Man has always loved a story and the story, in turn, proved a boon to him. It has treasured his memories, crystallized his dreams, and quenched his thirst for adventure and sermonizing. It has fathomed the mystery of his soul and shown the subtle working of his mind, displaying the incongruity of life that cannot but provoke laughter and wring tears. Above all, it has proved a never-failing source of joy, and perhaps man has not yet found a better mode of communion suited to all ages and stages of life.

The craft of a short story is as old as the hills. To that art belong parable, fable, saga and folk-tale, all which share their origin and structure with poetry. From earliest times they expressed the articulate tongue of mankind, that voice which differentiates man from animal. It was not until the nineteenth century, following the maturity of the novel as a form, that the descendant craft of short-story writing sprang from a variety of soils.

For a long time the short story was assigned a somewhat inferior status, being popularly thought of as some little piece an author tossed off between major productions. To some extent this view is still with us, but as the experts in the area have examined the modern short story is an exceedingly complex form, making up in depth what it lacks in length.

The novel, which dates from the early eighteenth century, is a hundred years older. Unlike the novel, which arose from the realistic movement in
literature, the short story had its beginnings in the romantic tradition— in fairy tales and legends.

The art of storytelling is native to all the people; perhaps the Egyptians were the first to endow random tales with permanent literary form. The tales from Egypt are not only an invaluable commentary on the then Egyptian life but are also genuinely moving and interesting. They are always short and tell mainly of adventures, either natural or supernatural.

As a literary form and an oral tradition, the short story dates back to prehistoric times. Since the dawn of human civilization it has flourished as an important and engaging social art. The earliest stories mark man’s slow emergence from his animal status. The forms of these stories, like the forms of the rituals of primitive man, help to create for him a history and an identity, and were part of the creative impulse that made him consciously human beings.

All the societies, since the invention of language, have had their myths and legends – narratives of how the universe came into being, how human beings evolved, how the tribe emerged and survived through thick and thin and how the heroes fought. That is why “If asked to cite an example of a brief prose narrative, many people call to mind one of the memorable Old Testament Stories”¹ or the Upanishads or the Jataka Tales.

What is significant about these tales, and the features that distinguishes them from the modern short story, is that each tribe considers its tale the Gospel, the Sacred Word. These tales, unlike the modern short story, are not merely make-belief, but belief itself. These stories inevitably bear the halo of
some faith, however crude it can be. Moreover we cannot neglect the value of these tales as a means of entertainment. As Ian Reid points out, "We have to look beyond the Hebrew Scriptures to ancient Egypt for the earliest extant stories evidently told for their intrinsic value as entertainment." Though some of these tales appear funny, their purpose is consciously and intensely serious. The fables of Aesop have been popular all over the world as a source of instruction and enjoyment ever since the period of classical Greece. The middle ages had their stories in the *Gesta Romanorum*, in Boccaccio's *Decameron* and in Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*. The Persians had their alluring legends and the Middle East it's gorgeous *Arabian Nights*. As H.E. Bates observe:

The history of the short story, through its phases of myth and legend, fable and parable, anecdote and pictorial essay, sketch, and even down to what the crudest provincial reporter calls "a good story," cannot be measured. 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 art that was already old, civilized and highly developed some thousands of years before the vogue of Pamela.

Much of the earliest written literatures the world over borrowed heavily are from such pre-historic lore. We tend to read such lore "with nostalgia, moved by the power of things we have lost: the kinship with nature, sense of
community, the certainly of belief." The popular imagination in those days did not require realism in the modern literary sense of the term. The audience for these tales loved the marvelous. As John Hampson observers,

Many of the folk tales which entertained mankind in those early ages come down to us as part of our great heritage of culture which is not confined within the bonds of race or creed.

