
INDIAN ENGLISH SHORT STORY AFTER INDEPENDENCE

□ DR SUNIL KUMAR

ABSTRACT :

The post – independence literary scenario of India has opened the new dimensions and possibilities and brought to us several talented and promising writers of Indian English Short Stories . After Independence some of the people of our country had hoped that English would go along with their rulers from India but it would not happen so . On the contrary , Indian writing in English , especially , Fiction and Poetry has developed quickly and became successful during the past few decades . Though the Indian English Short Story has not been flourished as the Indian English Fiction , she has her own share of luck and fate to make a rapid progress in this field as it can be seen the presence of the **Big Three** and Manjeri Isvaran on the scene . The situation is to some extent different because there has been a rich tradition of story – telling in our country by way of oral transmission and in writing as it can be witnessed in **Panchatantra** , **Jatakas** and **Kathasaritasagar** . Most of the practitioners of short story writings in English have taken it leisurely just to relax themselves from the tensions of a serious pursuit . There are some short story writers in English included in this paper are drawn from different sources . These practitioners , for instance , are Anita Desai ,

Arun Joshi , Bhabani Bhattacharya , Chaman Nahal , K.N Daruwala , Margaret Chatterjee , Khuswant Singh , Mulk Raj Anand , Rabindranath Tagore and Ruth Praver Jhabvala , etc. English language and Literature could emerge with greater vigour and force against the drift of time . Indian English short story has considerably flourished during the past few decades . It is true that the Indian English short story has been neglected right from the beginning but it is also true that there has been a rich tradition of Indian thought and tradition of telling story by a way of oral transmission as well as in writing system. This paper is to take a quick peep at the pages of the Indian English short stories practised by the different practitioners of the contemporary India .

A Brief Study of Short Story in English in Contemporary India : Indian English short story was originated in 1920s . Of course , a short story is a simple and more popular form of communication than the wide ranging fiction . It is deeply rooted in our Indian traditions and thoughts from the time immemorial due to the role of slow education and social customs as well as traditions in ancient India . This tradition of practising short story is as old as our Indian society and culture .

Indian English short story writers

found the sources of inspiration in the ancient tales of the **Panchtantra** and in the **Buddhistic Jataka Tales** which are said to be **beast tales** in which some animals symbolise human beings and their virtues or vices . Another variety of tales generally known as **folk tales** , in ancient India are well preserved in **Kathasaritsagar** . These stories are based on the **Brihatkatha** of Gunadgya and the **Daskumarcharitam** of the noted Sanskrit author Dandin . Apart from these the ancient tales are also found in **Upnishadas** and **Puranas** like the **Bhagawataagita** , the **Mahabharata** and the **Ramayan**. All these works composed by the world fame writers provided stimuli and motivations to Indian short story writers . The Jains too are not lagging behind in this **genre** and have added such works as the **Padmapurana** by Rabisena and the **Mahapurana** by Jinasena and Gunabhadra . All these works provided stimuli and motivations to Indian short story writers to write short stories in English which are very interesting and depict the true picture of life and character of the actors and actresses .

The short story may be written both in prose and poetry but the medium is not so important as the subject – matter and style . A short story concentrates on a single character or a single group of characters in a single situation at a single moment . As A.J. Merson has rightly **unexpectedness of the subjects and much that manner as well as matter further reveals the individuality of the writers** . H.E. Bates has remarked that it can be anything from a prose – poem without plot or character to **analysis** of the most complex human emotions , and the theme which it can deal , may be anything but the way of

