short story is defined in various ways according to its divisions into different genres. Therefore, the format of short story consists of many genres and styles. The length of a short story is always in accordance with the preference of the writer

in the light of guidelines significant for the short stories.

The writing of short story is mostly dependent on creative and experiential artistic integrity. Therefore, certain limitations can be imposed on it as it is a continuous or spontaneous expression based heavily on creative talent and logic. Also a short story can get shorter in length depending on the writer.

Modern readers are passionate about reading but due to lack of time and energy they are unable to indulge in the delicious escape that lengthy novels can give. So they choose short stories as their getaway routes to fantasy lands which are easily finished. For today's reader's short stories are good for recreation. Also after a day's hard work they are able to provide a very soothing effect. It was because of journalism that short stories came to be so much in fashion. The publication of different kinds of magazines and journals has also brought fame to short stories because other kinds of writing are lengthy and short stories are precise and could be easily finished and also has a profound and lasting impact.

On the American literature scene, after Irving and Hawthorne, there came a change in the content of short stories. It started to include local flavor and included men and women who got involved in humor and were known as feminists, sentimentalists and realists.

The ethical element highlighted by the writer with animals as characters could be seen in Reynard the Fox. There is also presented a very strong message in "The Jungle Book" of Mr. Kipling in which the author speaks about Mogli's development to manhood amidst Nature. The animal fables are very interesting and entertaining and have always reflected the talent of writers who are mostly sensitive about the different changes that come in life. The beast fable comes in the category of brief story and has a few similarities with a short story.

Some popularly known Indian Authors who received acclamation and recognition are Tagore, RK Narayan, MulkrajAnand, Malgonkar, Raja Rao. They have authored a several stories. All the writers are known for their grid, depth, subtle expression of the experiences, style, creativity and variety.

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These three stages, mentioned by S.K. Das, are those of short fiction, tales, anecdotes and different fables. According to him, the third stage, came during the nineteenth century with the publication of different periodicals and journals. These periodicals led to the development of different frequency of events and character portrayals. S.K. Das made a very apt and proper statement for short stories related to the point mentioned above.

India has always been a storehouse of stories and parables and the revolution in literature came when printing press came into existence, the stories began to come in printed form with certain changes. The short story as a literary genre was used in almost every Indian language. It became a widespread feature. It was called by different Indian names by the writers like "katha, akhyana, Upakhyan, Dastan and afsana."

The short stories of India came in vogue only after independence. Short stories written at that time became worldly popular for the perception, variety, vision and universal appeal described beautifully. Writers like Mulk Raj Anand, Raja Rao, Manohar Malgaonkar, Anita Desai, Salman Rushdie, Arun Joshi, Shashi Desh Pandey, Ruskin Bond, Khwaja Ahmed Abbas, Manoj Das became known for their writing in India and Abroad.

Indian short story writers chose this form of art because they thought that through this form of art, they can express the diversity of India more beautifully. The portrayal of common man became the focus of the short stories and played an important role in making the short stories interesting for the readers of every age. The major subjects that were taken into consideration were the multiple problems and troubles that a common man faces in his everyday life. Tagore became one of the first Indian English writer to depict magnificent signs of maturity in Indian Short story. It was said so because:

"For the first time in modern Indian literature, the life of ordinary men and women received such sympathetic understanding and was depicted with such love and feeling." (Das, S.K. (ed.))

Mulk Raj Anand has spoken about Short stories and its importance in Literature in following way: "And what the history of Indian culture comes to be written in the next century, it may appear that the inmost longings, thwarting desires of the many of people of our country, as expressed in the short stories, are more authentic evidence of the life of our time than the slogan of politics and the very obvious outer events."

After the Independence there ushered a major change in the vision and thinking of the writers because now they were face to face with completely different situation. Now their concern was shifted from independence to making a new India. Hence the major themes during this time were promises, dreams and plans for a better India."