The genesis of Indian tales can be traced back to the *Vedas* and the *Upanishads*, the *Puranas*, the *Panchatantra* and the *Jataka Tales*. These are older than the fables of Aesop and travelled beyond the bounds of the subcontinent to Asia Minor in the North West and China in the North East. *The Mahabharata* and *The Ramayana*, two epics, have proved inexhaustible mines from which creative artists of the country have quarried for their material for ages. While assessing the role of the short story in modern Indian literature, M. Rama Rao rightly observes:

We have had in Indian stories which lie embedded in the hymns of the *Rig-Veda*, or Scattered in the *Upanishads* and the epics, the stories which constitute the *Panchatantra*, the *Hitopadesha*, the *Sukasaptati*, the *Dasakumaracharita* and the *Vetalapanchavimsati* in Sanskrit, the *Buddhist Jataka* Stories in Pali and a host of similar stories in modern Indian languages.

These antique tales passing from generation to generation have tempted the great epic poets to stuff into their poetic framework enormous masses of religion, philosophy and polity, which are often incongruous with their central
theme. Although these tales appear funny, their purpose is intensely serious. Introducing a collection of Indian short stories, Shiv. K. Kumar comments,

Ingeniously conceived and skillfully structured, most of these stories, both about human beings and animals, offer an inexhaustible source of pleasure even to the contemporary reader.7

They are tales of practical wisdom and worldly polity or illuminating commentaries on epic and religious myths. We may say with R.K. Narayan that “every story has implicit in it a philosophical or moral significance and our understanding of the distinction between good and evil.”8

Each place in the vast subcontinent, village and town alike, has tales woven around some deity of its own, at the same time maintaining an unmistakable connection with the great epics in some way or other. Writers of varying statures in our country have found immense delight in nostalgic harking back to the rich cultural and literary tradition that has come down to them in the form of stories.

Indian literature from the very beginning of its history has been related to the life of the common people. They have not been for the edification of the scholars alone, but an engaging social art, a comprehensive and artistic medium of expression, to benefit the literate and illiterate alike. Although story-telling is as old as language itself “the short story as a conscious literary form is younger than most other forms.”9
That is why Susan Lohafer has observed that it is a "relatively young form born of an old, perhaps the very oldest form of literary expression." It has its beginnings in romanticism, in myths and legends and in the supernatural. The great practitioners of this modern art form, like Washington Irving, Gogol, Poe and Hawthorne have dealt in some way with a world different from the ordinary world of mundane fact. From the dawn of human history, the story has existed as a literary form the world over. Readers as well as writers have found in it a form of fiction which they could manage easily. That is why it existed as a Coeval, Coterminal art form through the history of man, and made Susan Lohafer state, "We may say that storying like dreaming, has always been – and will always be – a very homely part of life."

If the short story formed an integral part of or an intrusive element in, a larger work in the olden days, now it has gained an independent status with an identity of its own and a justification for itself. It is in this sense that one may maintain, it is a product of the twentieth century. But ever since the beginning of the nineteenth century, short fiction has remained the constant focus with the writers in the West.

Despite its being a new luminary in the literary firmament, the short story has established itself as the most favourite genre among the readers as well as the writers, not because of a happy development in the literary history but on account of "the amalgam of influences and conditions prevails in the last quarter of the nineteenth century." Like the novel of the eighteenth century, it is the product of special confluences of literary, cultural and social forces.
Quantitatively and qualitatively America enjoys the most prominent place vis-à-vis the output of this literary form. It does not mean that the Americans alone have authored the greatest short stories. It only means that no important. American writer of fiction has neglected the short form, and in the case of many writers from Hawthorne and Poe to Hemingway and Paulkner, the short story represents a significant past to their literary achievement. In France, this literary genre was firmly established in the third decade of the nineteenth century with the proliferation of magazines.

Simultaneously, short story emerged as a literary genre in Russia where Gogol and Turgenev gave it new dimensions. Gogol's contribution to Russian short story is such that Turgenev declares, "We all (have) come out from under Gogol's 'Overcoat'". For various reasons, its efflorescence was delayed in England where it did not emerge as a distinct literary form until the late eighties. As H.E. Bates rightly points out, "The history of English short story is very brief for the simple reason that before the end of the nineteenth century it had no history."

