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**Indian English Short Story-An Overview**

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**Abstract:**

Indian writing in English has attracted worldwide attention. It has flourished and attained higher peaks of excellence. As Srinivasa Iyengar says, "Indian writing in English should project a total vision of India which interprets her aspirations and hopes and records her ardors and defeats and her partial realizations just not before the outside world alone but even before the diverse linguistic regions within the country." Indian writers have made a remarkable dent in the fiction genre. Indo-English fiction has flourished during the past few decades. As Mulk Raj Anand says, "Indo-English fiction has come to stay as part of world literature. "The short story in Indian Writing in English may be superficially called an offshoot of the Indo-Anglian novel. This paper discusses the introduction of the growth and development of Indian English short stories.

**Keywords:** Genre, fiction, growth, development, short story

**Introduction:**

Drastic changes that took place in the social, political, and economic spheres during the pre-independence period influenced Indo-Anglian literature during this period. The most prominent writers, like R.K. Narayan, Mulk Raj Anand, and Raja Rao, appeared in the literary scene. Indian writing in English has been enriched by these eminent writers. Indo-Anglian literature was more realistic during this period. The ordeal of the freedom struggle, east-west relationships, the plight of the untouchable, the landless poor, the downtrodden, and the oppressed are the common themes of Indo-English fiction during the. Pre-independence period.

The changes that took place in social, political, and economic spheres have brought corresponding changes in Indo-Anglian literature during the post-independence period. Bhabani Bhattacharya, Manohar Malgonkar, and Khuswant Singh are the most prominent writers from the 1950s to the early 1960s. Arun Joshi and Chaman Nahal made their appearance on the literary scene during the late sixties and early seventies. The themes of Indo-English fiction during the post-independence period are the trauma of partition, east-west encounters, the theme of alienation, and

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social problems like hunger and poverty. Indo-English fiction is thus characterized by a variety of themes. It continues to change and grow and adapt itself to the changing Indian environment.

The genre of short story is much older than the novel. It has originated from fables, fairy tales, myths, legends, parables, and the tales of Chaucer and Boccaccio. When the development of novels took place in Europe in the 17th, 18th, and 19th centuries, it became popular, and the genre of short stories was neglected. Williams says: "The novel, for a time, displaced the short story, relegating it to an inferior position in the literary hierarchy, maimed and inadequate as an expression of human experience."

Edgar Allan Poe and Hawthorne are the pioneers of the genre of short story in American Literature. Russian novelists like Gogol, Dostoevsky and Tolstoy are also prominent short story writers. Guy de Maupassant, Belzac, Merimee and Daudet are the great short story writers in French Literature. The 20th Century short story writers like Katherine Mansfield and James Joyce are inspired by Anton Chechov, a Russian short story writer.

"Indian English short story has come out as a by-product of Indian English Fiction," says A.N. Dwivedi. Commenting on the overall neglect of the genre, Murli Das Melwani writes: "Indo-Anglian writers have neglected the short story. This is surprising considering that, next to poetry, the short story is the most flexible form of writing, and thus eminently suited to portray the variety of Indian life".

A.N. Dwivedi, in his work on the "Studies in Contemporary Indian-English Short Story," avers that the early Indian short story writers are inspired by the ancient tales of Panchatantra and the Buddhistic Jataka tales and also by the folk tales present in Dandin's Katha Saritha Sagar, Dashakumaracharitam, Upanishads, Puranas, and the Epics. R.K.Dhawan also agrees with the above view that our most reliable sources have been the great works of literature. For example, the Iliad, the Odyssey, the Ramayana, the Mahabharata, Chilappadikaram, and Manimekhalai are precious treasures that mirror the Greek, Aryan, and Dravidian past with great accuracy. They are all intensely human documents that reveal significant information about human relationships.

Shoshee Chunder Dutt, Surendra Mohan Tagore, and Kamala Sathianadhan are early Indian short story writers. Shoshee Chunder Dutt has authored two collections of short stories. They are Realities of Indian Life, A Dish of Rice and Curry, and Other Indigestible Ingredients. Shoshee Chunder Dutt and Sourindra Mohan Tagore have written The Times of Yore: Tales from Indian History (1885). Kamala Sathianadhan has authored Stories of Indian Christian Life (1898).

Rabindranath Tagore is not only an eminent poet but also a great short-story writer. He deals with the theme of nature and human life. The stories deal with the poor and middle-class people in villages and small towns of Bengal. They explicitly

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express the hopes and aspirations, disappointments and frustrations, joys and sorrows embedded in human life. The short stories of the pre-Gitanjali period were written during the years 1891- 1903. The stories written during this period are quite realistic and describe a conflict between one individual and another. Some of the stories of this period are Post Master, The Castway, The Child's Return, The Supreme Night, and The Cabuliwallah. The short stories of the post-Gitanjali period deal with the problems of contemporary life. They expose anti-social tendencies and hidden conflicts in the mind. The stories of this period are Wife's Letter, Number One, Ribibar, Shesh Katha, and Laboratory.