There came four short stories collection written and compiled by Khushwant Singh. They were "The Mark of Vishnu" (1950), "The Voice of God" (1957), "A Bridge for the Sahib" (1967), and "Black

Jasmine" (1971). He has also attacked hypocrisy prevalent in Indian society

Ruskin Bond and Manoj Das belong to the category of contemporary Indian short story writers who wrote in English. Ruskin Bond has written several collections of short stories. Some of them are: "The Neighbor's wife and other stories", "My first Love and other stories," etc. Ruskin bond has chosen to write short stories because he knows how people nowadays don't have much time to read novels. So they choose to have quick escapes from their mundane lives which can only be provided through short stories. He found that people enjoy short stories and also that its easy talk of many things through them. He has written numerous short stories and each one of them speak volumes about his love for the country, about his love for Hilly region and its people. His stories are mostly autobiographical because he is deeply influenced by the life he has led in India and have felt that the real source for writing is carefully observation of the daily activities of one's own life. His most beautifully crafted stories consist of the mixture of fact and fiction. He is inspired by great writers like Dickens and PG Wodehouse and their reflection can be found in his style of writing. But more than that is his love of writing and his positive attitude towards life which make his stories highly readable and lovable among his readers. Some of his stories that have widely acclaimed are as follows:

"Time stops at Shamli" is a story which has the theme about adolescent love and loss, narrated in Ruskin Bond's characteristic style. Shamli turns out to be a small town where his train stops every time and no one cares to step in or out, Bond says how it becomes a very significant place for him because he meets his first love, who was a childhood friend. But what he finds out there is that she's already married to someone else and there has been married. Despite all the changes he notices that love is still there.

"Whispering in the Dark," is a horror story which speaks about a terrifying night, with no moon in the sky and wind howling like anything, a person gets lost in a thick forest which is surrounded by mountains, to take refuge in an old house. He finds no one inside, but to protect himself from the wind and rain gets into the house through a broken window and its then when the things begin to go awry, until he runs away from the house, out of fear, without looking back. The story catches readers off guard and is full of dreadful events to send a chill down the spine.

"The Night Train at Deoli" by Bond is a short story about adolescent love, and more about longing and indecisiveness which is written with a lot of depth and sensitivity. It's setting is the railway station at Deoli, and the story is narrated by an eighteen-year-old boy who travels regularly to meet his grandmother during his summer vacations. In this story the narrator tells about a particular event, while on his way to Dehradun, where he sees a beautiful girl, seller of cane baskets. She immediately catches his attention. Though they meet only twice and that too very briefly, the story very beautifully captures the meeting of two complete strangers for a few moments on the railway station.

"A Handful of Nuts" is Bond's classic "coming of age" story. It is set in the backdrop of a small town of Dehradun in India. The story is about what it is to be young and foolish, it is about how the youth waste their time by being listless and by doing all the misadventures. The narrator is a 21-year-old man, who wants to become a great writer. Ruskin Bond wrote this story when he was in his sixties. This is a story that has inspired several writers to bring out their best despite the unfavorable circumstances.

Another story by Ruskin Bond is "The Cherry Tree" in which we have themes like resilience, passion, dedication, struggle, responsibility, growth and pride. It's a story from his "Collected Short Stories" collection. The story is written in the third person by a narrator without a name and after reading it readers come to the realization that Bond could be exploring a theme of survival and struggle. Rakesh sows a seed of cherry in the ground but it faces several difficulties before it finally grows into a tree. Just like an individual struggle in life so does the cherry tree. However, what is worth appreciation is the resilience of the tree that it showed. It is as though the cherry tree is adamant to live despite everything. It seems as if it's determined to live its life. As time goes on the tree gets more strengthened and is able to take on life in a far better way. Rakesh has planted the seed of the tree and took care of it for a while. It seems that Bond is suggesting that same is the case with the human beings. They also need a little help and support to have a balanced life. People who are well taken care of since their very beginning are able to manage life more properly as compared to the people who have had bitter experiences in their childhood. The cherry tree is taken care of by Rakesh constantly. He nourishes it with love and great efforts. He keeps a constant eye on it to ensure that everything is fine with the tree. This attitude of Rakesh towards the tree speaks a lot about his character.

There is another short story of Bond that is skillfully woven in words in "Dust on the Mountain." It's about the journey of a young man from a village, named Vishnu, who comes to a city to find a job. So that he can get a decent salary and feed his family in the village. He has left his village but he keeps missing his native place. He begins to work in a café in a cinema hall, before working as a truck cleaner for a sardar called Pritam. Things begin to get smoothly, when suddenly an accident takes place where Pritam, the sardar, is badly injured and has to lose the truck too. Finally, after all this, the boy decides to leave the city and to return to his own roots, to his village.