In the course of its progress, the English short story was so profoundly influenced by the Russian, French and American examples that it is impossible to understand its evolution without reference to them.

The variety of this literary genre and the elasticity of its form have made writers of vastly different temperaments and outlooks accept it as the finest and most convenient medium for the communication of their experiences in life. The practitioners of this aesthetic form in the West have been intimately
connected, especially in its more recent developments, with the social, political and economic upheavals in the community and the authors have focused attention on their stories on specific problems. There was a great demand for short stories because of the unprecedented proliferation of the newspapers, the development of the magazine, the rapid expansion of the radio and T.V. network. The cinema also "helped the evolution of tales complete in themselves both in theme and temperament, yet demanding not much time for their perusal." The diffusion of mass education with the consequential spurt in human curiosity and the increasing tempo and competitive pressure of modern life have given this literary genre its greatest encouragement. As H.E. Bates explains, "One obvious reason for its unique vogue has been the rush of modern life which has made man impatient of huge themes, "the great still books," as Tennyson called "the novels over which readers spent hours in more leisurely ages."

Short fiction is one of the most popular forms of reading today. It has turned out to be an inevitable and integral ingredient of the thousands of magazines all over the world. This popular form of art now covers a wide range thematically and stylistically from the tales of mystery and intrigue, and love and adventure to the more serious type of 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 certain problems of topical interest. It has, in fact, become a vehicle of creative talent and artistic genius. 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 the novelist cannot always pay attention to have made the short story a popular genre.

The short story is an art form that defies definition and so complete satisfactory definition of a short story has never been formulated though many definitions have been, and always are being attempted. But, the definitions offered differ regarding the exact nature of the short story:

Because individual short stories keep revealing affinities with their forerunners, it is almost impossible to stabilize 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.17

Though, Indian in origin, the Indian short story writing in English is Western in technique. The Indian short story writers in English had to look to the West for inspiration as far as technique was concerned. Edgar Allan Poe, the pioneer of the short story, defined the modern short story as a prose narrative, “Requiring from half an hour to one or two hours in this perusal.”18

In the opinion of H.G. Wells,

A short story is or should be a single thing; it aims at producing one single vivid effect; it has to seize the attention at the outset,
and never relaxing, gather it together more and more until the climax is reached. The limits of the human capacity to attend closely therefore set a limit to it; it must explode and finish before interruption occurs or fatigue set in.¹⁹

The definition of a short story given by Sherwood Anderson highlights this point. He observes:

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 woman loved.²⁰

In modern literature, the short story has established itself as a genre being attempted by many. It has developed into a distinct genre. It is not a reduced form of novel. Certain elements like plot, characters and settings are common in both the forms. But both differ in the handling of material, in the approach of theme and also in their focus and angle. Unlike the novelist, the short story writer has to focus his limited characters to the scene of main action within a short span of time. Thus, the concentration of attention upon a particular aspect of character may result in a powerful impression. It is not a loosely knit piece of work; it is an organic whole producing unique or single effect. The shortness of the short story does not remain as a handicap but in a way, a source of strength. It requires far greater care and precision in the
treatment of theme than the vast canvas of the novel demands. Thus, the short story is neither a rival nor a substitute for the novel. It is another kind of literary form; prose fiction developed beside the novel.

Brevity and unity are the most important elements that distinguish the short story from the novel. Its subject should be of a nature that can be adequately and effectively developed within the prescribed limits. It should be clear in outline, well proportioned, complete in itself. It should convince the reader that nothing could have been gained by further elaboration. It may deal with or may cover a wider field of time or involve a larger sequence of events than many novels.

Unity is another important element of the short story. It includes unity of motive, unity of action and unity of impression. There should be one and only one informing idea, which must be worked out to its logical conclusions with unerring singleness of aim and directness of method. In the novel, different elements are interwoven into its texture and at times, there may be two or more points of interest. No such scattering of interest can be permitted in the short story. The interest arising from the germinal idea of the short story must not be complicated by any other consideration.

