

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION : TRACING THE EMERGENCE OF THE ARTIST

Creative works of any writer cannot but take on the colour and embody the ethos and texture of the age in which they take shape. What makes a work enduring, however, is that element in it, which, while satisfying the needs and demands of the moment, transcends it and finds contemporaneity with later times. No writer can write being oblivious of his time. He unconsciously takes up a position on these struggles and expresses them in his works. He reflects the values of his class and at the same time, he is aware of the social movement for the creation of a new social order. He displays the widest sweep of imagination and the utmost creative power in portraying the life of the people around him. Ramesh K. Srivastava is an integral part of the civilization of his time. His intimate knowledge of a wider world is mirrored in his works. At the same time he is an heir to the greatest tradition of Indian culture. The universality of a literary work depends on the insights that an author brings to bear on his characters and their experiences, thereby endowing them with the quality of universality. These efficacies depend entirely on the literary medium on which the author has absolute control. Thus the creative medium that the writer chooses becomes significant.

Srivastava is the only contemporary Indian writer in English—of a recognizable stature—to choose short story as the medium of creative expression. He, who made his debut on the Indian English literary scenario with his first collection, Love and Animality: Stories in the year 1984 has gained reputation almost solely on the basis of his achievement in the field of short story in the subsequent years. His great contemporaries—Mulk Raj Anand, R.K.Narayan, Anita Desai, Khushwant Singh, Shashi Deshpande, Shiv K. Kumar, Manohar Malgonkar, Arun Joshi, Kamala Markandaya—were concerned primarily with novels though it cannot be denied that they have produced some of the finest short stories in English. Their fame primarily rests on novels and other literary contributions. Srivastava's contribution to Indian literature in English is substantial with five volumes of short stories, a novel, thirteen books of criticism and a wide corpus of book reviews.

Srivastava is, in fact, the second among the Indian English writers who stake their claim to literary reputation on short story, the first being Manjeri S. Isvaran. The investigator does not ignore Srivastava's contribution as a literary critic and as a novelist but his substantial contribution is on the short story.

To make an assessment of Srivastava's art of story-telling, it is imperative to have an idea of the art of story-telling and the evolution of the modern short story in the major literatures of the world, as also in Indian English Literature. It is to be particularly noted that Srivastava is not an isolated phenomenon in the literary firmament, but a significant link in the chain of development of the short

story as a comparatively new literary genre. So any assessment of Srivastava's achievement as a short story writer makes it inevitable to trace his literary ancestry and his indebtedness to his literary predecessors and contemporaries.

In an interview Srivastava stated:

It is difficult to enumerate which writers have influenced me. In the beginning, when I was writing my short stories in Hindi during 1955-57, I was charmed by Munshi Prem Chand—a Hindi novelist and a short story writer—who had a considerable influence on me. As I studied English, American and World Literatures in English Translation (including Indian), I had many writers from whom I might have learnt something or other. Edgar Allan Poe, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Henry James, Ernest Hemingway, Thomas Hardy, Charles Dickens, D. H. Lawrence, O. Henry, Alberto Moravia, Gustave Flaubert, Franz Kafka, Raja Rao, Kamala Markandaya, Mulk Raj Anand, R. K. Narayan, Manohar Malgonkar, Arun Joshi—I could go on and on. But I cannot precisely point out which writer has influenced me in what way in the same manner as one cannot tell which part of the body or temperament carries the stamp of which of the parents or grandparents. (E-mail interview)

This statement shows that he has inherited the tradition of the great masters of the art of short story, the world over.

As a student of literature he had an aptitude for the short story genre and he did in-depth analysis of the works of the practitioners of the art both in the East and the West. These experiences endowed him with a great advantage as a writer of short stories.

As an artistic expression, it is generally accepted, the story emerged before pre-historic times. C. I. Pawate says “This oral art of story telling is far older than history and it is not bounded by one continent or one civilization” (10). The forms of the earliest stories, like the forms of the rituals of primitive man, helped create for him his history and identity and were part of the creative impulse that made him consciously human. Srinivasa Iyengar makes reference to it in his work, The Adventure of Criticism: “Story-telling and story writing are hoary human arts. From the dawn of human civilization, story-telling seems to have flourished as an important and engaging social art” (73). All primitive literatures were in the form of stories which tell how the universe came into being, how the animal and plant kingdoms evolved and how the tribe emerged and survived defeating the evil forces. It is in keeping with this idea that Ian Reid commented: “If asked to cite an example of a brief prose narrative, many people call to mind one of the memorable Old Testament stories” (The Short Story 15).