The Indo-Anglian short story really came to its own during the Gandhian Struggle for freedom. Writers like Shankar Ram, A.S.P. Ayyar, and S.K.Chettur are primarily short story writers. Shankar Ram's *The Children of Kaveri* (1926) and *Creatures All* (1933) deal with rustic life in Tamil Nadu. A.S.P. Ayyar has authored *Sense in Sex and Other Stories* (1929), *The Finger of Destiny and Other Stories* (1932), and *Famous Tales of India* (1954). He exquisitely deals with social reformation and the plight of women in traditional Hindu Society. S.K.Chettur has authored four collections of short stories. They are *Muffled Drums and Other Stories* (1917), *The Cobras of Dhermashevi and Other Stories* (1937), *The Spell of Aphrodite and Other Stories* (1957), and *Mango Seed and Other Stories* (1974). His stories invariably deal with village feuds, murders, and local legends about serpents, ghosts, and omens.

Manjeri Isvaran is a prominent Indian English short story writer and has published about ten volumes of short stories. Some of them are *Naked Shingles* (1941), *Sivaratri* (1943) and *A Madras Admiral* (1959). He deals with low and middle class people in his stories and a variety of themes and subjects like Indian National Movement, love affairs and psychology of women.

Prominent novelists like R.K. Narayan, Mulk Raj Anand, and Raja Rao have made remarkable contributions to the genre of short stories. R.K. Narayan is not only a great novelist but also a prolific short story writer and authored six collections of short stories. They are *Malgudi Days* (1941), *Dodu and Other Stories* (1943), *Cyclone and Other Stories* (1944), *An Astrologer's Day* (1947), *Lawley Road* (1956), and *A Horse and Two Goats* (1970).

The setting of all his short stories is the imaginary small town of Malgudi. He deals with varied themes and subjects in his stories. Some stories dwell on the theme of human relationships, children, and animals, and some with social evils, customs, traditions, and superstition. Some others in different professions, trades, and vocations. But he lays significance to the theme of human relationships. Narayan himself rightly says: "I value human relationships very much, very intensively. It makes one's existence worthwhile in human relationships in any and every form, whether at home or outside. I think I have expressed this philosophy in my work

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successfully”.

An Astrologer's Day deals with the story of a town astrologer who is ignorant of astrology. People are attracted by his appearance and they come to him to seek his advise. He studies the psychology of the customers, makes a guess and gives them advise. He earns enough money for his livelihood and satisfies his customers. When a client comes to him whom he had injured with a knife, he tells his past correctly and finally it is discovered that what the astrologer predicts is from his own experience.

Trail of the Green Blazer deals with Raju, a pickpocket. He steals the purse of a man in the green blazer. When he takes away the money from it, he finds a toy balloon inside the purse. His heart is filled with filial affection and pity for the child. He decides to keep the purse in the pocket of the blazer but unfortunately he is caught.

Mulk Raj Anand is one of the most prolific short story writer and has authored about seventy stories. His stories are included in *The Lost Child and Other Stories* (1934), *The Barber's Trade Union and Other Stories* (1944), *The Tractor and the Corn Goddess and Other Stories* (1947), *Reflections on the Golden Bed and Other Stories* (1953), *The Power of Darkness and Other Stories* (1959), *Lajwanti and Other Stories* (1966) and *Between Tears and Laughter* (1973).

Unlike R.K. Narayan, who is a pure artist, Anand is a writer with a purpose. He deals with a variety of themes like religious hypocrisy, exploitation of the poor and the downtrodden, position of women in traditional Hindu society, confrontation of East and West, and the relationship between the colonial Indian and the white man. *Lajwanti* deals with the story of a village girl persecuted by her in-laws. *The Lost Child* deals with the bitter experiences of a child who is separated from his parents at a country fair. *Birth* deals with the story of a young, simple peasant woman in an advanced state of pregnancy. *The Tractor and the Corn Goddess* and *The Power of Darkness* deal with the clash between tradition and modernity.

