CHAPTER - IV

TOWARDS A UNIFIED AESTHETICS: CONFLUENCE OF TECHNIQUES AND MOTIFS

As a short story writer Srivastava is fully aware of the significance of each constituent that makes a perfect modern short story. He has expressed his views on the art form in his prefaces and interviews. His views commensurate with the views of the great masters of this genre:

Every work of art is an expression of the writer’s personality and so is the short story. It is also a manifestation of his instincts, emotions and experience, in a broad sense, in which they are not limited to his personal life but to the whole world which he internalizes and to which he responds both subjectively and objectively. (E-mail interview)

Almost all definitions of the modern short story focus on brevity. Brevity is essential because the reader’s attention must not stray. The story-teller must aim at a single effect only, to which all the ingredients—incidents, characters and scenes—relate.
A short story is a condensed fictional narrative, usually in prose concerning a relatively small number of characters involved in a single action with one theme, aimed at exciting in the reader a single emotional response, the novel by contrast, typically presents many characters more leisurely developed through several interconnecting story lines and conflicts and evokes a multiplicity of emotional reactions. http://fld.hit.edu.cn/english/wenxuexinshang/News_Detail.asp?id=1068

The short story must have just enough room to design a single effect, neither too much nor too little. Maupassant, a great artist known for technical innovations in the art of story-telling, concentrates on a single event or on a single tendency in the life of one character or a small group of characters. His stories reverberate “a little slice of life” and are often tinged with considerable cynicism and irony. Srivastava gives us brilliant snapshots taken from low or middle class Indian life. In the hands of the master craftsman, the short story is essentially intensive, lyrical, fixing reader’s attention on small but brilliantly perceived parts of human experience. The real merit of a short story is not confined only to the technique. The art of story-telling is something beyond technical innovations.

According to Kenneth Payson Kempton, “The works of eminent writers of short fiction bear testimony to the fact that the artistic merit of a short story lies
ultimately in something beyond method and technique” (The Short Story 33). He rightly observes: “A noble theme may sound merely pretentious under poor telling” (33). This statement shows that form and technique are vital elements of the short story and they are integral to theme and plot.

To the reader of the short story, “the way of telling is the mark of good fiction—scene, detail, dialogue—all the elements that make an imaginative creation of life” (Miller 514). So the technical innovations in a story, ultimately aims at the effective presentation of the theme. So theme and technique are equally important elements in the story. Srivastava himself has made it clear in the introduction to his collection of short stories, Games They Play and Other Stories:

Technique is as important in the short story as theme. It is the function of the story to reveal something about life in terms of a small fragment of man’s existence. Economy of words, a close-knit structure and significant theme are the cardinal points of a successful short story. After Maupassant and Chekhov, almost all the major short story writers of the world—James Joyce, Katherine Mansfield, Sherwood Anderson, Ernest Hemingway—have been following their line; compactness of form and economy in the use of words are characteristic of their stories. (14)
An effective technique of telling a story is measured by the degree of its capacity to draw the reader close to the emotional centre of the story so that the author, the reader and the main characters all seem to experience the same emotions. In “Cooperative Colony,” the views expressed by the author about the governmental policies remain that of the unbiased reader and that of the protagonist. This is not only the way the author looks at a section of ministers but also all the normal citizens everywhere in the country. This is an idea that often haunts one who thinks of the conditions of an Indian village. The story, “A Beggar’s Daughter” opens with the following words: “Beggars, stray dogs and flies are a great nuisance no matter where one goes. They need no passport to reach at places where none expects them. Births and deaths, marriages and “madarishows,” sweet-shop garbage heaps draw in beggars, stray dogs and flies. They are there, like politicians whether one likes them or not” (31). In “Gajari and Kanhai” the author shares equally the views of the major character and the readers. “Intensity of love is like a hot glass tumbler that cracks instantly with a mere touch of cold water of deception and infidelity, more so in the case of the poor people whose sensibilities are so sharp and brittle that they break before they bend” (38 ). In “Rescuers,” the protagonist Neeru feels that “the whole world was inhabited by wolves, some in their original, some in sheep’s skin” (80). It need not be particularly mentioned that this view of the protagonist is shared by the author as well as the common man. In the story, “Under the Lamp,” Karmaibai declares:
I have no faith in the police, in judiciary or even in humanity. But a few advocates and some volunteers from the women’s organizations come to my prison cell to hear my tragic tale so that they could take up my case. I tell them the story of what happens many times in the dark under the lamp itself that generously spreads its light around. (121)

As a writer who has chosen the short story as a favourite medium, Srivastava is well aware of the limitations of this genre that it cannot exhibit life in its entirety and multifaceted complicity. Unlike the other literary forms, technique and content in the short story are inextricably intertwined. Technique objectifies the heart of the matter. It makes a difference between felt experience and artistic presentation of it in the art. Thus the technique has an intimate relation to themes, as intimate as that of form to content. Mark Schover explores the possibilities of technique in relation to theme and content:

The difference between content and art is technique. When we speak of technique then we speak of nearly everything, for technique is the means by which the writer’s experience, which is his subject matter, compels him to attend it. Technique is the only means he has of discovering, exploring, developing his subject, of conveying his meaning and finally of evaluating it. (71)
Sean O’ Faolain who has expressed certain seminal views on the art of story-telling expresses almost the same view. He is of the opinion that the success of an artist is on the success of his technique. He feels that, “There are writers mesmerizing us into forgetfulness of the vastness of this convention which makes tiny bits of life speak for the whole of life” (144).

Short story as an art succeeds to the degree in which the temperament of both the writer and the reader achieve harmony. It is in fact born of pure temperament and this temperament is of infinite variety. It is the temperament that creates technique. Thus technique is an inseparable part of theme. Srivastava is ardently aware of the technique of the short story and he has expressed it in clear terms. “The technique employed is commensurate with the tenor or thrust of the story” (Games 17).

It seems that the short story is the chosen literary genre of Srivastava because he was well acquainted with the eastern and the western methods of short fiction. Throughout his career as a creative artist, he tries to understand the vital and varied principles of the composition of the short story as a creative art. He has experimented with form and technique with a considerable degree of success. According to him all constituents of the short story “... must be so closely woven that nothing can be added, nothing taken away. Hence the story, like good sculpture, is not a lifeless assemblage but a receptacle of the artist’s vision and soul” (Games 11). He appears to hold the view that the technique of
narration is determined by the kind of experience and the quality of vision which he tries to convey through the mutual interaction of character and plot.

Srivastava who has an innate faculty in story telling has to involve in creative writing as a part of his academic pursuit. So it is inevitable for him to make acquaintance with the masterpieces of the art form. This acquired knowledge made him a literary celebrity. Srivastava is very clear about the subtleties of craftsmanship:

The greatness of the short story writer consists not in creating a memorable menagerie but in painting a realistic picture of life. In order to draw the image of a person, reconstruct an episode, create a scene of terror, highlight the irony of a situation or paint a personified passion, a writer must select appropriate tools.

(Games 11)

Successful stories of Srivastava are examples of artistic perfection and literary workmanship. To achieve this he doesn’t make use of any modern technical innovations like interior monologue or flash back, impressionism or expressionism. Quoting Srivastava, Neeta Maini has clearly and briefly put it in an article, “Studies in Contemporary Indian English Short Story”:

While most of his themes relate to the contemporary scene, in the matter of technique, Srivastava’s approach is traditional. No
stream-of-consciousness, no interior monologue, no disturbed chronologies, no frequent flashbacks and no impressionistic or expressionistic technique find a place in his stories. One does not have to go far to seek reasons for it. He wrote most of the stories for popular magazines for which readability is the best test. (191)

These stories are of remarkable finish and very neat structure. Even if he has violated the norms of length and of narration, he has sufficient justification for it. Our earliest experiences of short fiction teach us that stories have a beginning, a middle and an end. The plotted story with its well defined beginning, middle and end has become a thing of the past. But still the vast majority of stories do have a beginning, a middle and an end.