H. E. Bates, one of the well-known theoreticians of the art of story-telling writes:

The account in “Genesis” of the conflict between Cain and Abel is a short story; the parable of the prodigal son is a short story and in itself a masterpiece of compression for all time; the stories of

Salome, Ruth, Judith and Susannah are all examples of an art that was already old, civilized and highly developed some thousands of years before the vogue of Pamela. (13)

This aspect of the short story is further illustrated by Dileepkumar Sen in his introduction to the collection of short stories, A Sheaf of Short Stories:

From Egyptian tombs of six hundred years ago, stories have been unearthed, Greek and Roman Bands wandered singing the glories of their Gods and heroes, ancient India had varied as well as fascinating fables, the Persians excelled in legends, the golden Araby gave the gorgeous Arabian Nights entertainment; The Bible contains many examples of short story. (3)

There is an intimate relation between the modern short story and the ancient tales. One of the critical views is that the origin of the modern short story is from the folk-tale or the fable, didactic or moralizing in tone and has its roots deep in the earth; innumerable are the writers the world over who practice it as a pure art form. The ancient tribes considered their tales as their gospel—their sacred words. These tales were not merely make-belief, but belief itself.

Srivastava is of the opinion that “the Indian short story is a product of the ancient and the modern” (E-mail interview). The ancient tales inevitably bore the halo of some faith, however crude it might be. The modern tales depict the truth about the society. Srivastava’s literary faculties were shaped by the traditional and modern literatures the world over. His own testament in this case is important:

As a child, I was fascinated by the stories from the Ramayana and the Mahabharata. Later on, I was told of do's and don'ts of life through the stories from Panchatantra. As I grew up, I read all kinds of literature good or bad. Other writers had the same sort of background. Raja Rao, Mulk Raj Anand, Khushwant Singh, Arun Joshi and Manohar Malgonkar's short stories can be considered the product of both the East and the West. (E-mail interview)

Though the ancient tales were considered sacred words bearing some halo of faith, they had a very high entertainment value. In the words of Ian Reid, "we have to look beyond the Hebrew Scriptures to ancient Egypt for the earliest extant stories evidently told for their intrinsic value as entertainment" (The Short Story 15-16).

Wilfred Stone et al. in their pioneering work, The Short Story: An Introduction traces the origin of the short story:

The impulse to embody human experience in narrative form is probably as old as human consciousness itself. Drawn together by the warmth of the fire, by terror of strange sounds in the dark, our early ancestors gave voice in story form to their fears and beliefs and thus made for themselves a magic against the trials of life. The earliest stories, traveling from campfire to campfire and down the generations, marked man's slow emergence from his animal status. Their forms, like the forms of other rituals, helped create for early

man his history and identity, and were part of the creative impulse that made him consciously human. (1)

What makes the modern story teller tell stories is not different from those of their ancient counterparts. Wilfred Stone et al. establish this fact when they write:

The impulses that make the modern fiction writer are probably, at heart, no different from those of the “primitive” story teller. He too would like to be a myth-maker, and often is, but his problem is vastly complicated. Early stories spoke for a whole community, modern fiction for lonely individuals. . . . The modern writer does not receive his worldview, he discovers it. He does not, like the ancient myth-maker, inherit his rituals; he invents them. (1)

Ever since the emergence of stories, whatever be their forms, man was fond of telling stories and listening to them. It has always been an integral part of everyday life. The short story is one of the most popular forms of reading today. Thousands of magazines all over the world devote at least some of their space to short fiction; many others carry fiction only. These stories range in type and quality from the tale of mystery, intrigue, love or adventure, as Harry Shaw and Douglas Beiment point out, to the “. . . ‘deeper stories’ which concern themselves with portraying character, delineating mood, illuminating the atmosphere of a locality, analyzing the complex phases of a situation or considering aspects of social or economic problem” (1).

The short story deserves close study because it is socially important; it teaches us to feel and to think. As the French writer Guy de Maupassant puts it rightly: “The public is composed of numerous groups who cry to us [writers]: “Console me, amuse me, and make me raid, make me sympathetic, and make me dream, make me laugh, make me shudder, make me weep, make me think!” (9).