presenting should be in such a manner that it carries the impression of being **unified** and **whole** in a limited sense .Edger Allen Poe , a well – known American tale – teller , has insisted on the importance and said , “ a certain unique or single effect to be wrought out .” In England , R.L. Stevenson also laid emphasis on the significance of an “ initial impulse “ in the short story which remembers the practice of Poe . Hence , a short story writer must visualise the end in the beginning , and the alone he will be successful in communicating an “ impression “ or “ idea “ . He should reduce the language to the minimum to contribute utmost to the “effect “ intended . H.G.Wells declares that a short story has to be read within twenty minutes . Some recent definers say that a relative short narrative should be under 10,000 words which is designed to produce a single effect and which contains the elements of drama . This is unmistakably a comprehensive definition of the short story and it is fairly acceptable . In Indian short story in English , the beginnings were made under the influence of Britishers who had given us both a steady nation and an international language . It is , therefore , to speculate that the Indian short story writer in English is an inheritor of British legacy bequeathed to him by O. Henry , John Galsworthy , Somerset Maugham and Rudyard Kipling . These British writers were also inspired by the French author, Maupassant . Hence , the fact is that the Indian short story writer in English began his story writings under the impact of the West and slowly and steadily spread his wings to incorporate the charms of a finished form and a natural prose style .

Indian English Short Story began

towards the end of the nineteenth century with the publications of Kamla Sathianandan's short stories from **Indian Christian Life** published in 1898. Thereafter some writings were done in this **genre** to arouse national consciousness and to effect social reforms and to have moral and philosophical broodings. K. S. Venkataramini published his short stories in English like **Paper Boats** in 1921 and **Jatadharan** in 1935. In the early twentieth century Rabindranath Tagore, an internationally known literary personality wrote some popular short stories in Bengali and then translated them into English. Some of his popular stories are **The Home Coming**, **The Kabuliwala**, **The Postman**, **The Cabuliwala**, **Subha**, **The Babus of Nayanjore** and **The Castaway**.

In the mid-thirties of the Twentieth century Mulkraj Anand published his popular short story, **The Lost Child** and **Other Stories** which proved to be an immediate success. Then came some big names such as R. K. Narayan, Raja Rao, Khswant Singh and R. P. Jhabvala. Anand is with the poor and down-trodden voicing the concerns and predicaments of the lower classes in our society and siding with the lost ones and sufferers. The element of humanism is evident in his short stories and he laces at **the lies, shams and hypocrisies** of our people with relentless vigour and robust satire. The social injustices and highbrow prejudices move him and he forcefully ventilates his strong feelings against them as is gathered from his short stories. **The Cobbler and The Machine**, **Boots**, and **The Old Watch** and **The Story of an Anna**. In his story, **Lament on the Death of a Master of Arts**, the story teller takes to satire to hit at

the rotten and inhuman social customs and conditions — the proud parents, the child marriage, the stubbornness of the elders, hypocrisy, insanitation, and cruelty in education and so many other things. Anand is occasionally indulged in self-pity and melodramatic situations, as in his **Lament on the Death of a Master of Arts**. But he touches new heights when he discards the mantle of propaganda or self-indulgence. His story **Lajwanti** is a moving tale of the hopeless situation of a young village belle, who finds no anchororage either at her in-law's or at her parental home. Anand's themes of the stories are wide ranging and his treatment is varied in accordance with the inexpediency of the plots.

R. K. Narayan occupies a prominent place as a writer of short stories in a lighter vein and style. He usually fixes his gaze on those aspects of an accident or a character which are appealing to him. He is a fine painter of the ludicrous and the humorous in his story. His stories **Lowley Road**, and **A Horse and Two Goats** are highly engaging and entertaining while dealing with facts of human life. He can also delve deep into child psychology and portrays children with perfect sympathy and understanding as can be seen in his **Swami and His Friends**, but he is weak in depicting women characters of flesh and blood, as can be gathered from his stories, **Mother and Son**, or from **A Willing Slave**. His stories do not have political overtones or even undertones like his fictions. Like Anand, he reveals his situations and characters by means of narrations and not by dialogues. One of the typical features of his technique is that he does not bother to evolve an indigenous brand

of English in order to cope with the local atmosphere or the social milieu. The sustaining power of a Narayanan story is its unmixed comic sense and its pure delight in the art of living.