The writer sets the scene by giving explicit background information. The short story “Rebirth” is a fine example of creating background before entering the main theme of the story. “The Living Doll,” “A Drowning Man” and a few other stories require background information to make the reader acquainted with what he is going to reveal in the story. Certain other stories like “Hospitality,” “Human Thirst,” “Two Odd Wheels” and “The Second Denudation,” the reader is taken straight into the plot and theme. In stories like “The Living Doll,” “Love and Animality,” and “Terrorist in the Kitchen,” the writer informs the reader using suggestion or implication rather than direct description.
The opening is direct and holds the reader’s attention, in stories like “Spilled Milk,” “Hospitality,” “A Drowning Man,” and “Lasting Victory,” perhaps mesmerising the attention of the reader with a word or a short phrase. Obviously, the opening of the story is vital. The device of opening is different in different stories. Whatever be the technique of the story it should draw the attention of the reader and sustain it. At the same time the writer is under constraint to compress the information. The opening gives a quick and effective picture to the reader, of what is going on. In the introduction to his collection of stories, Games They Play and Other Stories, Srivastava has categorically stated: “My method of working differs from story to story. I could begin the story with vague hints of a character, a situation or a plot which become solidified into an image and which in a polished form are passed on to the reader” (12). The beginning of his stories is always arresting.

The tension filled suspense of the story, “Terrorists in the Kitchen” is noticed in the opening sentences. “A black cat, they say, is a piece of embodied nuisance, a walking ill-omen, an aesthetically ugly creature, an uninvited guest, a constant drain on your generosity and a strain on your nerves” (74). Srivastava’s stories are marked by striking and gripping beginnings. The garbage heap described in the story, “A Ruby of the Garbage” is so vivid that one can almost see each item and marvel at the author’s acute observation. “A Blessed Curse” has a lyrical opening and captures the mood of the coming events, and the
graphic beginning of “Under the Lamp” helps us to see a disillusioned Karmaibai. In these stories the attention of the reader is captured with a word or phrase which gives a quick and effective picture to the reader of what is going to happen. The author strikes the keynote at once.

The opening sentences are highly impressive. The story, “The Living Doll” opens with a sentence which shows what is impending to the protagonist. “Kashi portended a misfortune for the poor family when he did not cry at the time of his birth” (Under 1).

“Love and Animality” opens with the following sentence. “A semiliterate wife is like a hot morsel in your mouth; you can neither swallow it nor spit it out” (Under 60). The opening of many stories of Srivastava establishes a relationship with the reader by drawing his attention to the subject. Srivastava’s openings are highly revealing. He begins the story “Gajari and Kanhai” thus: “Gajari, the whole world praises the sun because it gives light to the people but you and I wait for the moon to come up so that we could meet on this lonely bank” (Games 35).

Srivastava enjoys a unique position among the great Indian short story writers for having added a new dimension to the short story in matters regarding technique of telling. Srivastava says, “If I see a conflagration in a spark and an ocean in a bowlful of water, my effort would be to convey the impression in a
more explicit manner to the reader” (Games 12). He further adds that his stories “The Handicapped” and “A Known Witness” were inspired by common place inefficiency and immorality which were influential in making even the healthy people handicapped. “A Beggar’s Daughter” had its origin in a casual conversation in which a poor woman was condescendingly depicted as a maid servant. “A Hard Nut” is the portrayal of a girl whom the author knew as a bundle of contradictions. The stories, “Gajari and Kanhai” and “The Second Denudation” have their source in the direct personal experience of the author.

The most significant aspect of technique shows “the relation in which the narrator stands to the story” (Lubbock 251). The term “point of view” or “narrative perspective” characterizes the way in which the text presents persons, events and settings. Of all the fictional forms, the point of view in the short story is significant, both as a device for keeping the dramatic tempo and handling the perceptive upon the material for the positive explanation and analysis of the theme.

One of the narrative devices is that, the narrative structure is a straightforward progression in which one event follows the other and moves towards a conclusion where all is resolved. Short stories often have a moment in the plot, up on which, the whole structure of the story turns, and which affects the outcome of the tale. Sometimes this trigger can be a quite trivial incident or experience, but it signifies a moment of revelation to the central character. Where
there is a story there is a narrator. Since narration is an integral part of story writing, traditionally this narrator acted as an intermediary between the characters and the reader. Narrative viewpoint implies the sense from whose point of view we see the events of the story.

Srivastava uses point of view to gain greater objectivity. In some of his stories like “Tigers of the Steering Wheel” and “Road to prosperity,” he seeks point of view through self effacement by introducing a first person narrator who is a participant in the action. In stories which deal with more serious themes, he adopts a point of view that is totally impersonal. As the acknowledged creator, Srivastava knows everything, but is no more than a witness to the action of the story. “As an omniscient author he knows everything but he is no more than a witness to the action of the story” (Ram “R.K.Srivastava: A Writer of simple ways” 73).

He doesn’t adopt the point of view of the focal character or an omniscient observer in his stories. In stories like “The Living Doll,” “The Handicapped,” and “Masks and Men” he is omnipresent and omniscient. In these stories, the author talks about the characters and about the story. He sees into the minds of the characters and sometimes chooses to report what they are thinking. The main character in the story “Under the Lamp” is telling the story from her point of view and of course using “I.” This viewing of events largely through a character’s eyes is called an internal point of view. One may not experience
everything they do but events are mostly seen through their eyes with an insight into their thoughts and feelings and often with comments on the situation. The narration of this kind is charged with personal reactions and feelings from the point of view of the narrator. The point of view of the novel, “Neema” is that of the narrator. The young girl, “Neema” tells how her aspirations have been crushed by the present social order.

Rocco Fumento endorses the definition of the critics Stallman and West. They define “form” as “The final unity of a work of fiction, the successful combining of all elements into artful whole” (Fumento 414). and Brooks and Warren define it as “the arrangement of various materials (ideas, images, characters, settings etc.) to give a single effect” (414). The events that the writer describes in a short story order the events in a particular way. Through the narrative the writer can create a wide range of effects such as creating suspense, raising the action to climax, resolving problems, leading the reader in particular ways and leaving endings open to a variety of interpretations. Stone vehemently adheres Edgar Allan Poe view that “the chief formal property of the short story is unity of impression” (5). It is a product of conscious artistry. The author conceives a certain unique or single effect to be wrought and then devises an appropriate narrative vehicle for that. Another essential feature of this art form is symmetry of design.
The short story has, in fact, the form of various short fictional forms of the past—a yarn, a sketch, fable, or tale. At the same time it has a more complex structure and less rigid adherence to convention. The short story is concerned with the world as it is not as it should be. It has a rhythmical and unified plot, and it is less limited by convention in the handling of point of view. The short story achieves a functional and proportionate interrelationship of its elements—plot, character, setting, theme, style, and point of view. The aesthetic validity of the short story consists of the functional and proportionate interrelationship of these elements. An assessment of the short stories of Srivastava reveals that he could achieve the aesthetic validity to a higher degree.

The term, “form” can encompass two related but distinct ideas in addressing view point; we need to consider the question of who has actually seen the events described, and who is narrating them. They may be one and the same or quite separate and the question is rather complex than it might first appear.

