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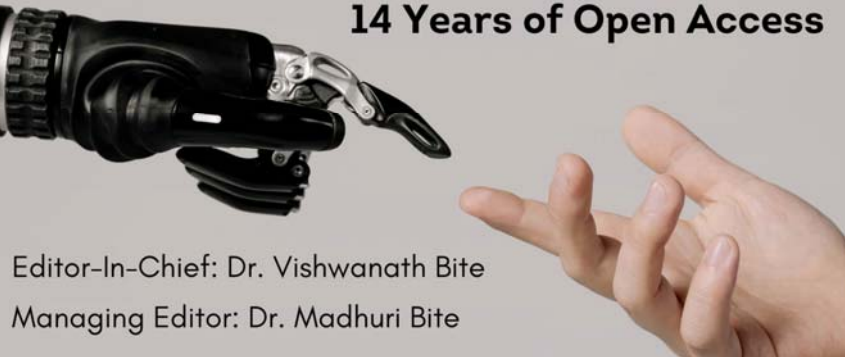
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Short Story: A Conceptual Analysis

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Abstract:

Short stories are natural, simple narratives and are popular and critically appreciated, which may be used as the resources for varied purposes. There is no culture that claims that there were no short stories in the history of that culture; there is no culture that claims that there are no short stories in that contemporary society; and there will be no culture that will claim that there is no need for short stories in their culture. Short stories deal with aspects such as mythical, legendary, historical, political, religious, spiritual, intuitive, and lyrical. The sources of the short stories are personal experiences, socio-politico-religious-financial and other constraints. Short stories are a part of great grand history. Characters, settings, exposition, and theme are attributes of a short story. In history, the printing press has played a significant role in making short stories more famous.

Keywords: Short story, culture, characters, mythology, history.

Introduction:

Short stories are natural, simple narratives that increase curiosity of audiences of different backgrounds. These are basically great efflorescences. In each era, short stories are enormously popular and critically appreciated. There are many types and many short stories. Many short stories are considered as the resources to continue the legacy and present the proud history. These are used as an authentic, reliable, easy and impressive tool to educate, nurture and motivate civilians in general and youngsters in particular. It is also seen that short stories are used as a resource to present a brief history, life of great personalities and an important event of the culture. But at times these are also used to taunt, insult, humiliate and present wrong discourses. These are popular in groups in general as well as there is a trend of popular short stories in subgroups presenting their own identity and critically appreciating or commenting on the competing or opponent subgroups, personalities, behavioral patterns or the nature groups. And such commentaries impetus a series of short stories that become a source of

entertainment. As Paul March-Russell states, “Like the literary fragment the short story is prone to snap and to confound readers’ expectation to delight in its own incompleteness, and to resist definition. These qualities not only mean that the short story has been of service to experimental writers but that they also relate the short story- and in turn modern and contemporary literature- the mutability of the oral tradition.”¹

Role of Short Stories:

Life of each individual moves ahead from early childhood by listening to short stories. It is possible that at an early stage of life, the child may not understand what the story is, but the child surely tries to connect with the style of the narration which adds to the pleasure of the narrator that is mother, father, or grandparents. It maintains that each individual is well-trained to listen to the short stories and it may be possible that because of this natural training each individual may narrate short stories at the later stages of life. Short stories were, are and will be the part of all cultures. There is no culture that claims that there were no short stories in the history of that culture; there is no culture that claims that there are no short stories in that contemporary society; and there will be no culture that will claim that there is no need for short stories in their culture. According to Viorica Patea, “A traditional view of a short story is that it is a compressed, unified, and plotted form. Theoretical discussion of the genre explores notions such as totality, brevity, intensity, suggestiveness, unity of effect, closure and design. Attention to the formal structure of the short story is mainly a twentieth century enterprise. The aesthetics of the genre’s form attracted the interest of critics and narrative theories of the Sixties- the period of international dissemination of Russian Formalist writings of 1920s (Borris Eijxenbaum, Viktor Shklovsky) the emergence of structuralism, Vladimir Propp) and anthropology (Claude Levi-Strauss), and the philosophy of culture (Earnest Cassier). The rise of the short story theory then also further developed in parallel with the growth of interest in narratology, reader-response criticism, and discourse analysis and cognitive science.”² This maintains that short stories are practiced widely.