The short story has played a very large and important part in fostering public taste during the last three decades and most of the important novelists of the West have produced short stories. Some of them are excellent and valid experiments in a difficult field.

Ramesh K. Srivastava is well aware that India is a land of different genres of short fiction—Vedic tales, Upanishadic tales, fables, parables, fairy tales, and Puranic tales. C.V. Venugopal who has made an in-depth study of Indian short story in English finds that “Both the ancient Indian fable and the ancient Indian popular tale have helped the Indian short story writer in English in giving his stories a definite shape” (2).

In most Indian English short stories, one can notice a synthesis of the varied features of ancient Indian tales. The genesis of Indian tales can be traced back to the Vedas and Upanishads, the Puranas and the Panchatantra. The Hitopadesh and the Jataka tales, and the Ramayana and the Mahabharata, the great Indian epics remain an inexhaustible mine of tales. M. Rama Rao makes a brilliant assessment of the role of the Indian short story in modern literature. He rightly observes:

We have had in India, stories which lie embedded in the hymns of the Rigveda, as scattered in the Upanishads and the epics, the stories which constitute the Panchatantra, the Hitopadesha, the Sukasaptatih, the Dasakumaracharita and the Vetalapanchavimsathi in Sanskrit and the Buddhist Jataka Katha in Pali and a host of similar stories in modern Indian languages. (76)

Every Indian is nourished on the popular Indian tales during his childhood as the various rituals and ceremonies give exposure to the village folk as well as town dwellers to the popular myths and legends. He carries fond memories of them in his later life. Even in our age of information technology, globalization, economic liberalisation and the consequent socio-political and economic change and cultural transformation, no Indian is tired of listening to the ancient stories any number of times. The modern electronic media deal with these ancient tales in varied forms and shapes.

The ancient literatures of India which are mainly built on short tales are a rich minefield for modern writers. Raja Rao who can be considered the doyen of story telling says, “I go back to the Sanskrit classics for inspiration, whether it is the Mahabharata, the Ramayana, or Shankara—these are the things that have inspired me most” (“Ambivalence and Individuality” 12).

Srivastava acknowledges the influence of the ancient tales on him. He says in Author’s Note to Games They Play and Other Stories: “The basic

difference between the short stories as they existed in the past and those we have today is both in their execution and in the intention of their creator” (10).

Manjeri S. Isvaran, the first among the Indian writers in English to put forward a remarkable opinion about the short story as a powerful modern art form writes about our rich tradition of story-telling. “India was the nursery of story and fable and the Indian story-teller was as fertile in tales inculcating practical wisdom and worldly polity as in illuminating epic and religious myth” (A Madras Admiral vii).

As a comparatively new creative art, almost all leading practitioners of this genre have put forward their theories of this art form. Srivastava is not an exemption. Just like the great masters of short story, Edgar Allan Poe, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Anderson, Anton Chekhov, Dostoevsky, Katherine Mansfield, James Joyce, Guy de Maupassant and Frank O’Connor, Srivastava has his own theory of the art, which is definitely different from that of others. But in certain basic matters, there are similarities. The differences are basically socio-cultural, familial and linguistic. One of the objectives of the study is to examine in detail the theoretical formulations of Srivastava on the art of short story and how far he could stick to his own theoretical assumptions.

Though in all cultures of the world story-telling is the oldest art form, “as a conscious literary form [it] is younger than most other forms” (Isvaran, Swatantra 33). In this connection D. Anjaneyulu, a great critic of fiction has

maintained that it is a “relatively young form born of an old, perhaps the very oldest form of literary expression” (12).

Unlike the developments of other literary forms, the short story has its origin in almost all literary forms and movements. It has its origin in romanticism, in myths, legends, fables, parables, and fairy tales and in the supernatural. The artistic expression of the great masters of the art form bears testimony to this reality. Nikolay Gogol, Allen Poe, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Washington Irving—all have dealt in some way with a world different from the ordinary world of the mundane.