In literary genres like the short story, setting is one of the crucial elements. For example, the short story of Edgar Allan Poe, “The Fall of the House of Usher” gives a detailed description of the building in which the uncanny atmosphere evolves. Typical gothic elements in the story include the Usher House described as "this mansion of gloom" with its dark hallways and draperies, ebony black floors, "feeble gleams of encrimsoned light" and its eerie burial vault. Complementing these elements are Madeline Usher's mysterious malady,
death and burial, and her return from the grave; the latter heightened by the
thunder and lightning of a violent storm, a gothic technique often adopted by
modern films and stories dealing with the supernatural. Setting denotes the
location, historical period and social surroundings in which a story develops. In
Srivastava’s stories “Living Doll,” “Road to Prosperity,” “Under the Lamp” and
“The Human Thirst,” the setting is clearly a typical Indian village of the period.
“She was making cow-dung cakes. Her dhoti, her hands, even her face carried
patches of cow-dung. She gathered the cow-dung in a small heap, patted and
flattened it on the ground and then stuck it on the wall” (Under 50). The story,
“Seeds of Democracy” opens with a description of the serene atmosphere of an
Indian locale and its inhabitants:

To the inhabitants of the village called Jheengur which nestled in a
valley peacefully like an abandoned child, away from the cling-clanging sounds of the civilized world, the voice of the king had
always been the voice of God. They knew they did not matter at
all; they were mere straws, blown about at the royal will. (103)

In many of the stories of Srivastava, the setting of time is immediately
recognizable, due to reasons of space. “The room was dark. Except for little
streaks of light escaping from the holes of the thatched roof, there was nothing
but darkness” (Under 7). In the story, “Terrorists in the Kitchen,” he writes:
Around nine in the night, Sonkali would invariably go out across the lawn to bolt and possibly lock the main gate and one or two young cats would quietly slip in and go straight to the kitchen . . . A kerosene lamp in a niche emitted a yellow flame topped by a black one spreading dark soot around the ceiling . . . the half-moon hung in the horizon, throwing its cool light inside the door (Games 86).

In the story, “A Ruby of the Garbage,” Srivastava portraits a clear picture of a posh colony in New Delhi:

Amid a heap of garbage lying in a corner of Swarna Nagar, a very posh colony in New Delhi, the leftover and discarded items could be seen of what otherwise appeared to be God’s plenty—peels of fruits and vegetables, torn and crumpled papers, empty plastic pouches of milk, holed aluminium foils of medicine with tablets gouged out like eyeballs from their sockets, pieces of broken glass tumblers, egg shells and glass shells of fused bulbs . . . a mere sampling of god’s and man’s creations gone to decay . . . They [people] might have realized then that the rag-pickers too were the discarded creatures of the society and hence rightly consigned to the garbage dump. (128-29)
In setting the time and place a short story is handicapped because of its length. A novelist has ample scope for building up the time and space. The short story writer has to achieve it by his brush strokes economically and evocatively. All references have to be to the point and capable of revealing.

Atmosphere, once created, gets the way for the writer to go ahead with the story. As a short story writer Srivastava has set things right in such a way that there is no false note in the narrative that destroys the atmosphere. He is careful in every aspect. Atmosphere, no less than mood and tone, imparts a meaning to the total theme of a work. Every imaginative work possesses its own peculiar atmosphere, which is peculiar to that work and to no other. The atmosphere of anxiety and suspense is built up in the stories like “The Living Doll,” “Rescuers,” “New Generation,” “The Human Thirst,” “Tigers of the Steering Wheel” and “Confession.”

It is atmosphere that describes the dominant mood created by the setting, description and dialogue. In Srivastava’s stories the physical and psychological effects of the activities are created by the atmosphere that the author creates. It is through the atmosphere that Srivastava establishes life-likeness in the stories that win the readers’ willingness to accept the world created by him. Thus Srivastava shows that atmosphere is one of the fundamental elements in his short stories. Atmosphere creates the mood as well as the psychological and physical effects
appropriate to the theme of the stories. By rendering appropriate time and place to the stories, Srivastava lends them verisimilitude and authenticity:

Srivastava gets into the action of the story after having set an atmosphere that helps him in creating the texture of his imagined world with its characters, locale and environment. In setting up such an atmosphere, the writer makes use of a number of technical designs such as symbolism, suggestions and imagery. The symbol of black cat in the story “Terrorists in the Kitchen” and the symbol of light in the story “Under the Lamp” are examples illustrating facts and problems through symbols. In the story “The Human Thirst,” there is a ceaseless flow of emotions and images. Srivastava writes: “Every July brought the much awaited rain-carrying clouds to quench, as it were, my thirst and yet it always rained elsewhere. Or if it drizzled for me, far from quenching my thirst, it created some moistness, enough only to sprout some seeds of hope which dried up in the absence of nourishment” (48).

Here, the images of “rain carrying clouds,” “sprouting seeds” and “drizzling” represent the sexual desires and their fulfillment or disappointment in fulfillment.

One knows well that a story centres on the lives of characters created by the imagination of the author in an imaginary situation. The elements that
contribute to the making of the imaginary world authentic and life-like are
descriptions of time, locale, people, their actions and their conversations. Of
these elements, atmosphere is vital. Atmosphere along with the theme and the
plot makes a well organised story.

Mysterious setting also creates a meticulous atmosphere. Distancing of
atmosphere and making it quite acquainted have different effects. For example,
the vague expressions like “long ago” and “far away” create a mysterious
atmosphere, an atmosphere we do not come across in our daily life. In the
stories, “Ganga Ma,” “Maharshi Satyanand,” “The Living Doll” and “The
Second Denudation,” the author creates an appropriate atmosphere by distancing
of place and time.

Anything created imaginatively is creative atmosphere, landscape alone
doesn’t make it. Atmosphere is made subsidiary to mood. Atmosphere rather
than mood generates the main current of meaning. As a convention, atmosphere
no less than mood and tone is appropriate to the general intention of the main
impulse of the story. It is atmosphere that binds the story together and sets the
time frame related to the past, present and future. In addition to this, the
atmosphere helps to create the psychological mood in the reader and establishes
the locale of the story. Apart from this it is the atmosphere that makes for
economy and authenticity.
The technique employed is always commensurate with subject matter. For example, the first-person narrative should not confuse the reader—it is only a strategy used to heighten the impact. Atma Ram quotes the opinion of Srivastava in an article: “The ‘I’ of the short story does not refer to me at all; it refers to the narrator and his personality” (Indian Poetry and Fiction in English 73). Srivastava, while writing from the point of view of a particular character, especially when it is in the first person narrative, has used the kind of language that would be characteristic of him [character] in his own vernacular. Occasionally, the imagery used is from the mother tongue. He very often willfully avoids authorial comments and lets the narrative flow. Sometimes the comment is incorporated in the description itself.

In stories like “The Handicapped,” “Cooperative Colony,” “Seeds of Democracy,” “Maharshi Satyanand” and “Masks and Men” we hear the authorial voice. He advises the world, “The feline intruders are more dangerous than the real terrorists” (Under 81). Mahipal Das felt disgusted at the immorality and insincerity of the leaders and politicians of our society. He says, “The world claws you when you do nothing but it tears you to pieces when you do something” (Masks 35). The authorial voice is echoed in the words of Karmaibai, “I have seen so much darkness under the lamp, so many criminals masquerading as Samaritans under the very lamp” (Under 105).
In these stories the narrator knows naturally much more than what the other characters of the story know. In the short story, as it is short, the writer cannot scatter his fire. He must concentrate on a single situation. In order to do this successfully he cannot devote equal attention to all the characters. He must select a character on whom the reader’s attention falls. The entire dramatic situation which forms the climax of the story centres on him. In his stories, Srivastava concentrates on a single focal character.

