

THE SHORT STORY – FROM THEN TO NOW

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Abstract:

Short Story, as we read it, has gained importance and popularity over the past one hundred and fifty years in the literature of numerous countries. Popular because of its form and attention-grabbing content, it is the most widely read genre in literature during modern times. In spite of its popularity, it enjoys very little critical attention. Edgar Allan Poe, the American writer dedicated much of his energy in the discussion of the form of short story and came up with an informative essay on the theme of Short Stories. This Research Paper is an attempt to understand the overview of the development of Short Story with the passage of time and the contribution of various writers in making it successful.

Keywords: Short Story, Development, Evolution, Short Fiction

A *short story* is said to be an imaginary work of prose which is much shorter in content and length than a novel. As it is shorter in length compared to other prose forms, a short story has its focus as a single plot, one protagonist with a few minor characters and one central theme, whereas novel usually tackles multiple plots and various themes, with a range of noticeable characters. Edgar Allan Poe, in "The Philosophy of Composition", his famous essay, said that one should ideally read a short story in a single sitting, ranging from thirty minutes to a couple of hours.

The Short Story as we read it today has emerged from the oral storytelling tradition of the 17th century. With the passage of time, it has become a complete genre in itself. It usually has a self-contained incident and the intention of the writer is to evoke a particular mood in the reader. The literary techniques used are usually taken from a common pool also used in the novel. Short Stories have no fixed length. Also, there is no demarcation about the kind of content accepted. It was mainly shaped by the demands of the available market for publication.

As the realistic novel got in shape, the short story also started to evolve as a tradition. Some of its first examples are found in the tales of E. T. A. Hoffmann. They developed the characters according to the short fiction, either as a choice or as the critics suggested. Another example is the early writers. Henry who wrote *The Gift of Magi* and the popular O. Henry award is named after him. *An Unfinished Story*, *A Municipal Report*, *Collect Penny Lover*, *Two Thanksgiving Day Gentleman*, *The Last Leaf* etc are some of his other famous stories the importance of short story publication further increased due to improvement in printing technology and coming out of periodical additions.

The short stories started to get published separately between 1790 and 1810, but the years between 1810 and 1830 witnessed the publication of first collections of short stories in several countries during this duration. Gothic tales like Richard Cumberland's "The Poisoner of Montremos" were the first ones to appear in the United Kingdom. Sir Walter Scott and Charles Dickens are two of the most popular novelists who also wrote some well-known short stories during this period. In the United States, the earliest short story was Charles Brockton Brown's *Somnambulism* in 1805. Washington Irving wrote *Rip Van Winkle* and other mysterious tales. Writers in Germany and France also started to publish their short stories.

The years 1850-1900, i.e. the later half of the 19th century saw a tremendous growth in the number of printed magazines and journals which led to an increase in demand for short stories as well. In the United Kingdom, Thomas Hardy wrote a lot of short stories like *Mere Interlude* and *The Three Strangers*. Rudyard Kipling and Arthur Conan Doyle Gave a further boost to the short stories. In the US, Herman Melville name came up with his short story collection *The Piazza Tales* in 1856. Henry James came up as another popular writer of short fiction during

this period in the United States. Many French and Russian authors also successfully tried their hand at short story writing.

As far as the Indian authors are concerned, Munshi Premchand made a remarkable beginning in the genre of short story writing during this period in the Hindi language. He wrote many novels and short stories based on realism and introspection, thereby displaying the complex norms and relationships of the Indian society. Premchand has written over 200 short stories. When we discuss short story writing in India, we cannot forget to mention Sadat Hassan Manto who was born in India and wrote in the Urdu language has gained worldwide respect for his irony, depth and sarcasm in short story writing. Manto has written over to 50 short stories and Toba Tek Singh remains his most popular masterpiece. Rabindranath Tagore also published short stories which highlighted the lives of the oppressed section of the social search as the poor farmers and women.

During the years 1945 to 1900, there were periodicals published like the Strand Magazine and Storyteller. These periodicals were responsible for the popularity of the short story. During this period, Saki wrote short stories about Edwardian England which were full of satire. PG Woodhouse also published comical stories which were his first collection of short stories. Virginia Woolf, Graham Greene, Arthur C. Clarke are some of the other popular short story writers who started to write during this period. Many high-profile American magazines like the New Yorker, The Saturday Evening Post, The Bookman etc. started to publish short stories in each one of their issues. As the demand for these short stories was constantly rising, the writers were also getting paid very well for their stories. Many more German, Brazilian, and Portuguese writers also started to write short stories along with writing novels and poetry.

After 1945, that is after World War II, we saw the writers in the United States also started to write a lot of short fiction. The famous periodical, the New Yorker, continued with the publication of short stories including the short fiction of Shirley Jackson who wrote The Lottery in 1948. It turned out to be one of his most popular works. Innumerable writers started to explore the genre of short fiction. John Updike, Stephen King etc. wrote voraciously during this time. Roald Dahl in the United Kingdom wrote some of his best shot fiction during this time.

The five key elements on which each one of these writers works to create an impressive short story are character, setting, conflicts, plot and theme. A character is usually a single person or a protagonist with a few unimportant characters in the story. The setting up a story is the place and time when the events take place. Scenery, landscape, seasons etc. provide a strong sense of setting. The next important key element which is a plot gives us a series of events and characters which relate to the central or the main conflict. The conflict in itself is a struggle highlighted in the story between two people or things. The main character or the protagonist struggles against society, nature, another character or his own emotions and feelings. In a short

story, The central idea or belief is said to be the theme of the short story.

Srinivasa, in his book *The Adventure of Criticism*, says about the future of the short story, “ So long as there are writers like Maugham and Pritchett, Hemmingway and Faulkner, Masti and Raja Roa and there are quite a few of them whose art can expose the darkness at noon or the glory hidden in the seeming dross, we need not despair of the future of the Short Story”.

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