In a short story, elements like theme, plot, characters and settings are almost the same as those of the novel, but there may be difference in the treatment of the material, its focus and in angle. Usually one of these elements may dominate over the other.
Ours is the age of the short story. Poetry has had its day. The novel blossoms in an affluent society. Drama must be supported by a well-established theatrical movement. It is the short story which best portrays the peculiar personality of the modern man. It can be as poetic, as poetry, as dramatic as any drama and yet project life in a narrative form. The short story can even be without the story in it. It is short because the sensibility of the modern man does not accept long drawn-out yarns because, the hectic schedules and unscheduled hectic of his everyday life forces him to search for shorter forms. And the short story provides him relief from the frightfully hectic life which modern living condemns him to more and more with each day that passes. It is, indeed a fascinating study, almost all of our short story writers, today are equally outstanding as practitioner of other genres like poetry and drama. Some of them have adapted their short stories into plays. Rajinder Singh Bedi has based a number of his plays upon his short stories with considerable success. There are short stories that border on poetry in their intensity and diction. A number of short stories would admirably lend themselves to poetry if only the writer chose to express himself in this medium.

The short story came to India at a crucial period in the history of Indian letters. The nation was in ferment. A massive movement for liberation from foreign rule was raging in the country. The British were in no mood to withdraw easily. The struggle was long and grueling. It involved, in particular, the imaginative youth and the creative talent of the country. As the suppression increased, the movement tended to go underground. The writers and artists
became more subtle and more insidious. They resorted to symbols and imagery. There are some of the ingredients of great art. A large number of short stories written in Hindi, Urdu and Punjabi during the period reflect mainly the struggle for freedom. Our short stories portrayed the unjustness of the Raj and the grim fight of the people against it. It took different forms; it was non-violent here, violent there.

The main drama of Indian’s heroic effort to throw away the foreign yoke had the backdrop of the Russian Revolution. It was mainly on the unique chapter of world history that our short story writer was nurtured. The short story was a new tool in the hands of the creative writer. It lent itself admirably to advocating the cause of the poor, the under-privileged and the have-nots. Our short story writers depicted the plight of the repressed and the rack-rented in vivid colours and infused in their readers a great strength of will to undo the injustice.

It was a mighty silent revolution in Indian letters. No more did the nawabs and the maharajas, the white-skin rulers and the privileged Brahmans glitter on the pages of our writings. It was the story of the common man and his problems. The poverty-stricken and the underprivileged, the toiling millions and the have-nots came to be portrayed and glorified. It was not the mercenary fighters but the soldier-lovers; it was not the stooge by the suffering citizens, not the landlord but the tiller, not the mill-owner but the mill worker who figured in our stories. Our writers glorified them the way it had never been done before.
The main preoccupation of the Indian short story writers during these years was the freedom struggle. No sensitive writer could remain uninfluenced by the mighty movement sweeping the country. There were various parties and diverse roads but the goal was the same. The short stories written in the Indian languages in the nineteen forties reflect the vitality of a people devoted to a cause. In these stories reflect the Indian freedom struggle. We have vivid pictures of the exploitation and the arrogance of the foreign rulers and also the determination of an awakened people struggling for their birthright.