The plot of a story is technically the basic constituent. The structure is derived from conflict, sequential action and resolution. Structure is “the ordering of the parts in whole; the ordering of the dramatic or descriptive scenes, the characters, the incidents and action etc, into a unified scheme work—usually for a pre-conceived effect” (Fumento 414). Thus structure is not concerned with the outward events (the action) of a story. One knows that a reader wants to know what is going to happen next. In fact, he wants to be stimulated to the point. The formal structure of a short story is an arrangement in which the characters interact with incidents or situations. The craftsmanship of a writer lies in making it appear that there is no conscious arrangement, no contrivance, no plot to deceive the reader and that the reader should think it could well have happened that way.

The structure of Srivstava’s stories consists not merely the description of outward events; it is the inner development of the theme and characters which
holds the attention of the reader, serving to sustain his enthusiasm to know what happens next. Essentially this is the basic feature of a short story. There is no point in the development of the plot in which the reader is not stimulated.

He has set the structure in such a way as to make the interaction of the characters with incidents and situations highly stimulating to the point. Srivastava makes the structure of the stories so natural that no reader will consider it having any artificiality or contrivance. Whatever be the way of telling he has carefully maintained the structure. The developments seem so natural that the handling of structure in his stories helps him to achieve how to make them interesting, appear true and make them meaningful. Most frequently Srivastava focuses on a single character in a single episode. Though he takes the freedom of minor diversions in some of the lengthy stories, he focuses on single moment to achieve symmetry of design as an essential part of his stories.

As a short Story writer, Srivastava exercises strict self-restraint in order to achieve unity of impression in most of his stories. He has been very careful in excluding the details which he considers superfluous and which hinders the creation of singleness of impression, in choosing the incidents to be described and the traits to be emphasised. He exercises his judgement and selects only those incidents and aspects of character which are essential for the production of the contemplated expression.
Plot involves sequence of incidents or events of which the story is composed. Conceivably, a plot might consist merely of a sequence of related actions. But the way of telling involves certain consideration of pace, tone and colour. In the art of story-telling it is the creation of a constant sense of movement in the plot. The effective way of telling makes the reader believe that the writer is talking to him as a friend, as an equal not as someone superior.
Srivastava has tried to make his stories appear familiar and plausible. It has been found that in some of his stories like “Under the Lamp,” “A Drowning Man,” “The Human Thirst” and “Straw in the Eye,” certain digressions divert the attention of the readers. These digressions are things which violate the professed nature of the short story. But Srivastava, as a writer who has his own theories of short fiction, has sufficient justification for deviation or digression. He makes it clear in an interview, “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). In an online article titled “Essence of Short Story” defines plot:

Plot, most difficult of words to define, is a sequence of events, trivial or astonishing in themselves as it may be, but always probable and convincing, which leads to a change or climax in the life of one or more characters; a change or a climax so important or
interesting that it arrests, holds and satisfies the reader’s curiosity.

http://www.everybodyscribbles.com/Essence_Short_Story.php>

A plot denotes a movement in time and space, and when the characters become actors in the plot they cannot remain static, they must grow. The personality of the character must unfold itself in the process of his thoughts and actions, so that he reveals himself fully, and often surprisingly, only at the end of the story. The writer speaks through his characters.

Srivastava is very careful in eliminating the superfluous details detrimental to the creation of singleness of effect. However some of the stories are wrought with features that may be termed “loose.” A very close examination of such stories will reveal that treatment of themes in such stories require such a way of telling.

Conflict is a clash of actions, ideas, desires or wills. It is the collision of opposing forces and it is the core of every story. “It reaches its greatest intensity at the climax of the story and is then resolved, either happily or tragically by virtue of a logic that the reader, if he is to be convinced, must be made to accept” (Shaw 20). The main character may be pitted against some other group of persons. In the stories of Thomas Hardy, the characters are in conflict with some external force—physical nature, society or fate (man against environment) or he may be in conflict with some elements in his own nature (man against himself).
The conflict may be physical, mental or moral. The kind of conflict is determined by the author. The purpose of a story is to interest the reader so that the characters and events will arouse his feelings. Feeling or emotions is the result of conflict. The author is expected to generate the warmth of the reader’s sympathy or antipathy by friction; this he does by depicting two or more conflicting forces. The dramatic conflict often is the cause of a trap (situation) in which the protagonist is caught. It is left to the reader to discover how she or he gets into the trap and how he or she extricates himself or herself or fails in the attempt.

A character may get entrapped by his own fault—fault in his own character, judgment, belief and some other flaws in his character or by the fault of others as in or by forces outside the control of man. Srivastava has experimented with many other forms of conflicts. “A Drowning Man” presents a number of situations which manifest moral, ethical and cultural conflicts. The main male character has sufficient reasons to marry an Indian village girl. He thinks at the beginning of the story:

And if at all I had consented to marry a rustic Indian girl with no more than an eighth class certificate, much against the wishes of my Indian and American friends, when I was on the point of marrying one of at least half-a-dozen charming girls I had liked in the US, it was my inherent liking for a simple, quiet, innocent wife – a flawless product of the Indian culture. (Under 10)
The depth of the revelation of the truth and its impact on him is revealed in a highly suggestive manner in the concluding paragraph of the story, "Under The Lamp". It reads: "Now the revelation came to me—a man afraid of showers and leaks—with the thunders and lightning and the relentless downpour. My head was dizzy. Lying in a pool of water, I felt like a weather-beaten man, now drowning in an unfathomable ocean" (Under 23).

In most of the stories in the collection entitled Masks and Men, the conflict is between appearance and reality. It is well exemplified in the title story. In “Masks and Men,” the conflict is derived from the wrong notions of the people and the resolution takes place because of the fortitude and the imagination of the protagonist.

Sudama exclaims “I have seen so many persons, and most of them are hypocrites!” It is further observed: “They wear masks, in order to succeed in this world; we will have to wear masks. It is hard to find one sincere unmasked man. If I begin painting masks they might have a greater market in India” (Masks 87). The outburst of moral indignation of Srivastava finds expression in “Rescuers.” He comes across the truth that no religious halo—Hindu, Christian, Muslim or Sikh—is an indication of sincere or unmasked approach to the daily business of life. Here three men tried to put the poor, innocent girl, Neeru, in a trap and at last, she is not able to save herself from Father Joseph Sault. The reader’s sympathy is with Neeru. It is to the satisfaction of the readers that Neeru aims her
knife at Fr. Joseph Sault and finishes him. And here the resolution of the trap is made by taking revenge on the man who ruined her.

“The Living Doll” is the conflict between what one has and what one desires. In this story Karni’s strong feeling for sexual desire puts her in a trap which ends her life. “The Handicapped” depicts the mental conflict of the young unemployed, honest and hard working individuals who are denied their opportunity by the reservation policy of the government.

“Road to Prosperity,” “Confession” and “Under the Lamp” show conflict arising out of moral and ethical degradation caused by the administrative setup and the so called social and political activists. The situation is composed of characters in action against background, or setting. The way in which the situation is resolved constitutes the theme or idea, behind the story. In the most ideal characteristic manner of a shapely modern short story, each story of Srivastava makes the reader toil and think. These stories are highly capable of stimulating the emotions and thoughts of the reader in such a way that he projects himself into the story. He develops his sympathy towards the hero and tends to boo the villain. The purpose of any story is to interest the reader so that the characters and events arouse his feelings.