Concept and History:

The concept of ‘short story’ is complex as the stories are narrated, presented, preserved and nurtured in varied formats. Short stories deal with different aspects such as mythical, legendary, historical, political, religious, spiritual, intuitive, lyrical. For all forms/formats of the short stories, there is an appropriate stage/platform. Short stories are highly dynamic and impressive tools. Critics, scholars and stakeholders have defined ‘short story’ by considering



its formalness, content, functions, aesthetic value(s), effect, and historical development, size and different elements. Basically as Viorica Patea said , “A short story is a way to say something that can’t be said any other way, and it takes every word in the story to say what the meaning is. You tell a story because a statement would be inadequate.”³ Whereas Joyce Carol Oates states, “...the short story is a prose piece that is not mere concatenation of events, as in a news account or anecdote, but an intensification of meaning by way of events.”⁴

Short stories are narrated by almost all. All try to narrate short stories, folk or fairy tales as these are not voluminous or complex in pattern. These are direct narration(s), less flexible or wonderfully flexible. The myth about short stories is that as the title suggests, short stories are primarily short. As these are short, these may be self-dependent, self-defining, and self-explanatory. As these are basically short and meant to serve the purpose, there is a possibility that these remain perfect and full of the elements that need to serve the purpose of the story or need of the audience(s). These remain lively, practical and develop a personal rapport.

The sources of the short story are personal experiences, socio-politico-religious-financial and other constraints. The short story may be narrated to an infant, school children, youngsters, office bearers and even to laypersons or professionals. Thus, its sources are different. Viorica Patea maintains that, “The origins of the short form go back to myth and biblical verse narratives, medieval sermons and romance, fables, folktales, ballads, and the rise of the German Gothic in the eighteenth century.”⁵ Today, most of the renowned authorities do narrate short stories through their presentations, speeches or narrations at various platforms. Or even it is experienced that short stories are expected by the customers, students/learners, infants, kids and laypersons to understand the success/failure stories, or great grand traditions or even to understand the complexities of situations. Thus, the short story narrators know perfectly what to be edited, and how to design the pattern of beginning, middle and end of the story. Though the short story is narrated from the ancestors, there is a possibility that the current generation may fix it to fit it to present day conditions and requirements.

In the history of the literature of any country, short stories are the ones which were considered as part of its great grand history. In Greek and Latin history of literature, short stories have strongly laid the foundational stone of the great tradition of romances and other

formats of the literature. Same is the case with the history of all literature. These are not only popular in the beginning of any history of literature, but these are present in each successive era of the history of literature. In brief, no study of history or the study of literature of any era or of any country or culture is complete without the study of the short story. And it is also seen that short stories in each era might have taken a new form. According to Florence Goyet, “‘Modern’ short stories that follow less generic conventions may very well be more satisfying for twenty-first century readers than the classic form.”⁶ According to Charles E. May, “Although there is some justification for the common claim that the short story as a distinct literary genre began in the nineteenth century, the wellsprings of the form are as old as the primitive realm of myth. Studies in anthropologies suggest that the brief episodic narratives, which constitute the basis of the short story, are primary preceding later epic forms, which constitute the basis of the novel. In many ways, with its usual focus on a single event and a single effect has remained closed to its primal mythic source.”⁷

The study of short stories maintains that the history of short stories may be divided into parts such as short stories in the ancient era, short stories in the medieval era, the modern short stories or short stories in the modern and postmodern era. The short stories have the following important elements viz characters, plot, setting, conflict and theme. As Joyce Carol Oates states the plot of a short story, “may be wholly interior, seemingly static, a matter of the progression of a character’s thought. Its resolution need not be a formally articulated statement..., but it signals a tangible change of some sort; a distinct shift in consciousness, a deepening of insight. In the most elliptical of short stories, a characteristic of the modern and contemporary story, the actual resolution frequently occurs in reader’s, and not the fictional characters’ consciousness.”⁸

Scholars, critics and short story narrators in general believe that characters, settings, exposition, and theme are attributes of a short story. The characters in a short story may be people, animals, and/or things involved in the plot. These characters may be real, fictitious or fantasy. In general, there is a protagonist in a short story, who may be a good individual(s). The protagonist is often a good character who might be opposed, exploited or even victimized. There is an antagonist who creates conflict, who in general is a bad, cunning, shrewd individual, who creates the problem or the suffering of the protagonist because of him. The static characters are those which hardly change. Either these may be good, evil. There may be dynamic characters in a short story. These are the characters who change or transform from being good



to bad or vice versa. There may be round characters in the story about whom it is too difficult to claim or predict how they will react. They have many qualities and emotions. And finally there may be flat characters which are easy to describe and predict. They possess and display a personality trait.