Raja Rao is definitely a different mental make-up both in his novels and short stories. He is sober and more serious in evoking a proper atmosphere for the flowering of his Indian tradition and **Barricades** both published by the Oxford University Press in 1947. He had taken a long rest in the fictional world after the release of **Kanthapura** in 1938. He goes to the folk tales and epic legends to evolve a form of his own with "all simplicity and credulity" of a myth maker. He often writes on such subjects as the popular myths, national upsurge, and rural characters. His story **Narsinga**, **The Cow of the Barricades** powerfully evokes the suffering motherland (symbolised by the cow, Gauri) under the tyrannical rule of the red Englishmen. The stories **Kanthapura** and **Companions** highlight the popular snake myths, while **The Little Gram Shop** and **A Client** focus our attention on the cunning **baniyas** exploiting the innocent people and themselves **wallowing** in wealth and prosperity. **The policemen** and **The Rose** and **A Fable** confirm the depth and philosophical probing in his works. His **Javini** is a charming story of an untouchable woman widowed and despised by all and earning a **rupee** per month for her livelihood. The story **Akkanyya** is highly touching, portraying the tortuous life of a high-class widow. His profundity of vision and deep-rooted Indianness is the real charm of his short story. He appeals to us for his onrushing narrative

technique — and his masterly handling of the English language.

Another contemporary short story writer who is slowly yet steadily gaining ground as a major Indian – English short – story writer is Manjeri S. Isvaran. His stories **Naked Shingles** (1941), **Sivaratri** (1943), and **A Madras Admiral** (1959), prove him to be a pioneer of this **genre**. He is a typical Indian writer who confines himself to the life of the low and middle classes in the erstwhile Madras State. He observes fidelity to facts and his own experiences in his tales. He manages to write skilfully, from different angles, on a wide variety of subjects. His story **Between Two Flags** is the ravaging results of the Great Wars and the Indian National Movement. The naiveties of children in **Kolu**, the love – affairs of a confirmed thief or a motor driver as to be had in **The Motorman**, the uninhibited exhibition of love leading to sensual gestures and sexy word – duel as to be found in **Mango Lane**, the rape of the volatile Jagada by the crafty cart man as in **Immersion** are on different subjects written on different angles. Isvaran seems to excel in the sympathetic revelation of female psyche, ranging from a house wife to a school going girl, a mother-in-law to a daughter-in-law, from a young widow to a granny. Isvaran is close to earth and keenly alive while depicting the womankind but he does not succeed in dealing with children and their delicate psychology. His story begins leisurely but ends up with some authorial comments or psychological reflections. But it is tormenting that he starts casting his views and reviews in the midst of a story. Still for this weakness he is a truly powerful story teller. Isvaran is not

an experimenter with the English idiom , as Anand or Rao is -----pious and devoted Brahmin to worship and feed with milk the black cobra (Kalanag) which bites him to death . **The Voice of God** highlights the inherent evils of democratic systems of the government in which elections

With the dawn of Indian Independence Khuswant Singh as a short story writer of free India wrote his popular books of short stories . His **The Mark of Vishnu** launches a scathing attack on a blind belief which impels Ganga Ram , a play a dominant role but the elections are won by hardcore criminals (like Gunda Singh) at the cost of deserving candidate like Baba Ram Singh . How hard- hitting is the irony of Khuswant Singh when he remarks ——— “ The people had spoken . The voice of people is the voice of God “. Another title story **A Bride for the Sahib** is a tragic tale of the schism between an Oxonian and his docile Indian wife , Kalyani Das . His stories **Posthous** , **My Own My Native Land** , **The Red Tie** , **Mr. Kanjoos** and the **Great Miracle** , and **Rats and Cats in the House of Culture** are humorous and fantastic . It is obvious that irony and comic sense is the **forte** of Mr. Singh’s stories . V. A . Shahane has rightly remarked that “ The predominant quality of Khuswant Singh as a short story writer is his comic spirit , informed by the sense of incongruity and by the bewildering phenomena of contradiction in life .” All these Indian short stories written in English by the eminent writers of India are already standing at the cross – roads and they have to strive **consistently** to arrive at a safe destination .