“Terrorists in the kitchen” depicts conflicts of the fractured psyche of the people in the then Punjab where violence and murder had become an accepted
way of life. The conflict arises through the merits or defects of the character himself. The inclination of Mohan for sensual pleasures with the American girl Marcy and his own consciousness that he is doing the wrong, enter into a conflict. And finally he saves himself by abstaining himself from wrong doings. Mohan says: “Humanitarian considerations have been the heaviest fetters on me. I do not exploit a person I do not know and I cannot exploit a person I know”. He further expresses his mental conflicts, “Would all my efforts go in vain? What would people say when they come to know that I had slept with a girl without doing anything? And what would Marcy in her saner moments think of me—a fool” (Cooperative 69).

Conflict arises out of the contrivance of others. In “Road to Prosperity,” Kaiso Singh, the evil incarnate is instrumental in making the conflict. In “The Living Doll,” Karni’s evil intention leads her to the tragic end. Conflict arises out of the outside circumstances on which the characters have no control. The protagonist wants to have a shelter in the Cooperative Colony. Nobody can blame him for cherishing such a hope. He cannot fulfill his desires, finally kills himself and meets with a tragic end for no fault of his own.

Commenting on the short stories of Anton Chekhov, Raymond and Sewall have observed: “Chekhovian short story may be described as a completely economical, highly integrated symbolical situation which reveals the ‘inwardness’ of a personality or experience; it lends itself to character analysis
especially to analysis of character in action—a sphere in which Chekhov’s ability was very great” (606).

Conflict is better expressed through dialogues, through interior monologues, the misery of the characters and by presenting the demeanor of the exploiters or oppressors. Exploitation, as an undesirable social evil is best brought into play through satire. The conflict, a resultant factor of exploitation, finds appropriate expression in the dialogues and monologues of characters in the story “Under the Lamp”, out of the efforts of Bichitra Singh to sexually exploit and Karmaibai’s resistance. In “Road to Prosperity,” the conflict is between those who try for progress and those who prevent it. “Cooperative Colony” presents a conflict between a high ideal and the practical implementation of it. “Masks and Men” involves the conflict between appearance and reality.

It is the quality in a story which makes the reader ask what is going to happen next or how this will turn out. And it impels him to read on to find the answers to these questions. Suspense is the greatest when reader’s curiosity is combined with the anxiety about the fate of some character upon whom the sympathy of the reader falls.

The common devices for achieving suspense include the introduction of certain elements of mystery—unusual set of circumstances for which the reader craves for an explanation or to place the prominent characters in a dilemma—a
position in which he must choose between two courses of action, both undesirable. Srivastava’s craftsmanship is highly successful in building up and sustaining the suspense in the mind of the reader till the denouement. Though “Friendship, Love and Marriage” is a long story, Srivastava shows a rare gift of craftsmanship in sustaining the suspense till the end of the story. Similarly, “New Generation” is a story notable for sustained suspense. It doesn’t mean that the other stories of Srivastava do not have the quality of maintaining suspense. He maintains it as a step by step process of rational enquiry and thereby makes the reader anxious to know how it is going to end. The atmosphere also plays a significant role in sustaining suspense. A typical example of creating suspense is present in the story, “New Generation.” Yadavendra decides to marry Jyotsana. But before they could leave the “mandap,” Deepika, with a little baby in her arms pushed herself through the crowd, and cried out “I am his wife, He can’t marry again” (Masks 100). She begged, “I am poor and you are rich, he discarded me and is marrying you. For my sake please do not marry him”(100-1). Priests of both sides declared that they had been married and that could not be undone. But to their surprise, Jyotsna remarked:

I belong to the new generation. For me taking seven rounds of the fire, chanting of a few ‘mantras’ and exchanging of garlands do not matter. I am still under the “mandap” and the marriage is not yet
consummated. What matters most to me is not rituals or ceremonies but that people are not deceived and exploited. (101)

She forced him to marry Deepika before everyone in the very “mandap.”

Closely connected with the element of suspense in a story is surprise. If we know in advance exactly what is going to happen in a story and why, there can be no suspense. As long as we do not know whatever happens comes with an element of surprise. O. Henry’s stories are well known for unexpected twists and turns. The end of the story can never be predicted in the case of almost all his stories. The end of many stories of Srivastava is unpredictable. The plot and the style of presentation have been designed in such a way as to make the ending of his stories memorable. The way he performs the climax of the story is particularly noteworthy.

The characters in a story must be consistent in behavior, clearly motivated, plausible or life-like. The techniques of drama are often very effectively employed by great masters of the art form.

There are many ways of ending a story as there are beginnings. Unlike other literary genres the ending reveals meaning in a short story. It also points a significant theme or provides a solution. The appropriate ending of a short story will have to leave the reader contented and satisfied with a sense of tale completed. In order to achieve the desired effect, Srivastava has employed both
dramatic and narrative methods. In an effective dramatic presentation, the narrator is avoided and there is not any overt influence on the reader by a narrative mediator. In this method of presentation the reader perceives the acting figures without any intervening agency as if witnessing a dramatic performance. The reader forms an impression of the character through his or her actions and words without any interfering commentary. The setting also adds to drama technique. The scenes in the story, “Under the Lamp” are a fine illustration. The story reveals an illustration of an almost perfect integration of theme and action. The action is both simple and complex. It is complex in the sense that it does not begin at the actual beginning of the story but breaks into the middle, then flashes back to the earlier scenes, then picks up and continues to the end. It is simple in the sense that the full course of events can be restated briefly.

The progress of the action is towards some kind of changed understanding on the part of the principal character, the process of defining her own mind and changed conditions of her being. “A Drowning Man” and many other stories bear testimony to the ability of Srivastava to present his characters and themes in a highly dramatized manner. The opening of the story itself is highly dramatic. “Confession,” “Rescuers,” and “Rebirth” are examples for dramatic opening. “Confession” opens with the following scene: “Clucking her tongue, rolling her eyes and sucking her fingers, Deepa, the four year old daughter of Janaka, a widow, said: “The mangoes are very sweet”. “Are they?” Lajvati asked, “How
sweet?” “Like soil” Deepa innocently said, used as she was to eating soil” (Masks 42).

The creation of a dramatic situation in a short story is a test of the writer’s acuity and adroitness. H. E. Bates comments in The Modern Short Story: “A. E. Coppard has long cherished the theory that short story and film are expressions of the same art, the art of telling a story by a series of subtly implied gestures, shift shots, moments of suggestion, an art in which elaboration and above all explanation are superfluous and tedious” (21). Miss Elizabeth Bowen expresses almost the same view. She says: “The short story in its use of action is nearer to the drama than to the novel” (21). The notable dramatic situations in Srivastava’s stories are the climax scenes in “A Drowning Man,” “The Living Doll,” “The Confession” and “Cooperative Colony.” Regarding the endings and climaxes of Srivastava’s stories, critics have contrasting views. For K. V. Chacko, in a “Review of Love and Animality”, in Hitavada says: “the endings of Srivastava’s stories are dramatic enough to have their impact on the reader’s mind for days to come” (Sept.9, 1984). Whereas for Sulekha Sharma, “his basic technique is to build up suspense, but he fails at the climax” (The Tribune). No doubt, some of his endings are stereotyped, as in “Maharshi Satyanand” and “Hospitality,” where the culprits are tamely caught and punished at the end as it happens in typical Indian movies or fables or fairy tales. However, in some short stories, the climax is very convincing and artistic. The last scene in “The Living Doll” is laid
in the dark room of Kashi’s house where he, in a fit of anger, molests and kills his sister-in-law, mistaking her as his doll. The scene is weird but convincing because of Kashi’s physical prowess, mental retardation and his dizzy state of mind from hemp, and no less significant for the fact that the first line of the story carries the seed of conclusion: “Kashi portended a misfortune for the poor family when he did not cry at the time of his birth” (Under 1).