Then independence came. The foreign power withdrew after dividing the country into two parts. With the partition was let loose a communal fury which caused unprecedented dislocation and misery. Millions of people migrated from one part of the country to the other, thousands were massacred, women were abducted and raped, children flung on spears, property burnt and looted on an unprecedented scale. This frightful mass-fury left the sensitive writer stunned. Was this the freedom he had dreamt of and fought for? No. A spate of stories was written on the partition of the country—the havoc it wrought and the plight of the refugees. Seeing how the neighbour attacked neighbour, some of the writers seemed to lose all faith in common humanity. There is a strain of despair in a great deal of the writing of the period. Yashpal, Ashok, Mohan Rakesh in Hindi, Krishan Chander, Rajinder Singh Bedi in Urdu, and Sekhon and Virk in Punjabi wrote some significant stories moved by the partition riots.
Short story writing requires both inspiration and hard work. It is a highly exacting art. It can be the story of an age; it can be the picture of a split-second arrested by the skill of the writer. The short story reads like a poem in its intensity and lyrical description. It may have a high drama couched in it in the most dramatic form. It may be as long as a novelette. It may be as short as a snatch of a dialogue. It holds the mirror to life. And the sort of life we have in our day and age, the short story does fullest justice to its complexity and its nuances.

The Indian short story in English is virtually a product of this century. The first short story collections appeared in 1885: *Realities of Indian Life Stories Collected from the Criminal reports of India.* (London, 1885) by Shoshee Chunder Dutt and Sourindra Mohan Tagore. Shoshee Chunder Dutt’s Bengalian: “*A Dish of Rice and Curry and Other Indigestible Ingredients*” (1892) contains two long tales *The Reminiscences of a Karani’s Life* and ‘Shukur: *A Tale of the Indian Mutiny of 1857* and a number of short stories. Next appeared P.V.Ramaswami Raju’s *The Tales of Sixty Mandemians* in 1886 and *Indian Fables* in 1887.

The short story by an Indo-Anglican writer was still in an embryonic form. The writer knew that of all the forms, it was the simplest and the most popular means of communicating a way of life. He was interested in conveying in a language understood by many inside as well as outside India, the essential India which he understood and of which he wanted others to get a proper perspective. Fortunately, he found the short story, in almost perfectly
developed form, in the ancient Indian classics, a form which suited exactly his purpose.

Notable among the pioneers in the Indian short story are K.S. Venkataramani and K. Nagarajan. K.S. Venkataramani had contributed *Jatadharan and Other Stories*. Gandhian influence is discernible in his short stories. His stories are realistic in approach and they show the interest of the author in the social revolution. He exposes the social evils prevailing in society. For example, “The Erode Waits” depicts the anxious but futile efforts of Subramania Sastri to find a suitable bridegroom for his daughter, Patty. His contribution to the development of the Indian short story in English is significant. By attempting to translate the typically Indian idiom into the English idiom, he has shown the way to others. He holds the reader’s attention by his realistic portrayal of personal relationships as well as with his humorous touches.

Nagarajan’s stories are atmosphere dominant and his technique of narration is noteworthy. Some stories, in his “Cold Rice,” the only collection of short stories of him, draw obviously upon the author’s own experience as a government pleader. He presents a realistic picture of the contempt pleader. Most of his stories end happily as in the ancient tales; they do not fall a victim to moralizing.

But, the short story in Indian writing came to life in the stories of Rabindranath Tagore. His stories are characterized by the informing concept of a totality of life blended with imaginative romanticism and idealism.
A writer is the product of his/ her own contemporary society. By living in the contemporary society by looking at living conditions and understanding them from the own prospective and responding to the then and existing conditions, as all other people made the artistes including the writers are also made.

Rabindranath Tagore is not an exception to this natural phenomenon. Though he was born with a silver spoon in his mouth, he was talented enough to study the sociological conditions in the society, which are reflects in his writings.

To the non-Bengali reader, Rabindranath Tagore is known as poet and philosopher. And the remarkable richness of his short stories is unknown to most Indians outside Bengal. It is a pity that they have not been artistically translated into modern Indian languages even today. The stories also form an excellent introduction to his novels. Some of them carry the core plots and to be later developed into novels and a few of them have been dramatized by the poet himself, and at periods, stories and novels were being simultaneously composed. Rabindranath Tagore is the first writer in Bengal, most probably in India, to compose ‘short stories’, in the modern sense of the term, and remains still its greatest exponent. Although modern Bengali short stories are notable for their variety and technique, none in Bengal is fit to touch the bootlace of the grand old man even in this field.