Another notable name in the field of contemporary Indian – English short story is

that of Ruth Praver Jhabvala , who is a Polish by parentage , a German by birth , an English woman by education , and an Indian by marriage . English is her mother tongue , and she writes her novels and short stories in it with utter sincerity and command . Her portrayal of Indian life is sensibly executed , with the added advantage of a somewhat detached observer . Her four novels , namely **Like Birds , Like Fishes & Other Novels (1956)** , **A Stronger Climate (1968)** , **How I Became Holy Mother & Other Stories (1964)** , and **An Experience of India (1972)** , show evidently that Jhabvala gets depressed and disillusioned in India , which she calls a country of ‘ heat and dust ‘ . of slow movement an activity , of indolence and laziness . Her story , **A Stronger Climate** is a painter to this experience of story teller , Even **An Experience of India** is cast in the same gloomy mood and in the same attitude of helplessness .

In addition to the above mentioned established short story writers , there are some more memorable literary personalities like K . A. Abbas , G.D Khosla , Bhabani Bhattacharya , Chaman Nahal , Balakrishnan , Ruskin Bond , and **Usha John** . They have contributed in their way to the growth and expansion of this **genre** in varying degrees .K. A. Abbas seems to be impatient with the present day social set- up , which is dominated by poverty , ignorance , selfishness , hypocrisy , inefficiency and unemployment . He is utterly disturbed by the prevailing political problems like those of partition , bloodshed , and refugee influx . His stories **Blood and Stones & Other Stories (1947)** and **Cages of Freedom & Other Stories (1952)** , treat these political issues . **Rice & Other Stories (1957)**

and **One Thousand Nights on a Bed of Stones & Other Stories (1957)** highlight some of the glaring social evils, in whose portrayal he sometimes becomes enraged and furious and at others sentimental and melodramatic. His technique of narration shows us a strong urge for the visual cinematic effects and offers us a series of striking and memorable flashes of events and scenes. The story teller creates one of harsh realism vehemently attacking the odd and the incongruous with the fond expectations of a zealous socialist who believes in setting things right in the last run, though sometimes he loses his grip over the medium of his art and slips into slipshod generalisations.

G.D. Khosla is another famous story writer who gives us a peep into the multifaceted personality of Mother India through his wide-ranging themes. He depicts characters who are both types and individuals and he portrays them with sensitivity and objectivity. He depicts all walks of people — from rickshaw-pullers to business men, from film heroines to defiant loving ladies and all find a birth in his creative world. His stories, **The Price of a Wife (1958)**, **The Horoscope Cannot Lie & Other Stories (1961)**, **Grim Fairy Tales and Other Facts and Fancies (1966)** and **A Way of Loving & Other Stories (1973)** — steeped in realism and humour. Khosla has earned an abiding place for himself in the world of literature. In his stories he hits hard at the social evils like untouchability and ill-matched marriage. His stories are woven logically and systematically but sometimes they are too long. The stories are mixed with wit and humour which come to his rescue and prove to be saving grace.

Ruskin Bond and Manoj Das are

no doubt redeeming figure for contemporary Indian – English Short Story, but Ruskin is hardly accessible due to non-availability of most of his works, and Manoj is largely confined to a particular locale and events taking place there. Arun Joshi and Anita Desai excel in laying bare some deep –hidden human motives and emotions and in making subtle psychological analyses of characters. Chaman Nahal's single volume does not add much to his reputation as a novelist.

Sale is a modern Indian English short story by Anita Desai. The story is a study of an artist whose paintings never sell. He is a painter gifted with unusual talents and calibre but his misfortune is that nobody has the capacity to understand and appreciate his creation in an unbiased manner. He complains of the degenerating aesthetic taste of the person. Once it so happens that three visitors came and make long perusal of his paintings. They ask him a number of questions ranging from professional to private affairs. However, the painter answers them well and he is quite hopeful that the visitors may purchase his paintings, he tells them various specifications of his paintings in detail. Despite all his pleadings and persuasions, the painter fails to prevail upon the visitors, for they do not find anything substantial in his paintings. As a matter of fact, Anita Desai has projected an idea of neglect of artists in society through this short story. He considers the declining aesthetic taste of the people wholly responsible for the plight of the artist. Vulgar tastes demand vulgar art. Anita Desai does not ditto the idea that an artist should ever make any compromise with the standard of his art just for the sake of money. **Scholar and Gypsy**