The story "The Eyes Have it" is taken from his "Complete Short Stories collection." It has the themes such as determination, freedom, longing, memory and confidence. It is narrated in the first person by a young man who is blind and unnamed. The main theme that comes forth after completing the story is the theme of kindness. Throughout the story the young man shows a lot of compassion and kindness to the young woman in the compartment. He keeps on complementing her when he can which is ironical since he cannot see her. The fact that he compliments her face by saying it's interesting rather

than saying it's beautiful shows that he is attempting to make an impression on her intellect and not on her vanity like most men would prefer to do.

The narrator in the story tries to show his readers that he is a determined and resilient human being when it comes down to his connection with the young woman, that he is trying to form with a lot of effort. The words he used reflect the outlook on life of the writer. He is blind but he doesn't see this as any kind of an obstacle. While others could have seen it as a weakness and could have made it an excuse to depend on others, but the narrator finds it natural. He maintains his independence. However, it can be seen that the narrator is a bit self-conscious in the train compartment. He does not want the young woman to find out that he is blind because he doesn't find himself incapable in any way. One can see that the narrator is relying heavily on his memory when he begins to talk to the young woman about nature and landscape as if he could actually see the scene from the compartment window. It is quite evident that the narrator wishes to hide the fact that he cannot see because he must have been aware of how the blind people are treated by other people. Despite the blindness the narrator has the ability to live fully and completely. Something which comes under notice that he is travelling all by himself. Through such instances Bond wants to highlight how independent the narrator is.

The other short story by Ruskin Bond that is a bag full of surprises is "Susanna's Seven Husbands." It consists of the themes such as love, longing, loneliness, unhappiness, tradition and jealousy. It is taken from his Collected Short Stories. The story is told by an unnamed narrator, in first person, and after finishing the story the readers can reach to the conclusion that the theme of the story is "The pursuit of Happiness." Susanna despite getting married seven times fails to find peace and happiness with any of her husbands. Whether their deaths occurred due to some misfortune or whether Susanna is really responsible for the deaths. In the story it becomes clear that Susanna is trying her best to get happiness and that she seems to think that she can have it through a husband only. This is an important thing to notice that the times the story is set in, Indian women were not allowed to have male friends and that also becomes one of the reasons for Susanna to get married to seven husbands. The other reason could be that she found herself to be lonely most of the times. Also it has been a very evident factor in Indian society that single women are not welcomed in family get-togethers or are not treated with respect. Hence she kept on getting married one after the other. It is also interesting that none of the men she chose to marry were of high financial status. This is something which shows that she isn't after wealth. She has been craving for love.

Susanna's seven failed marriages also point out to the thing that she might have been insecure. Feeling throughout that she needs a man to complete her or to give her happiness. A positive quality of her personality is her charity work that she does. Moreover, Naushad seems to have formed an opinion

on Susanna which seems to have been developed more on gossips and here say then on reality. The entire narration seems to be false as Naushad has been narrating what he has got from his father, who must have got it from other people. All the information about her is handed down from one generation to other. It seems impossible for Susanna to have killed seven people and to get away with it so easily. Even if she is a wealthy woman. The story seems unreal and unearthly as if it is written to scare off the people who listened it. She has rightfully become a part of the folklore of the town. And nobody appears to have actually known her. She seems to be more a figment of fantasy than the truth.

Every character has something to say about Susanna but nobody knew her personally. This is the point that Ruskin Bond wants to make that in India nothing is said or proven with facts but is rather put forward through the mouths of people who like to gossip day in and day out. The gossip done is more due to jealousy. It seems that she is being forced into matrimony because of the values that the Indian society held at that time. True she marries seven men and each husband dies mysteriously but there isn't enough proof to suggest that Susanna is behind their deaths.

In an interview Ruskin Bond has said jokingly, "Susanna is a Black widow spider. She'd dined off a fat juicy male, now she was thinking of moving her web elsewhere."

Ruskin Bond is a living legend as he creates magic with his words. His short stories written in English language has captured the soul of India and has brought it to world stage. His writings are popular among the people belonging to varied age groups as they have something for everyone.

Conclusion

Ruskin Bond is a living legend as he creates magic with his words. His short stories written in the English language have captured the soul of India and have brought it to the world stage. His writings are popular among the people belonging to varied age

groups as they have something for everyone. Among contemporary writers of short stories in the present day. Ruskin Bond has carved his popularity with his style of writing, regaling people of all ages. The remarkable thing about him is that he is a foreigner who has reintroduced us with our social ethos and how in the given circumstances love can stay. Short stories are apt for the people who enjoy reading short fiction and that's the reason short stories have been famous among masses of all ages since time immemorial.

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