Tagore himself was of the opinion that his short stories are a realistic depiction of life as he observed it. In fact when critics referred to them as lyric
in quality he felt hurt. On May 22, 1941, shortly before his death, the poet said:

I am surprised when you say that my short stories are lyric in appeal...I'd like to emphasis that there was never any want of realism in them. I've written what I've seen, deeply felt and directly experienced. My stories are the fruits of my experience, imaginative creations of what I've seen. If you say they're lyric you're wrong...You say that even when I compose in prose its appeal is poetic. Yes, true my style sometimes transcends the plot of the story, and establishes its own identity. But you shouldn't blame me for that. Remember, I had to give shape to the Bengali language according to the demands of my art. In the earlier stages of my prose writing you'd indeed find something of poetic effusion, but in the later stages my prose has changed its character.21

Mother India was fortunate to have Rabindranath Tagore as one of her rare gifted children. Tagore had the vision of the third eye which could witness and understand the complex sociological, social, familial and human relations. Perhaps such a gifted talent for deep understanding of his contemporary society awoke his spirit to write his enthralling masterpiece Geethanjali. Tagore could witness the entire India of his times as the “Bright Star” of John Keats witnesses the amazing beauties in nature and still could stand steadfast in the sky as a hermit. Similarly, hermit Rabindranath Tagore also could see the
complex and immense varieties of conditions in Indian Society. But he could not stand steadfast as a midst of his riches. His heart was moved. His spirit was stirred and his mind spontaneously responded as mentioned below:

Where the mind is without fear and the head is held high:

Where knowledge is free:

Where the world has not been broken up into fragments by narrow domestic walls

Where words come out from the depth of truth;

Where tireless striving stretches its arms towards perfection;

Where the clear stream of reason has not lost its way into the dreary desert sand dead habit;

Where the mind is led forward by thee into ever-widening thought and action

Into that heaven of freedom, my Father, let my country awake.22

With such tender heart and responsive mind Tagore did not confine him to the pleasure of writing. The multifaceted genius has focused his attention towards many areas. According to Tagore views Education is the third eye, as it is referred to in the Vedas as Upanayana.

As Education was as an exploration, mere theoretical education cannot be satisfactory. The need, he said, was for improvisation at every level- even, for instance, in making little of financial
resources go a long way. Education was nothing short of learning to live, and the atmosphere in which education is imparted is of great significance. Tagore preferred open-air class rooms in the midst of nature- a suggestion which if adopted today even in a limited sense would do away with unnecessary expenditure on building schools and classrooms and especially furniture and other things to equip them with. In present-day schools and colleges, a major problem is the relation between children or students and teachers. There is no proper interaction between them so that the students are alienated from the teachers and vice versa. Unless a warm and purposeful relationship is established between the learners and the teachers, education cannot hope to achieve its full objectives. That is why Tagore stressed that the life within a classroom is similar to life within a community where all are equal. And so interaction and cooperation must be as among equals. The teacher must be a guide to his students as well as their friend. Education must teach the mind how to create and help creative self-expression. Two ways in which this could be achieved was aesthetic education and craftwork. Tagore strongly disapproved education that emphasized cramming, which plays as essential role in the educational pattern of today.  

Tagore pretty well knew that a large chunk of population resides in rural and agriculture areas. Hence Tagore was keen in including rural areas as the
content of his writings not in a limited or superficial sense but as a movement for nation-building with the goal of social, economic and political freedom for the individual. He did not merely evolve a rural community development programme but experimented with it in his Shantiniketan. The programmes that he set in motion are being carried on in Shantiniketan even today.