is a short story of temperamental contrast, it centres round an American couple named David and Pat, who have come to India to explore her mystery. David is certainly a scholar, whose interest in sociology entitles him to fame. Pat has an entirely different temperament attitude from David. She is interested only in visiting other countries. In a way, She is a globe teller. She comes of an American farmer family and loves to be free, unfettered and unchained by bonds of any sort. The environs of Delhi and Bombay appear to her as suffocating, teasing and nauseating. But David finds India an enchanting city, which Pat disapproves. She feels bored of "the wild jungles of the city of Bombay." Even the climate of Delhi is suffocating to her. She assures David that She can anyhow tolerate it. She confides David, "I must pull myself together" which she betrays later. Finding both Bombay and Delhi suffocating and nauseating, she naturally recollects the lost home, apple trees and cows. Tired of life in India, she joins the hippies being sermonised by an Indian preacher who masquerades to cure **these seekers of nirvana and bliss** by administering **bhang** and who often ridicules them more than **meditating or discoursing on theology**. Pat is educated only up to high school, but she considers herself to be far superior to the well-educated Indians. Pat does not find social work congenial to her temperament and gives it up in despair. Fat Indian ladies appear to her as terrifying and provoking as a red rag to a bull. She was once given a party by the Gidwanis. Mrs. Gidwani is very courteous to Pat but her obesity drives Pat almost nauseatic. For her physical charm is more tempting than the simplicity of her

heart. Pat fails to reciprocate the generous feelings of Mr. Gidwani, because of her wrong notions of virtue and vice, of moral and immoral. In disgust, she goes to Manali in Kulu to find happiness and enjoy the natural beauty, the flora and fauna of this place. She does a lot of shopping in The Tibetan quarters of Manali Bazaar, where she encounters many hippies roaming to and fro. She likes them and their way of life. David regards his wife as a woman of blurred outlook. They enter into a heated discussion on religion, hippies, Buddhists et cetera at this juncture. David fails to prevail upon his wife and they are now separated from each other. Disgusted and broken-hearted, David returns to his country all alone. Pat joins hippies in search of spiritual solace and finally plans to be a Buddhist monk. She also finds fault with her husband for unnecessarily impeding her religious and spiritual quest. Precisely, Anita Desai's such story deals with the problems of adjustments where there is a lot of differences between the temperaments of husband and wife.

Sita is the protagonist in **Where Shall We Go This Summer?** and Suno is the main character in **Studies in the Park**. Suno is just a micro, a short sketch of Sita, for Anita Desai postulates her vision or outlook of life through Suno on a micro plane, whereas through Sita on a macro plane. However, Suno is the prototype of Sita in espousing a particular view of life for which Anita Desai is generally known. The story teller's overall vision of life is not merely to feel helpless in the face of realities of life, but to face them boldly. Harish in **Surface Textures** is an escapist and his entire being just a psychograph of evasive personality

— a personality of pusillanimity . He invites a disciplinary action so that he can get rid of his family burden and also became a **Sadhu** in order to lead a life of inactivity and to prosper on other's earnings . This is a negative side of life , which Anita Desai hates and rejects .

Conclusion : When we give a cursory glance at the significance of Indian English short story , it convinces us that it has traversed a long course of journey and has now reached a stage through the salutary efforts of a few talented writers . It has made a breakthrough by exploring new areas and techniques . The story writers have faced the natural hardships of language and expression , for English is our acquired language , not mother tongue . The short story has made some headway and has become truly Indian after shaking off the initial foreign influences. The short story writers have realised that their own tradition of both folk – tales and fables has been rich enough to feed and support them in their literary expressions . They have just to look around for their keen and lively subjects , to which they have tailored their modern techniques . We find in the stories that their sensibility and subject – matter are essentially **autochthonous** , their treatment of stories is moulded by such modern modes of expression as the stream of consciousness , the flashback and flash forth , the first person narration , the point of view method and epistolary method . Modern short story tends to be analytical and narrative , not didactic and descriptive in nature as the traditional Indian tale . We find a number of other techniques in modern Indian short stories . The modern Indian short story in English has grown in variety and vitality , It has earned a credit for this mainly