Raja Rao has authored *The Cow of the Barricades* (1947) and *The Policeman and the Rose* (1978). He has written fewer stories compared to R.K. Narayan and Mulk Raj Anand. Venugopal writes to say, "What he loses in range, he achieves in-depth." He deals with a variety of themes. His stories unravel the woes and sufferings of rustic people, oddities and idiosyncracies, and weaknesses of human character. *Javni*, *Akkayya*, *The Little Gram Shop*, *A Client*, *Nimka*, *The True Story of Kanakapala*, and *Protector of Gold* are stories of social and moral realism. The stories *Narsiga*, *In Khandesh*, and *The Cow of Barricades* deal with political resurgence. *Companions*, *The Policeman*, and *The Rose* deal with metaphysical symbolism. *Javni* is the story of a low-caste widow who is neglected and ill-treated by her own brother. *Nimka* is the tragic story of a beautiful girl who is neither successful in life nor in love despite her goodness and beauty.

Bhabani Bhattacharya, Arun Joshi, Chaman Nahal, Khuswant Singh, and

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Manohar Malgonkar have published short story collections during the post-independence period. Bhabani Bhattacharya has published Indian Cavalcade (1948) and Steel Hawk and Other Stories (1968). His stories depict the themes of freedom struggle and the conflict of the East and the West. Like Mulk Raj Anand, he is a writer with a purpose. K.R. Chandrasekharan contends, "Bhattacharya's Short Stories, on the whole, show his seriousness of purpose as a writer even as the novels do." Indian Cavalcade deals with the striking incidents from Indian History. Steel Hawk and Other Stories deal with the lives of people in India and abroad. Some of the stories included in this collection are Glory at Twilight, Public Figure, My Brave Great Uncle, Lattu Ram's Adventure, Pictures in the Fire, Mere Monkeys, A Moment of Eternity, The Acrobats, The Quack and Steel Hawk.

Arun Joshi, a great novelist and a significant short story writer, has authored The Survivor (1975). He deals with a variety of themes and characters in his stories. Commenting on the art of Arun Joshi, A.V. Krishna Rao says: "The vision of Joshi is humanistic and inclusive. No segment of social reality is taboo or considered improper for the purpose of his art. No class of society is favored by the writer's predilection or marred by his prejudice, for there is no room for narrow subjectivity in Joshi's narrative art".

The stories included in his collection are The Gherao, The Frontier Mail is Gone, The Eve-Teasers, The Boy with the Flute, A Trip for Mr. Lele, Homecoming, Harmik, The Survivor, The Intruder in the Discotheque, and The Servant. The Intruder in the Discotheque deals with the story of an old man called Shambu who wants to gratify his desires. Harmik deals with the theme of illegal immigration and the plight of illegal Indian immigrants in Europe. The Eve-teasers deals with the theme of eve-teasing.

Chaman Nahal has published The Weird Dance and Other Stories (1965). The stories included in this collection are Metamorphosis, The Release, The Watch, The Weird Dance, Mother, The Silver Lining, Lucky Man, A True Story, Neighbourly Love, A Lonely Path, The Idle Hatch, The Little Italian.

The Release deals with the story of Rani who suffers at the hands of her husband, Milkhi Das. Later she marries Bashir Ahmed in order to escape from the clutches of her cruel husband. A Lonely Path deals with the story of Rama Kanth Sagar who is exploited by his wife and mother-in-law.

Khuswant Singh has published four volumes of short stories. They are The Mark of Vishnu and Other Stories (1950), The Voice of God and Other Stories (1957), A Bride for the Sahib and Other Stories (1967) and Black Jasmine (1971). The Mark of Vishnu deals with the story of Ganga Ram, who is superstitious. He is a pious and devoted Brahmin. He worships the black cobra and feeds it with milk. Unfortunately, the cobra bites him, which leads to the death of the poor Ganga Ram. The Voice of God exposes the evils of democracy in which elections play a dominant

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role. This story tells how hardcore criminals like Ganda Singh win the elections instead of good candidates like Baba Ram Singh. A Bride for the Sahib deals with the story of a docile Indian wife, Kalyani Das.

Manohar Malgonkar has published *A Toast in Warm Wine* (1974), *Bombay Beware* (1975), and *Rumble Tumble* (1977). He deals with a variety of subjects like army life, hunting, smuggling, treasure-seeking, and filmmaking. Commenting on the stories of Manohar Malgonkar, Agrawal Writes: "His settings vary, his characters shuffle, and the motivations differ from tale to tale. There is a riot of colors, a rainbow of human situations, and a wide panorama of men and places which produces a vast amusement park, something like an Indian Disneyland thrown open to the curious and avid reader".

The Indo-Anglian short story is thus characterized by a variety of themes. The image of an Indian, Indian culture, traditions and the realities of modern life are reflected in the short stories written in modern India and provides an important source of information on Indians and their culture.