The experiment of rural development at Shantiniketan was begun as sober, calculated, systematic efforts on the part of workers to find a comprehensive solution to the problems of village communities. Such development relied on the qualities of self-help, individual freedom, and self-realization to guide the people to recognize their problems and to fight them with the resources available. For Tagore, such development was not to be based on charity. It was a community endeavour and not state action – that was based on cooperation among the people. The cooperation and self-help was such that even the surplus of the rich got spent equally among the members of the community. The relevance of this programme for this present day rural orpiment, i.e., progress in every sense, and its approach is universal unlike modern programmes of community development that are specific and depend upon the organization of, and conditions obtaining in, a social set-up.

The agrarian development programme envisaged by Tagore was, likewise, broad in its goals and reach. Tagore felt that self-help among farmers to free themselves from debt, adopt improved technologies, etc., would raise farm productivity and income. Consolidation of holding and other forms of collective actions would contribute significantly to better farm layout and
organization. Tagore also recommended voluntary contribution towards relief, rehabilitation of weaker communities and Zamindars' contributing finances for local development. Conferment of ownership rights on tenants would lead to much improvement in the tenants' status and contribute to agricultural development. These ideas can be very usefully put to use for agricultural reform and progress especially as they would not prove difficult in practice.

Having knowledge that the rural India is the backbone of Urban India and the Indian traditions are rooted deep in rural India only. Tagore writings inevitable contain and reflect the living styles of rural India. Tagore belongs to the world class community citizens, like the greatlegendaries of human civilization such are Socrates, Abraham Lincoln, Jawaharlal Nehru and Gandhi. Tagore also is an immortal soul for the existing world. His thoughts and ideas are relevant for ever for all times. The relevance of Rabindranath Tagore's thoughts for the modern man cannot be gauged in any restricted sense for he was not only a poet-philosopher, but also a political and social reformer, educationist, and humanist. His contribution and influence has been undoubtedly wide in their range. Deep in their meaning, his thoughts depict a profound Universalist and humanist vision that make them significant for all times and all places. His outlook was such that it viewed things in their entirety. And so, his answers to the moral and spiritual questions and his solutions to the specific issues that confront modern man are entire in their approach and reach. He did put into practice many of his ideas and, as a result, won a great deal of success and acclaim. The programmes and experiments he
began, in Shantiniketan for instance, are still carried on now with a lot of zeal and commitment. All this, to some extent, certifies their continuing relevance.

In order to fully understand and appreciate Tagore’s relevance to the present times, it is necessary to delve into the essence of his thoughts, which are, by no means, confined to philosophical topics alone; they deal with education, rural reconstruction, agricultural development, political reforms, cultural aspects, and a host of other issues of practical importance. Without any hesitation it can be said that his writings are the treasure houses of his thoughts and ideas.

The Viswa Kavi must have known the principle that “Science informs while literature transforms.” On the transformed foundation only and informed civilization can be built and it is the Herculean task of laying transformed foundation that Tagore shouldered. In his own words,

That all-embracing poverty which has overwhelmed our country cannot be by working with our hands to the neglect of science.

Nothing can be more dignified drudgery then that man’s ‘knowing’ should stop dead or his ‘doing’ go on forever.24

The process of this ‘knowing’ according to Tagore should permeate and pervade at all times in all directions. Tagore did this through his writings.

Short stories also form part of Tagore’s splendid writings. Practically speaking short story has been ‘friend, philosopher and guide to man since unknown times.’ Tagore’s short stories, like his novels, show robust realism
and closeness to actual life, side by side with a highly poetic and imaginative recreation of what is observed. We also find in the short stories the same tenderness and pathos, patriotism and humanity, the same philosophical vision, which characterizes his novels. The very compactness of the short story implies certain disadvantage. The author neither gives free rein to his philosophical musings, nor can be afford the luxury of detailed description of nature. Moreover, the gradual evolution of a complex personality, or the working out of an important idea through a series of dialogues in many different contexts, is hardly possible within the brief compass of a short story.

But the short story also has some advantages. The very smallness of the canvas compels the author to prune the superfluous and saves him from diffuseness. In some of Tagore’s short stories, there is a clarity and directness which we rarely see in his novels. The number of character is limited to two or three. Their personalities are brought out vividly. The action is brief, there are no sub-plots, and the reader’s interest is sustained throughout.