goes to the **Big Three** and Isvaran and a few gifted talented writers . But It would be a misconception if we think that it has reached the pinnacle of artistic perfection and nothing more is required to succeed . Most of the writers have confined themselves to social scenes and events but they have deviated from burning issues of the day as the political awakening and upheavals during pre – Independence and Post Independence periods . Some of our modern story writers have largely overlooked **the purely domestic situation** but for Anand's **Lajwanti** and Raja Rao's **Akayya** and Jhabvala's **The Interview** . These writers have occasionally grown over – enthusiastic and sentimental in their desire to be indigenous and to be impressive in their inherent urges . They have restored to word-jugglery and verbosity . They have added variety of themes and diversity of technique to this art-form but they have yet to rise above some of the shortcomings . The qualities of brevity , economy and significations in their works in order to be able to compete with the international masters of the **genre** — Maupassant , Conar Doyal , Faulkner , Henry James , Hemingway , Galsworthy and Katherine Masefield . Mrs Desai has a marvellous mastery over language and style . Her language is highly sensitive , responsive , sensuous , but nervous . Her style is fit for all modes of thought and tensions .

Finally , contemporary Indian short story in English is already standing at the cross roads , and it has to make cautious moves to put itself through . It should keep in view the international standard , and has to strive consistently to arrive at a safe destination . It will have to overcome its

deficiencies and evolve a fresh measure of investigation and energisation . We have only to **wait and watch** for a better future of the short story in English , and not get bogged down in the morasses of unhealthy speculations and pessimistic tendencies , realising the truth that **The best is yet to come.**

REFERENCES

1. Abbas , K. A. ; " Blood and Stones & Other Stories " (1947) , " Cages of Freedom & Other Stories " (1952) , " Rice and Other Stories " (1947) , " One Thousand Nights on a bed of Stones & Other Stories " (1957).
2. Anand , Mulk Raj , " The Lost Child and Other Stories " , " The Cobbler and The Machine " .Boots " , " The Old Watch " , " The Story of an Anna " . " Lament on the Death of a Master of Arts " , " The Barber's Trade Union " , " The Death Of A Lady " , " Lottery " . " Lajwanti " .
3. Bhattacharya , Bhabani , " Steel Hawk and Other Stories " (1968) , " Encounter " (1978)
4. Dalal , Nergis , " The Nude " (1977)
5. Desai , Anita , " Scholar and Gypsy " (1991), " Sale ."
6. Dwidi , A. N. , " Contemporary Indian English Short Story " (1943)
7. Hosain Attia , " Phoenix and Other Stories (1953)
8. Jhabvala , Ruth Praver , " Birds " (1956) , " Like Fishes & Other Stories (1956) , " How I Became Holy Mother & Other Stories (1964) , " A Stronger Climate " (1968) , " An Experience of India " (1972) .
9. Kamala , Sathianandan , " Stories from Indian Christian Life " (1898)
10. Khusla G. D. , " The Price of a Wife " (1958) , " The Horoscope Cannot Lie & Other Stories " (1961) , " Grim Fairy Tales and Other Facts and Fancies " (1966) , " A Way of Loving & Other Stories " (1973).
11. Madhaviah , A . , " Kushika's Short Stories " (194) ,
12. Manjeri , Isvaran , " Naked Shingles " (1941) , " Sivaratri " (1943) , " A Madras Admiral " (1959).
13. Narayan , R.K. , " An Astrologer's Day " (1947) , " Lawley Road " (1956) , " A Horse and Two Goats " (1970) , " The Cow of Barricades & Other Stories " (1947) , " The Policeman and the Rose " (1978) , " Kanthapura " (1938) .
14. Nagrajan , K . , " Cold Rice " (1945) .
15. Shankar Ram , " Children of the Kaberi " (1926) , " Cretures All " (1932)
16. Singh , Khuswant , " The Mark of Vishnu and Other Stories " (1950) , " The Voice of God & Other Stories " (1957) , " A Pride for the Sahib & Other Stories " (1967) , " Black Jasmine " (1971).
17. Tagore , Rabindranath , " The Cabulibala " , " Subha " , " The Postmaster " , " The Babus of Nayanjore " , " The Castaway " .
18. Venkatarabani , K. S . , " Paper Boats " (1921) , " Jatadharan and Other Stories " (1931).