Shiv K. Kumar gives an account of the origin of Indian English short story:

Although the Indian short story in English is comparatively a recent phenomenon, its genesis may be traced back to the ancient fables of the sixth century A.D. Its origin lies in such ancient classics as the *Katha-Saritsangara*, *Yogavashishtha*, *Brihat-Katha* or *Panchatantra*. As stories, these fables and tales were tightly structured and ingeniously conceived, although their primary objective invariably was didactic—geared more to instruct than to entertain their readers. (Kumar 9)

Though the short story remained an integral part or intrusive element in a larger work in the olden days for the past 150 years it has emerged as a literary form of independent status with an identity of its own and a justification for

itself. It has generally maintained that it is a product of the twentieth century. H. E. Bates observes “The short story proper, that is, a deliberately fashioned work of art, and not just a straight forward tale of one or more events, belong to modern times” (13-14). Quoting Elizabeth Bowen, H. E. Bates says, “. . . as we know it, it is a child of this century” (13). Alstair Fowler, in his work A History of English Literature comments that “The modern short story has generally been described as a well-defined, distinctively twentieth century form (335). Since the beginning of the nineteenth century the reading public as well as the writers began showing interest in short fiction in Europe and America but as a literary form bearing specific characteristics, it emerged towards the end of the nineteenth century. Soon after its emergence it became the most favourite reading among the readers. There were many contributing factors, literary and socio-cultural.

We know that novel as a literary form is the product of a special confluence of literary, cultural and social forces prevalent in the eighteenth century. The literary influences which gave shape to the short story exercised fruitful influence first on the American literary scene which gave birth to the pioneers of American short story—Edgar Allan Poe, Nathaniel Hawthorne and Henry James.

As in America, simultaneously the form developed in Russia, France, England and in other countries. In fact its birth, spread and popularity in America have made critics and readers claim that it is America’s own art form. Frank O’

Connor, one of the greatest theoreticians of short story, has termed the short story as “America’s national art form.”(28) This statement is primarily based on the quantitative and qualitative output of America in this literary form. The short story more than any other type is America’s contribution to literature.

Along with America, France and Russia have made outstanding contributions to this art form. In the thirties of the nineteenth century, with the proliferation of periodicals, short story became the most popular form of reading. Sir Walter Scott, Charles Dickens, Mrs. Gaskell, William Makepeace Thackeray, Anthony Trollope and R. L. Stevenson made the short story firmly established as a form of art capable of communicating varied impressions of life and evoking all kinds of emotions.

Almost during this time Gogol and Turgenev gave new dimensions to this powerful literary genre. Commenting on the contributions made by Gogol to Russian short story, Turgenev declares, “We all [have] come out from under Gogol’s overcoat” (qtd. in O’Connor 14).

H. E. Bates elaborates:

But as the father of the short story, Gogol, it seems to me, did a very simple thing, for which countless writers of short stories are indebted to him and the works of such writers as Coppard, O’Flaherty, Joyce, Sherwood Anderson, Saroyan and many others today. He took the short story some way back to the folk tale and in doing so bound it to earth. (27)

Chekhov and Dostoevsky have produced some inimitable short stories. Another mark of the short story after the nineteen thirties is the growing interest in probing states of mind. We have any number of examples of writers in the East and the West to illustrate it. Russia has been considered as the world's greatest contributor to the literature of the short story. This statement is not to disparage those superb artists like O. Henry and Maupassant. The Russian writers were first to give what are called pure psychological stories. Isvaran in his introduction to "Rickshawallah" says:

Through the key hole of psychoanalysis, they saw life as a fierce drama to evoke the deepest feelings of pity and terror. Two writers, Dostoevsky and Gorky saw it more burningly than the others and gave it a close up; but they were both naturalistic rather than realistic writers concerning man as nature made him and environs fashioned him, depicting the hideous and horrific as an integral part of life but not as life itself. (vii)

On account of the various conditions prevalent in England the efflorescence of this literary genre was delayed in the land. England had to wait for it till the late eighties. "The History of the English short story," says H. E. Bates "is very brief for the simple reason that before the end of the nineteenth century it had no history" (17). The English short story was profoundly influenced by the American, Russian and French examples that it is impossible to understand its evolution without reference to them.

Since its emergence as a distinct literary form it has become an integral part of an unprecedented proliferation of the newspapers and the magazines. The Cinema which was emerging as a popular medium the world over, says M. Rama Rao, “helped the evolution of tales complete in themselves both in theme and temperament, yet demanding not much time for their perusal” (213).