The dramatic presentation of themes and actions render his stories a quality rarely present in Indian English short stories. The action in many of his stories is both simple and complex. It is complex in the sense it does not begin at the actual beginning of the story, but breaks into the middle, then flashes back to the earlier scene, then picks and continues to the end. The story “Under the Lamp” exemplifies this technique. The story begins with the following words of the main character. “Behind the iron bars of the Central Jail, Patna, I, Karmaibai, a woman of thirty one, widowed, answer questions of many people, particularly of advocates, press correspondents and some volunteers of women’s organizations, who want to save me from the gallows but which I do not want” (Under 105). The story, “Rebirth” has its beginning towards the middle of the story and goes to the beginning and then the narration moves to the end of the story.

Most of the stories of Srivastava are simple in the sense that they present a straightforward narration carried out briefly and directly. The theme is
adequately embodied in the action and properly intensified by the other elements which contribute to the total effect.

A short story must make a single impression on the reader by concentrating on a crisis which plays a pivotal role in a controlled plot. Edgar Allan Poe, commenting on the short stories of Nathaniel Hawthorne writes: “The chief formal property of the ‘short prose tale’ was ‘unity of impression’, which he regarded as a product of conscious artistry; the author first ‘conceived, with deliberate care, a certain unique or single effect to be wrought out’ and then devised an appropriate narrative vehicle for conveying that‖ (Reid 54).

Srivastava considered himself a realist who presupposes certain attitudes towards the representation of life. He makes his characters symbols. Srivastava presents his themes with a rare touch of realism. Whether it is hunger and degradation as in the stories “Ruby in the Garbage,” “Cooperative Colony” and “Road to prosperity,” East-West encounter as in “Century” or communal problems as in “Savagery,” human relationship as in “Rebirth,” the theme of exploitation and hypocrisy as in “Masks and Men,” “Rescuers” and “Under the Lamp,” he has boldly depicted them in such a way as to make an indelible mark on the reader’s conscience.

The making of a short story is the making of a world, in miniature, in language, and it is a persistently developing world. It normally consists of a
devised succession of events, in an organized structure, involves the writer in all sorts of acts of choice, and selection of incident and language, to the end of provoking recognitions, and responses in his reader. This is made possible by appropriate selection and arrangements of words. Commenting on the linguistic devices of the short story as an art form Sean O’ Faolain writes:

Every art has its own hieroglyphics. These are its language, its technique, its conventions. In the short-story the speaker of the language is the writer; he has to learn its conventions, know what can be done with them, understand their limitations, adapt them to his own purpose, and often add to them. (135-36)

An artistically perfect short story is the joint product of the mind and art of the writer. So the language, in which the thinks, feelings and emotions are shaped, has more significance than any other constituent. All the constituents gain significance only if the language used is appropriate to the context and character. John Braine expresses almost the same view. He is of the opinion that, “Writing is thinking, because it is the arrangement of words, words are the only possible medium of thought” (Braine 17).

Thus we come to the fact that “Literature is fundamentally an expression of life through medium of language” (Hudson 11). It is the reader who is to judge a work of literature. “To many readers, the way of telling is the mark of good
fiction; language, scene, detail, dialogue— all the elements that make an imaginative creation of life” (Miller 514).

The characteristic manner of expression of a writer is considered his style. It is as peculiar and as personal as other personal traits; that may be the reason of Buffon’s statement that “style is the man.” It is related to personal idiosyncrasy. Almost the same opinion can be found in the following words of R. F. Dietrich and Ruger H. Sundell in their introduction to the seminal work, The Art of Fiction:

Unlike the scientific language of observation and report, the language of fictional literature is a total language. It employs such devices as rhythm, metaphor, image, symbol, plot, character, setting, tone and point of view to convey feelings and express ideas that will appeal to the whole man— to his senses, emotions, imagination and intellect. (4)

Miller finds that the short story writer makes use of words to paint a picture. He remarks: “The words used by the tale-teller were as the colors used by the painter. Form was another matter. It grew out of the materials of the tale and the teller’s reaction to them. It was the tale trying to take form that kicked about inside the tale-teller at night when he wanted to sleep” (523).
The relationship of language with various constituents in a work of art will also be a significant factor in the analysis of style. The simple narration of experience will not bring into light different features of that author’s style. “The object of narrative is to transmit to the reader an exact visual account of the object or action represented” (Read 97). Every author tries to achieve this. Srivastava is quite conscious of the language to be used in fictional literature when he expresses:

I agree with the observation of R. F. Dietrich and others about the totality of the fictional language as opposed to the scientific language. The scientific language is a means of conveying factual details as they happen to be. On the other hand, all the devices, such as, rhythm, metaphor, image, symbol, plot, character, setting and point of view are used in a fictional language to make them appeal to the whole man. What it implies is that the short story is not a mere narration of an event, but a medium of communicating in totality what a writer has in his mind - a vision of deeper reality of life, its universality, his point of view, the characters which best appealed to him, the fragments of life which have deeply touched him, through the use of rhythm, metaphors, images and symbols so that the appeal of the short story is to the whole man - all his senses and faculties. However, all of them may not be used in the same
story. Much will depend on the plot and character as also many other factors, or else it may drift into artificiality. (E-mail interview)

While making an observation like this, Srivastava had in mind the creative endeavours in one’s mother tongue. In this regard the Indian writer in English is put in an unparalleled situation—writing in a language linguistically and culturally quite different from the languages of India. The most significant challenge before the Indo-Anglian writer is the task of using English language in a way that will retain the sensibility that is distinctively Indian, and to still remain English. The early Indian English writers made experiments in overcoming the difficulties of creative expression in a foreign language. The greatest challenge they faced was the employment of Indian imagery and rhythm through the medium of English language which is linguistically and culturally alien. Nevertheless, most of them were successful in making their literary works natural. Thus the success of a style depends upon the apt use of English language in the Indian context and on preserving Indianness in full. Srivastava’s style is marked with the skillful use of images inseparably linked with Indian life as can be seen in “Masks and Men”:

A mile of forest and wild land stretched between the village and a road leading to the nearest city. On this land, the wheels of bullock-carts had made deep, zigzag ruts—made deeper by the flow of
water through them during the rainy season—with the result that neither human beings nor vegetables and fruits in any weather could be transported even up to the road leading to the nearest city. (Masks 32)

“My father-in-law encouraged me in sitting at the smithy, saying that this human life comes after many births and deaths, and god tests his creatures through such trial” (Under 107). These images have only limited functions. His images do not have any symbolic overtones. The images are not so much fanciful and have a reference to the observed Indian scene. Wadhawan writes in Punjab Journal of English Studies:

His imagery and images add to the intensity of the colours of the portrayal while capturing Indian sensibility effectively. The writer in these stories has translated some folk idioms and proverbs also, such as, spending money like water, one’s mind having nothing more that cowdung in it, a scabbard can’t hold two swords etc. in the final countdown, it may be suggested that Srivastava has evolved a language which is fascinating and flows rhythmically and majestically, carrying the reader with it. (108)

A critical analysis of the linguistic devices of Srivastava’s stories reveals that his faculties lie deeply rooted in the traditional, cultural experiences of his
native land. On account of social and educational situation in which he was
brought up, Srivastava happened to choose English as the medium of creative
expression leaving behind his mother tongue Hindi in which he started his
literary career. His stories are the splendid expressions of his personal reactions,
and responses at the depth of his being. The language of short story is different
from the language of other fictional literatures. On the language of short story,
James E. Miller Jr. is of the opinion:

The short-story writer’s problem of language is the need for a
speech which combines suggestion with compression. If I have to
choose one word to describe short-story language I would either
say that it is engrossed, or that it is alert. At the very opening, a
writer, at any rate a modern writer, must make an immediate and
intimate contact with his story. For this reason, I confess, I tend to
judge most of the stories I read by the opening sentences. (192)

Though there have not been set rules for style, the narrative traditions
have set certain ideals and conventions. Descriptions of events have to be exact
and smooth in its rendering. Precision or economy of expression may be
achieved through speed of events. The description of objects may be in the form
of images or symbols. The prose style is supposed to be direct, simple, and
unimpeded.
Among the contemporary writers Srivastava can be placed among those Indian English writers who have acquired a fairly good command of the language before entering the realm of creative art. The exposure he had in villages, towns and cities, various urban and rural education institutions and his experiences abroad made him acquainted with different dialects and registers of the English language. This enabled him to choose from a wide variety of the English dialects to suit his narrative. However, the situations and characters he has been dealing with make it inevitable to employ a style in which he is required to use Indian images and a certain amount of indianisms.