The setting of a short story is the time of day, season, past, present or future. The location may be a local area, town, state, country, neighboring country, global platform or even planet as the platform. This is primarily required to create an atmosphere or mood in the story. The conflict is the main problem that the protagonist tries to solve. This is something that is a disturbing element of the story or a bad or unexpected hazard that had happened or might happen in the story. Usually, such a conflict is resolved at the conclusive part or end of the story. The conflict may be different types. It may be against a person versus person, a person versus nature, a person against himself/herself, a person against society, family, etc. Whereas the theme of a short story may be what the author wanted you to know/learn or understand. Or it may be a broad idea of a life. It may be stated or intended. The plot of a short story is also important. Basically, it is the sequence of the story i.e. list of the events that take place in the story. The plot of a short story in general consists of five elements viz exposition or introduction, rising action, the climax, the falling action and the resolution.

The exposition or introduction is an important part of a short story. It basically is the beginning or an introduction of the setting, background or the character(s). The setting is of when and where. The background is the set of events created for the proceeding and leading of the plot. And the exposition of the characters such as protagonist(s), antagonist(s), static, dynamic, round and/or other types. This is a point where the atmosphere of the story is systematically set. It leads to rising action where conflict or suspense arises. The rising action is basically a series of action(s) that are significant and produce a kind of suspense, interest, stress/tension required for the narration of the plot. In a short story the rising action presents the personality trait of the characters, their flaws, and the situational background which creates the turns and twists that leads to the climax. This is the most interesting or highest and/or deciding factor of the story. This is the highest point of the tensions. This is also known as a conflict. It may be internal or external. The internal conflict is related to the protagonist and the external conflict may be related to the external world where one cannot control the actions and reactions of the others. It moves to the falling action where the protagonist leads to a settlement that results in the resolution which is the final end or the solution of the story. The

resolution is the concluding part of the story. This is the point where the story ends and tells or indicates what happens to the characters. This may be a kind of happiness, disappointment, etc. It indicates that there should be a proper structural unity in a short story. In this regard, Rust Hills maintains, “A successful short story will thus necessarily show a more harmonious relationship of part to whole, and part to part, than it is usual ever to find in a novel. Everything must work with everything else. Everything enhances everything else, interrelates with everything else, is inseparable from everything else - and all this is done with necessary and perfect economy.”⁹ Melville, James, Twain, Freeman, Jewett, Chesnutt, Chopin, Crane, Hemingway, Faulkner, are selected individuals, but many other great individuals have created the literary masterpieces.

The theme of the short story may be explained in a single word such as ‘family,’ ‘sisterhood,’ ‘brotherhood,’ ‘friendship,’ ‘love,’ ‘anger,’ ‘fear.’ This may be the central idea of the short story through which the message is understood that the author or narrator wants to send. The themes of short stories are varied. In general the objective of short stories was considered as mere fun, entertainment. Many critics and schools of criticism substantially considered this as the pattern. Thus, serious critical attention to these stories was negligible. As Julie Browne stated, “Short Story genre critics often preface their studies by stating how neglected the short story genre is; then they proceed to offer a study that adds to the body of short criticism...”¹⁰ But, now substantial critical attention to short stories is in vogue because of its popularity.

In the history of a short story, the printing press has played a significant role. Readers started relying on the printed versions of the story. At times, they accept the printed version(s) of the story or reiterate that it is partial, prejudiced or superficial and/or continue with the version of the story that they have heard through their parents, grandparents and from other resources. As Maria Loschnigg maintains, “The short story is neither a miniature novel nor is it comparable to a novel’s chapter; still it is shortness which serves as the basis for a definition and understanding of the specific aesthetic qualities of a genre. In other words it is essential to investigate the nature and effect of the short story’s shortness.”¹¹ Considering its shortness, it seems that in the era of AI (artificial intelligence), there is a possibility that the new version may emerge. In this process AI will try to identify the space to insert the cultural, ethical and mythical elements in the popular version of a short story to make it useful to each section of society and its appeal will be glocal and global.



Conclusion:

This maintains that ‘short story,’ as a genre has developed with the development and progress of human beings and will remain in vogue forever. Though these are short, these are meaningful, useful, critical, and also offer guidance. These are popular in all cultures and narrators of each era adapted this pattern. The characters of short stories are popular and vivid. The themes of short stories encompass every segment of life. Thus, short stories are must, important and needed. Characters, settings, plot, exposition, and theme are attributes of a short story. Short stories were, are and will be useful in each society.

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