During the last two decades the expansion of electronic media at an unprecedented speed and dimension was also instrumental in the development of the short story, in certain distinct directions across the world. The spurt in human curiosity brought in by the diffusion of mass education, with the consequential increase in the tempo and competitive pressure on the life of common man have bestowed upon this literary form an encouragement hitherto unknown in its history.

What makes the short story different from other literary genres is that it can assume varied forms. Commenting on the wide range of the short story 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 that it can deal with any subject, from the death of a horse, the loss of a cloak, to a girl’s first love-affair. The theme may undoubtedly be anything, but it must be presented in such a manner that it carries the impression of being ‘unified’ and whole in a limited sense. (10)

One of the reasons for the popularity of the short story, as a popular form, is its brevity which makes a comparatively less taxing demand on the time of the reader and the possibility of its including all aspects of life and society which no other form of literature can pay attention to. “Successful reading,” according to Raymond W. Short and Richard B. Sewall,

is an experience very like many of the experiences we derive from life. It has a fullness of meaning that may defy a quick summary or paraphrase; a moral may be involved that is too intricate to express in simple tags of good and bad; attitudes may be expressed that modify or extend the attitudes we already harbor. Such reading sharpens the mind, but perhaps more important than that, it refines the sensibilities and enlarges the domain in which they are at home.

(xv)

The short story is probably the most widely read of all modern literary genres. Yet, even today it seldom receives serious critical attention commensurate with that importance. “Not until the OED supplement of 1933 did the term ‘short story’ itself, designating a particular kind of literary product, gain formal admittance into the vocabulary of English readers,” says Ian Reid in his work, The Short Story (1). Because of the nature of this literary genre “no completely satisfactory definition of a short story has ever been formulated” (Shaw, Valerie 1).

Many renowned practitioners of this creative art tried to define the literary genre. They all agree to the point that it is a “unique literary form, with techniques and effects that cannot be achieved through another medium” (Stone 5).

“The short story,” says Rama Rao, “seems to be peculiarly suited to the mirroring of our life since the writer of it can choose any one part of life and deal with it with the attention, care and mastery which it requires” (21). The definitions given at various periods, since the emergence of this art form as a favourite form of reading, differ widely on the exact nature of the short story. Valerie Shaw further comments:

Because individual short stories keep revealing affinities with their forerunners, it is almost impossible to stabilise a definition of the genre; no summary phrase can encapsulate the diversity of possible story types, lengths and approaches. Consequently, no one theory of short story form prevails, most delineations of the art having come from practitioners like Frank O’Connor and H.E. Bates, and being accompanied by clear provisos about their partiality and incompleteness. (20)

Alstair Fowles writes:

The short story was a chief triumph of the modernist movement. No other prose form, not even the novel, showed so much creative invention. Its variety astonishes, for (like poetry) it became

diversified into a multitude of sub genres, which replaced such broad Victorian genres as the ghost story. (341)

The most significant opinion, which Edgar Allan Poe expressed about the short story, in 1842, when this art form was in its infancy, still remains unquestioned is that of “unity of effect or impression” (27). This effect could be achieved only if it could be read at one sitting. Allan Poe had formulated the basic principles for the composition of the short story. By a brilliant stroke Poe applied to prose writing what he had found to be an invariable rule of poetic production.

It is to be remembered that Poe enriched this literary genre by contributing hundreds of very brilliant and startling short stories. It was he who provided the first serious critical axioms for judging a short story’s merit. “By reason of its brevity, the short story can develop intensity of style as well as of vision that would be difficult to sustain for the length of a novel,” says Peter S. Prescott (15). He further comments that, “Poe believed the short story is different from the novel and superior to it. It was not shortness, but intensity of impact that Poe, the romantic, valued most highly” (5).

Poe’s views on singleness and unity are widely shared by the pioneers of this art. Ian Reid is of the opinion that it would be unsatisfactory to make a word-count the sole criterion. To him “genre is not arithmetically defined” (10). It was Allan Poe who created the perfectly constructed story. His primary aim was

carefully structured stories. The significance of brevity lies in inclining “readers to make close verbal connections and perceive relationships of resemblance” (Brown 39). In an interview, Srivastava makes it clear that:

As seconds, minutes and hours add up to form a day, a month and a year, small fragments of life, real in themselves, have their individual entities. They form parts of a larger canvas of life. A short story depicts such fragments of life.