While discussing the problem of language we have to examine the difficulties confronted by Indian writers in English. Attempts to translate Indian linguistic patterns to English are confronted by major difference between the Indian cultural and linguistic system and their rendering in English. Indians who speak English out of choice in a daily situation approximate an accented but academically correct English—“grapholect.” The difference between English and Indian languages may be one of the reasons why transcriptions of regional languages into English quite often sound unnatural. In the Preface to *Under the Lamp: Stories*, Srivastava warns about the limitations of the Indian writer in English. It can be admitted that the description of human emotions, reactions and reflexes can be made in a sophisticated language, but whenever, the language is a vehicle for expressing the experience of the characters from diverse social strata,
it poses certain difficulties to the writer. Great Indo-Anglian writers have overcome this obstacle by their own inventions in the technique of presentation. While assessing the works of Raja Rao, P. C. Bahattacharya has put it in the following way: “While using English, he knows he has squarely faced the problem which, as he himself has put, is to convey ‘in a language that is not one’s own, the spirit that is one’s own’” (358). An analysis of the language and diction of Raja Rao will reveal that he has used English as an Indian language. P. C. Bhattacharya further observes that Raja Rao’s “idioms and phrases, proverbs and aphorisms, metaphors, imagery and comparisons—all are patently Indian, taken from Indian life and rooted in Indian culture”( 358). Srivastava has made the modes of expressions—the vocabulary and the syntactic devices—appropriate for the characters and settings. Great artists have used language as a medium for exploring the many layers of human consciousness and motivation.

The characters and situations and the cultural background of almost all the fictional writings of Srivastava are Indian. He has presented a wide variety of characters in diverse socio-cultural and familial situations. Most of his characters who are drawn from Indian socio-cultural milieu constitute the rural folk. Their dialogue in the stories has always been a problem and has been subjected to severe criticism. While Raja Rao and others liberally use the Indian phatic expressions and Indian expletives and even the Indian words in
vernacular, Srivastava uses an English which appears suitable at times for the common man. About this problem Srivastava says in an interview:

   When I write from the point of view of a particular character, especially when it is in the first person narrative, I use the kind of language that would be characteristic of him in his own vernacular. Occasionally, the imagery used is from the mother tongue (Ram, Interview 22).

This is not only the problem of Srivastava but of all Indian writers in English who deal with Indian characters, Indian themes, and Indian settings. Srivastava who has always been baffled by this problem, writes in the Preface to the collection of short stories, *Under the Lamp: Stories*:

   Dialogues in Indian fiction in English have occasionally been a problem, particularly when concerned with non-English speaking people. Having been born and brought up in a village, I saw the elderly people conversing effortlessly in a native dialect which was pictorial, idiomatic and alive. It throbbed with life and wisdom. These dialogues remain my priceless possession even today. I have often endeavoured to recreate them in English, avoiding the oddity which a literal translation often carries. In order to see that the dialogues are natural, I have leaned my ears in many a secret place,
listening to women talking about nothing for hours together or to the children who delightfully exchange idiocies as pearls of profound wisdom. (vii-viii)

He could successfully employ the language to suit almost all Indian contexts. What is unique about Srivastava is that he retains Indian setting, rhythm and colour, in his art of story-telling. His use of English in the Indian context is, no doubt, successful that it is difficult to find any parallel in the contemporary Indian English short story. In an interview with Atma Ram, Srivastava tells about the influence of his mother tongue on the language of his fictional literature:

It does influence the dialogues in my fiction. I have been hearing since my childhood certain proverbs, sayings and idiomatic expressions in the conversations of all kinds of people. It would be inauthentic not to give the typical flavour in the dialogues of certain types of characters who are known to speak in a particular way. I have not literally translated, as Anand has, such conversations into English, since I consider that rather odd, particularly if carried to an excess, but have given the flavour of such idiomatic expressions. The manner of speaking of people belonging to different castes and classes is so different that it is difficult to render their dialogues effectively in English, without
using their proverbs, sayings or the very words and expressions.

(22-23)

As for the stylistic devices, Srivastava does not have any pretensions. For him what matters is the situation. Whenever the situation demands that an Indian word is more suitable than its English counterpart for the fullest revelation of the context and the meaning, Srivastava doesn’t show any reluctance to use the Hindi or Punjabi words. In “Century,” Jasbir uses such colloquial expressions as “Tuhadda ki hal hai”, “changa changaji” and “chhalo.” At the climactic moment, in this story, Marcy puts off Mohan saying, “Nope” (No, please) (65). In “Cooperative colony,” the writer uses such words as “haramzade,” “chapattis,” “kanaris” (29) etc. to convey the genuine Indian mindset. In almost all his stories he uses such expressions as “Thum kuhush ho?” (Under 2) “main ek raja, tu meri rani” (Masks 26). (It means I am a king and you are my queen.) “Ram Ram” or “Jai Ramji” (Under 4) “Holi hai” (6) “Bhabhi” (Masks 45). “talieebijan”(Under 67) The colloquial expressions render his stories the quality of genuine Indian cultural setting. “Sanyasin” (Under 9), “pujaris”(Masks 43) “Once he trod on her foot and she emitted a sharp muffled cry Oooyee!”,
“Gopikas” (Masks17), “Iaffi” (embrace), “lazzy” (a kind of soft drink from curd), gulabjamuns(a kind of sweets,Under101) “pandit” (Under 34) “bandh” “Rastharokho”,(Under78) “vidyarathi ekta zindabad” (Masks 63)—Hindi-ish words and expressions have been so skillfully used that no question of
unintelligibility or ambiguity affects the full enjoyment of the stories. In “A Drowning Man,” he makes reference to Kama Sutra (Under 17)

Continuity of enjoyment and readability of the stories is not hampered by the use of these devices. Abundant use of Indian names referring to persons and places create obviously an Indian atmosphere in his stories. The question that is naturally raised against Srivastava’s language is that of the high level of sophistication of the language used to record or describe the life of the unsophisticated village folk. In this connection what Srivastava has got to say is significant:

Once a writer begins to write in any language, the characters and their dialogues begin to flow naturally in that very language. If a writer has a command over a particular language, the difficulties are not insurmountable. Occasionally, some expressions in a native language, such as, an idiomatic expression, a saying, a proverb, do pose some problems but a way could always be found as has been done by Raja Rao in Kanthapura. Some short stories of mine like “The Living Doll,” “Seeds of Democracy,” “Confession,” “Road to Prosperity” dealing particularly with rural characters did momentarily create problems but with good translations they were managed. The same thing I did in my novel Neema which deals
with rural life and characters. I had to roll the rural dialogues in my mind to see that they appeared real. (E-mail interview)

The problem of language, as a means of day to day communication, in the modern globalized context, in socio-cultural interactions, has been reduced to a minimum; but when it comes to matters like that of literature, it poses severe problems of appropriateness in the use of diction. Srivastava as a creative writer and critic has examined minute details of cultural, linguistic and technical aspects of story-telling. The following words illustrate it:

The fact that English is not the language of most of my characters has provoked some criticism. The objectors often forget that English is merely a medium of communication for the writer and a touch of artificiality is inevitable when characters and situations happen to be purely Indian, but it is no more than a momentary confusion. Once the reader had adjusted his vision, his understanding and his reflexes, once he had mentally aligned himself with the medium, everything becomes natural. After all, the problem is not different when literary works of one language are translated into another. One has to remember that it is largely through English that India has come to be known and understood outside and inside the entire country. (Under viii)
The relationship of language with various constituents in a work of art will also be a significant factor in the analysis of style. The simple narration of experience will not bring into light different features of that author’s style. “The object of narrative is to transmit to the reader an exact visual account of the object or action represented” (Read 97). Every author tries to achieve this objective.