The modern short story is Rabindranath Tagore’s gift to Indian literature. In fiction, he had a distinguished predecessor, Bankim Chandra Chattterji. But in the field of the short story, Tagore had no predecessors in India. He initiated the tradition, and found great delight in doing so.

The first story, “Bhikharini (A Beggar Woman),” was published in the monthly _Bharati_ in 1877 when Rabindranath was hardly a young boy of sixteen and the last of his short stories had been composed during June 24-25, 1941, a little more than a month before the poet died on August 8, 1941. He did not
write stories throughout his astoundingly extensive creative life – he composed about only one hundred short stories whereas we have more than three thousand songs, not poems, from his pen – and one can detect three definite stages in which he directed this energy to writing stories: 1884-85, the period of apprenticeship; 1891-1917, the period of maturity when most of them were published in *Sadhana, Bharati* and *Sabujpata*; and 1925-41, the final period in which most important ones were published in *Prabasi, Ananda Bazar Patrika*. During the first two periods he concentrated on the village life in Bengal, and middle class problems of Bengali families. In the last stage, particularly since 1939, a new vision – an eagerness to understand the peculiar psychology of modern young men and women is discernible.

It is possible to classify his stories thematically – the peculiar features of Hindu joint family system, the realities of peasant life in Bengal, social criticisms, love in its waywardness and eccentricities, love born of conjugal bonds or outside marriage. Many of the plots of the stories are based on actual observation.

Tagore’s technique of the stories is as natural and spontaneous as the flow of life itself. Something of the serenity and expansiveness of the river Padma particularly characterizes the earlier stories; the poet was then living in his houseboat on Padma, and made an extensive tour of that fascinating part of Bengal.

He loves to tell a story in a style nearer to that of Chekhov or Tolstoy, and discovers, with a ruthlessly penetrating vision of his own, the truth of a
character or the essential of a human situation. The almost melodramatic twist at the end of a story that characterizes the technique of Maupassant had no appeal to Tagore. He believed in unfolding the plot or the secret of an individual character in a leisurely style; and it is the total impact of a story or a character, rather than any particular moment in the story or any character that haunts our memory.

At the centre of his creative passion there is this great love and compassion for the humble and the defeated; and, perhaps more than anything else in Tagore, his short stories may serve as an introduction to the multitudinous world he created. Sometimes he is angry with the senseless customs of society, sometimes the pity of an humble existence engages his attention, sometimes he dissects with gentle yet ruthless art the pretensions and innocent hypocrisies of a Bengali bhadralok, sometimes with gentle irony he exposes the meanness of a character; but it is always 'Man' the infinite variety of human nature, that excites his creative imagination. The stories were the creation of a particular mood, harvest of some bright inspiration. Within the compact frame work of a short story he attempted to capture the great moments of life, paint the eternal variety of human nature and depict the joys and sorrows of our daily life. The magic of this world is felt by the reader as much for its true description of life as for its imaginative splendour. The poet himself was most happy when he composed them.

'If I do nothing else', he writes from Silaidah on June 27, 1894, "but write short stories I am happy and I make a few readers happy. The main cause
of happiness is that people about whom I write become my companions: they are with me when I am confined to my room in the rains, on a sunny day they move about with me on the bright banks of the river Padma.\textsuperscript{25}

Thus, the short story occupies a prominent place in the literary world. It has cut across the boundaries of all countries to find room in their cultures. It starts there, it get finished there. It contains a moral, evokes an interest and the content leaves an indelible impression on the minds of the listeners. Hence, the short story can be considered the best of literary expression and the most effective genre in the human culture.
References

2. Ibid., pp.15-16.
11. Ibid., p.8.


16. Ibid., p.213.


22. *English @ Work*, Hyderabad: Osmania University, Dept. of English, p.38.


24. Ibid., p.190.