(E-mail interview)

Edgar Allan Poe links brevity with intensity. He maintains that emotional or aesthetic arousal can be sustained only for a brief period. The story culminates in a moment of psychological reaction for the character and of insight for the reader. In an essay in The Norton Book of American Short Stories, Peter S. Prescott quotes the statement of Elizabeth Bowen that, “the story should have the valid central emotion and inner spontaneity of the lyric. . . . It must have tautness and clearness . . . Poetic tautness and clarity are so essential to it that it may be said to stand at the edge of prose” (13).

The short story is not merely a story told short, it is a particular kind of literary construction . In a similar vein, Srivastava observes:

A short story is a frozen moment of life, carrying in it the seeds of perennial truths. It reveals in a flash an image of hitherto unexplored aspects of life fleeing each moment before us. A good short story is like a supply of fresh air that makes the human life

delightful, meaningful and no less healthy. (Author's Note.

Games 9)

Srivastava is of opinion that a short story always need not be short. He observes, "If a short story is really short, a writer will have to confine to a single theme and tone. However, in order to make it readable, interesting and enjoyable, introduction of minor digressions, anecdotes, wit, irony and humour may be desirable" (E-mail interview ).

Brevity is essential to the short story because the readers' attention must not stray. The story-teller must aim at a single effect only to which all the ingredients relate—incidents, characters and scene. So the short story must have enough room to design a single effect, neither too much nor too little.

"The short story, then functions as a mirror but what is reflected is not an image of waking reality, but an image of the human mind" ( Rohrberger 12). The definition of the short story given by Sherwood Anderson highlights this point:

The short story is the result of a sudden passion. It is an idea grasped whole as one would pick an apple in an orchard. All of my own short stories have been written at one sitting, many of them under strange enough circumstances. There are these glorious moments, these pregnant hours, and I remember such hours as a man remembers the first kiss got from a woman loved. (Brown 30)

Sean O' Faolin considers it " as a more personal genre than the novel. It is the kernel of the matter in hand as the writer sees it. The writer need not be

explicit” (57). H. E. Bates quoted the definition of H.G. Wells that the short story is, “any piece of short fiction that could be read in half an hour” (16).

Rohrberger comments that, according to Brander Mathews, “the short story deals with a single character, a single situation, a single emotion or a series of emotions called forth by a single situation”( 12). Close examination of the most outstanding stories of the world reveal that the short story has a dramatic touch. It is not merely short; it is compressed and highly dramatic.

Somerset Maugham comments: “It is not hard to state what Poe meant by a good short story. It is a piece of fiction dealing with a single incident, material or spiritual, that can be read at a sitting; it is original, it must sparkle, excite or impress and it must have unity of effect or impression” (Points of View 155).

The divergences in the attempts to define the short story make us aware that it is safer to examine its possibilities and limitations than to try to define it in precise terms. Perhaps the most significant limitation and strength of the short story is its brevity. A practitioner of this genre paints miniatures. He confines himself to a small canvas, a limited number of characters, a restricted number of settings and a short space and time.

All these definitions agree on certain vital characteristics, though they differ in certain others. Some of them are too restricting and put the short story form into a rigid frame that inevitably hampers its freedom of movement so that it does not include, as it must, certain experiments in the genre which do not conform to a rigid pattern.

The modern story is likely to find its unity in its thematic materials—in building to a single flash of insight that suddenly reveals whole biographies and histories, like a streak of lightning illuminating the country side. James E. Miller and Bernice Slot comment:

Some writers will deliberately weave together seemingly unrelated characters or episodes or styles, but, if skillfully done, the subterranean connections will make these disparate materials suddenly coalesce and fuse into a deeper kind of unity—a unity of idea or spirit or essence. (The Dimensions of Short Story: A Critical Anthology 511)

In this connection, what P. Raja has remarked is worth mentioning:

All literature grew out of oral tales. The main thing is that a short story should be clear, despite its oddness or peculiarities of its known form, or its social and religious context. In the transparent quality of a good short story is concealed a great school of morality which reveals the depths of the human soul. A short story need not be fashionable or beautiful, frightening or complicated . . . it must be fascinating in its simplicity and wisdom. (74)

The infinite possibilities of the genre are, in fact, the outgrowth of its limitations. As the story is short, the writer has to condense his material most effectively. All great practitioners of this art form have believed that the finest short stories are closer in technique to poetry. It can focus on a single character

or a small set of characters. Thus the story emerges from the heart of the situation. Most significant of it, is its unity—a singleness of effect.