Contemporary women writers deal with the theme of human relationships, particularly man-woman relationships. They deal with the status and predicament of women in different dimensions. R.K.Dhawan, in his "Introduction" to *The Fiction of Bharati Mukherjee*, says that fiction by women writers constitutes a major segment of contemporary writing in English. It provides insights, a wealth of understanding, a reservoir of meanings, and a basis for discussion. Through the women writers' eyes, we can see a different world; with their assistance, we can seek to realize the potential of human achievement.

Among the women writers, the practitioners of the genre of short story is not very large as compared to novelists. The well-known novelists Ruth Praver Jhabvala, Anita Desai, Shashi Deshpande and Bharati Mukherjee have the unique distinction of producing short story collections.

Ruth Praver Jhabvala is one of the most prolific short story writers and has published four collections of short stories. They are *Like Birds, Like Fishes and Other Stories* (1963), *An Experience of India* (1966), *A Stronger Climate* (1968), and *How I Became a Holy Mother* (1976). Commenting on the art of Jhabvala, V.A. Shahane says: "Jhabvala as a short story writer has been as skillful as she has been a novelist. Her art excels in various spheres of short story, such as mode of narration, style of description, an eye for detail, delineation of character, and an ability to render her own view of the 'slice of life' in words."

Ruth Praver Jhabvala deals with the theme of human relationships in *Like Birds, Like Fishes, and Other Stories*. The short story *A Loss of Faith* deals with the trials and tribulations of a middle-class family. *A Stronger Climate* deals with the theme of East-West encounter. The theme of East-West encounter is dealt with by a majority of Indo-Anglian writers. Meenakshi Mukherjee says: "The majority of the

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Indo-Anglian writers today (with one or two notable exceptions), it will be observed, have had at least a part of their education abroad. Because of their intimate experience of their culture other than their own, they are made aware of their Indianness as well as the difference in the two systems of values: One rather acquired, the other inhabited and often taken for granted."

Some of the stories included in the collection *How I Became A Holy Mother and Other Stories* are *Two More under the Indian Sun*, *Bombay*, *On. Bail*, *Desecration*, *In a Great Man's House* and *How I Became A Holy Mother*.

Antia Desai has authored *Games at Twilight and Other Stories* (1978), and she dwells at length on the interior landscape of the mind rather than on political and social realities. The characters in her stories are extremely sensitive. They are crushed by the other characters who are not so sensitive and feel inevitably alienated.

The short stories of Anita Desai deal with a variety of themes like temperamental differences, worldly outlooks, psychological insights, miserable social plights, and pessimistic philosophies. Stories included in her collection are *Scholar and Gypsy*, *Sale*, *The Accompanist*, *Pigeons at Daybreak*, *Games at Twilight*, *Surface Textures*, *The Farewell Party*, and *Studies in the Park*.

Shashi Deshpande has published four volumes of short stories. They are *The Legacy* (1978), *The Miracle* (1986), *It was Dark* (1986) and *It was the Nightingale* (1986). She deals with the predicament of women in modern Indian society. Her stories depict the problems faced by women - their sufferings, pains and anguishes, desires and despairs, fears and hopes, suppression and oppression. As G.S. Amur says, her thematic concern is with a "Woman's struggle, in the context of contemporary Indian Society, to find and preserve her identity as wife, mother, and most of all as a human being."

Some of her stories are *The Inner Rooms*, *The Awakening*, *I Want*, *Intrusion*, *It Was the Nightingale*, *Antidote to Boredom*, *A Day Like Any Other*, *A Liberated Woman*, *Death of a Child*, *Why a Robin*, *The Valley in Shadow*. Thus, these writers depict human relationships in varied aspects, as well as the status and predicament of women in modern Indian society.

Bharati Mukherjee has published two collections of short stories. They are *Darkness and The Middleman and Other Stories*. She focuses on the experiences of Third World people in her short fiction. The Third World people migrate to Canada and America to make their lives better. The expatriate faces many problems in the host country because the white host does not treat him as an equal. He is unable to adjust himself to the new world, and at the same time, he is unable to return home. He looks back with nostalgia for his native country and the culture he has left behind. He is subjected to racial discrimination and experiences like loneliness, a sense of rootlessness, and the pain of exile in the host country. He also suffers from the fear of survival. He is a marginal man and homeless.

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Indian English Short Story has made a long journey. In this journey, we have remarkable writers like Raja Rao, MulkRaj Anand, Kamala Das, Khuswant Singh, Arun Joshi, and many more. Right from Raja Rao down to Arun Joshi, every Indo-Anglian novelist, to be more precise, a good many of them, have produced at least one, if not more, collections of short stories. At the same time, there are writers like Mulk Raj Anand and R.K. Narayan who are equally prolific in the realms of short stories and novels; they have contributed much to the emergence of the Short Story in English as a distinct genre and entity.

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