In this context it is interesting to draw the observation of Frank O'Connor, that Ian Reid contextually cites:

Short stories do frequently focus on one or two individuals who are seen as separated from their fellowmen in some way at odds with social norms beyond the pale. In this respect short stories can properly be called romantic, as O'Connor prepossess or even romantic by virtue of their affinity with those works by Wordsworth, Coleridge, Byron and others through which move wanderers lonely dreams and outcast or scapegoat figures. (27)

The short story, like the sonnet, has a narrow plot. In both the short story and the lyric poem, the emotion of the speaker is often heightened by placing the character in a situation which puts him under stress and which justifies the impression of the urgency created by the momentum of his dispassionate speech.

The Indian English short story has a history of a little over 100 years now. “Unlike the American short story, the Indo-Anglian short story can boast of no such skilled writers and theorists to patronize exclusively this genre and is considered merely as a by-product of novel writing”. (Maini 185). Quite a large number of writers during the early years of its emergence have contributed liberally to the art form. The early stories were the early attempts at this genre and they were mostly rewritings of folk tales and legends. The authors of this

period had a particular interest in making prominent in their stories, the elements of didacticism and sentimentalism. Though these stories cannot be compared to any well-formed modern short story, they occupy a very prominent place in the development of this literary genre in the Indian soil. C. V. Venugopal, who has surveyed the Indian English short story is of opinion that, “These stories have but a historical importance, although credit could be given to them for the fact that their simple narratives actually underline the folk-tale form, a form which has been so well exploited later by such noted writers as Raja Rao and Anand” (226).

Indian culture over the past two hundred years has been very much influenced by European imperialism and colonialism. Our age-old socio-economic, political and cultural structures were viciously broken up, first by the mercantile incursion, the East India Company and then by the imperial government which began to make its presence a vital and indispensable part of Indian social and political life. In education and religion, the British colonialism totally changed the cultural textures of India. Those influences were covertly or overtly present in literatures produced in India. The closing years of the nineteenth century and the early decades of the twentieth century saw the short story in India slowly emerging in a new dress. It started with slavish imitation of the western models—at first English, the French, followed by American and Russian.

The Gandhian era which witnessed a socio-cultural renaissance had its significant impact on the literary scene in India. This period witnessed a

significant development of the short story as a favourite form of reading. The revolutionary spirit that made a significant mood in the socio-cultural, political and moral outlook had all been refreshingly mirrored in the literature produced in the period, particularly in the short story. Writers of all modes of literature during the period, developed a social consciousness which found exquisite form of aesthetic expression in their creative endeavour.

Every great practitioner of this literary genre in India has been found embodying all the forces which are very significant for an understanding of the way the short story genre has developed as a distinct artistic form in Indian English literature. In the first half of nineteenth century Manjeri S. Isvaran who established a literary reputation by writing short stories incarnated the influences and conditions prevailing in that period. V. C. Venugopal writes:

The thirties and forties saw the ‘Great Leap Forward’ in the short story form. That was the period when the great four—Anand, Isvaran, Narayan and Raja Rao appeared on the scene. Each one of them being committed to the form in his own way (Narayan perhaps, would deny any such ‘insinuation’), the short story in their hands acquired a form typically Indian and a conscious handling of technique and exploiting the English language to express what was till then alien to it gave an identity to the short story and a representative status, culturally speaking. (Venugopal 226-27)

Before Srivastava, Manjeri S. Isvaran is the first Indian short story writer in English to examine this genre as an ancient and enduring art. He is the first Indian English short story writer to formulate an opinion of what a modern short story should be. Just like the great American and Russian masters he has come up with a theory of the art form.

As a writer he combines harmonising inspiration and conscious art. It is interesting to note that his theoretical formulations and critical assessments of what he accepted as the most favourite form came out only after the publication of a major part of his literary works. His theoretical formulations of the short story find place only in the last collection of his stories, A Madras Admiral.

Isvaran had in all his literary endeavours a deep awareness of the culture and tradition of Indian art and literature from the pre-Vedic period. At the same time he had made thorough examination of the various stages of the development of the modern short story at different parts of the world as the most influential art. As John Hampson says in the introduction to No Ankletbells for Her: “Many of the folk tales which entertained mankind in those early ages have come down to us as part of our great heritage of culture, a culture which is not confined within the bounds of race or creed” ( vii).

Whenever Isvaran, just like his great contemporaries, Raja Rao and R.K.Narayan, thinks of the short story, he has in memory the genre’s roots in the primitive art of story-telling. No other country can claim to be a nursery of “story and fable”. The same is the case with Srivastava who maintains: “In their earliest

forms, the Indian tales date back to the interpolated stories in the Ramayana and the Mahabharata, the fables in Panchatantra, the tales of Betal, and the myths and legends abounding in the Puranas, as also in ancient Indian literatures of various languages” ( Author’s Note. Games 10).

Ancient Indian literatures were rich in tales. This hoary art has flourished on all continents and during all civilizations in the guise of fable, allegory or romance. As far back as 1959, Manjeri. S. Isvaran wrote:

In the contemporary Indian scene, the story, more particularly the short story as an art form has become very popular in the country’s several major languages, and also with those who use English as their vehicle of expression. The innate Indian predilection for the tale has, as it were, been revived by contact with western literature whose fiction, more than any other genre, has exerted an extensive influence on the writers of about the last three decades here. In the west the story has been intimately connected, especially in its more recent developments, with the social, political, and economic upheavals in the community, and authors have focused attention, in their stories, on specific problems. This characteristic of the modern short story, whether British, American or European, is also evident in its Indian counterpart and it is therefore germane to consider what role the story-teller in India has

to play in the moulding of the new life with which this ancient country is now seething. (A Madras Admiral vii)

It is in the hands of Isvaran that the Indian English story has actually gained a new vitality and a new design. It is also worth mentioning that the essential quality of transparency that makes the short story a favourite reading became an integral part of the short story in Isvaran's art. He also embodies those which are crucial to the understanding of the way this particular art form developed in the Indian soil. So the significance of Isvaran's stories and his views on the growth and development of modern short story in English remains a remarkable landmark.

The horizon of Indian English short story has been broadened by the post-1980 short story writers who have taken as it were, "all province" as their themes. Shiv K. Kumar says:

If the short story in English remained subdued till the first quarter of this century, it has catapulted into a popular literary genre in the mid-eighties—thanks to the patronage of Doordarshan with its millions of viewers. This new medium is now treating its mammoth audience to dramatization of stories by our celebrated writers like R. K. Narayan (now known for his "Malgudi Days") and Satyajit Ray. Such programmes as "Ek Kahani"—and "Katha Sagar" which has offered us ingenious adaptations of world classics—have

encouraged our new writers to take short story as an exciting form of writing. (16)

As two very prominent Indian writers in English cast their lot with the development of short story, it would be highly interesting and relevant to examine the views of the two masters—Isvaran and Srivastava. Srivastava writes in the Author's Note, Games They Play and Other Stories: “A short story is a frozen moment of life, carrying in it the seeds of perennial truths. It reveals in a flash an image of hitherto unexplored aspect of life fleeing each moment before us” (9). Short story has a vast scope and function like any other form of literature. In its thematic concerns and technical virtuosity, it can be in the forefront of any other forms of literature. According to Isvaran:

A short story can be a fable or a parable, real or fantasy, a true presentation or a parody, sentimental or satirical; serious in intent or a light hearted diversion; it can be any of these, but to be memorable, it must catch the eternal in the casual, invest a moment with the immensity of time. The masters have done it, each creating their own autonomous form, setting within its brief compass a striking incident, weaving a breathtaking narrative, revealing character through circumstance, psychological probing and poignant dialogue integrated with the descriptive and the dramatic. (The Role of the Story Teller in the Modern World, 537)

Though Srivastava hasn't given an exactly similar definition of the short story, his stories are with a variety and range, so that he agrees with the views of Isvaran. Like the great writers of this art form, Srivastava has a very clear view of the shape of the story. He has considered in detail the various constituents which make a perfect short story; whether he has strictly followed his own norms is another question.

Srivastava observes: "The greatness of the short story writer consists not in creating a memorable menagerie but in painting a realistic picture of life" (Games 11). He further says that "a short story is the concretised creative urge of the writer" (12). The best stories of Srivastava present "a little slice of life."