Srivastava can be placed among those Indian English writers who have acquired a fairly good command of the language before entering the domain of creative art. In order to achieve this Srivastava has used a direct and conversational tone. He has chosen a simple common place language which avoids verbosity. He has made everything clear and has enlivened most of his narratives with flashes of humour and tried to share his jokes with the readers even at the expense of the characters.

Srivastava has been able to manage the problem of his literary medium with a high degree of technical flair. His experiment with the English language has been conducted using a largely conventional vocabulary and diction. It can be considered more an experiment with the rhythms of written and highly stylized sentences. In this respect his experiments can be contrasted to that of Raja Rao and Rushdie who stand apart from writers like R. K. Narayan, Amitav Ghosh and Mulk Raj Anand. While largely sticking to the vocabulary of English “grapholect,” he manipulates the syntax in order to give his sentences an Indian
bent. It is a major trait of Srivastava’s style to mould the language according to the requirement of the situation a technical skill which can be seen only in those who write in their mother tongue. His use of English in the Indian context is so efficient that it bears superiority to the contemporary Indian English writers.

Srivastava has chosen a medium of expression that is really suitable to him. The English that he uses is neither an Indian English nor is it alien; it occupies a unique position in the Indian cultural context. Except for short stories which deal with Indo-American life, Srivastava writes about places and people where the principal language is Hindi or Punjabi. He has been concerned with the socio-scape of which he is an integral part. Whatever be the medium of expression, the vivid description of the scenes from everyday life can only come from someone who is a part of that society.

One can say that his English lacks suggestive nuances and complexity of the language that we come across in the writings of British or American writers. One thing that strikes a careful reader is that a strange literary effect lies in the very flatness and rare literary quality of his writings. He has been quite successful in focusing his mind sharply on the Indian reality to which he gives concrete shape.

A well written story has the richness and conciseness of a fine lyric. Edgar Allen Poe, whose achievement as a poet and short story writer remains
undisputed, believed that the short story could stand at the juncture of prose and poetry, uniting the best qualities of each and reconciling truth (reason) with beauty (rhythm), comic, grotesque, tragic and logical effects can exist together in the same story, so long as they are united by some total effect on the reader. A short story is in fact a fictional device in which the author expresses his experiences in lyric form. Randall Stewart shares the opinion of Walter Allen that, “the modern short story writer is a lyric poet in prose and indeed the effect on the reader of many modern short stories, those of Chekhov conspicuously is nearer to that of lyric poetry than to that of the novel or of other stories” (8).

About the precision of words to be used in short fiction Miller further adds:

    In a short story that’s next to the poem, almost every word has got to be almost exactly right. In the novel you can be careless but in the short story you cannot. I mean by that the good short stories like Chekhov wrote. That’s why I rate that second- it’s because it demands a nearer absolute exactitude. You have less room to be slovenly and careless. There’s less room in it for trash. In poetry, of course, there’s no room at all for trash. It’s got to be absolutely impeccable, absolutely perfect. (524)
Brevity, smooth coherence, subjectivity, passion, sensuality and appropriate use of image, which characterize the lyric genre, form the features of a good short story. Along with the essential constituents of story telling—characters, theme, plot, narrative point of view and setting—the short story maintains the characteristics of the lyric.

Srivastava has tried to make the way of telling lyrical and expressive. The feelings and the thoughts of the characters are not merely denoted or described but revealed within the limits, characteristic of an Indian writer in English. Usually lyrical effects are created by tracking the language closely to the sensitivity, perception and intensity. Devices like this are aimed at drawing the reader to the emotional centre of the story.

Just like a true romantic, Srivastava cared much about the intensity of feeling. Very often the poetic element is lost, when Srivastava tries to give a realistic touch to his themes. O. Henry, in his stories, plays upon his reader’s emotion with pathos, sentiment, humour and suspense. Though Srivastava has tried to achieve this effect, the language—a foreign tongue—has caused some limitation to create the desired effect. He says:

A fine short story is the joint-product of the heart, the head and the hand. It originates from an inspiring idea, an appealing incident, a dramatic situation, a memorable character or an unforgettable
experience. The seed of the story sprouts in the writer’s head, it grows and swells to take the shape of a story carrying around it a mass of herbage, like foetus in amniotic fluid, which protects as well as stunts, and which has to be cleared before its unfurled leaves and its extending branches could assert its separate entity. The fully-grown, well-trimmed plant of the story then stands majestically before the world, concealing the hand that had given it a loving care or oblivious of the seed that had given rise to the creation. (Games 9-10)

He tried to make concentrated and patterned expression of feeling. Usually a lyric doesn’t provide an explanation, judgement or narrative. What it does provide is feeling; but Srivastava goes beyond this in some of his stories. Just like a lyric poem of high order he often maintains the privacy of inner discourse and he has always been careful in controlling the melodramatic quality of stirring feelings and sensations. There is in his writing a ceaseless flow of emotions and illustrative images.

Lyric poetry preserves the ephemeral life of feeling. But Srivastava’s stories have characters and incidents representing a continuity of life which forms a part of human history:
His language is simple and lucid. He “whittles” each word till it fits into the “slot” assigned to it. As such his prose is remarkable for balance and precision. His manner of writing is candid yet not naked. He shows restraint and can write short, simple as well as long sentences . . . it may be suggested that Srivastava has evolved a language which is fascinating and flows rhythmically and majestically, carrying the reader with it and *Games They Play and Other Stories* is likely to enhance his prestige and popularity as a creative writer. (Wadhwan xx)

The stories of Srivastava have their origin in the depth of personal experience. He has learned from the masters of this art form how to transform the experience into a piece of art. In an introduction to a collection of short story, Robert Gorham Davis writes:

A lyric poem attaches personal experience to the world outside, colouring events and ideas with individual passion or transforming particulars into symbol and metaphor. It is typical of lyric poem to involve a shift from the particular to the general, from the bed of sleeping love to the meditation on love’s aspiration and weakness. (xiv)
This is true of the stories of Srivastava. Whenever he is required to use the language of the common man in the moment of emotional intensity, mental condition or human predicament, it gains an effect that is natural to lyric poem and also in certain stories the revelation of philosophical ideas add to lyrical quality. Within the linguistic limitations, he has tried to make his language rhythmic.

Atmosphere, moods, feelings and sensuous details are essential ingredients of our sense of life at any given moment. It is mood and tone that imparts a meaning to the totality of a work. Every imaginative work possesses its own peculiar atmosphere; one which is peculiar to that work and to no other. Srivastava writes in this connection:

A short story is a lyric in prose when it comes to having a single theme, a single effect and a single tone. If the language of a short story remains unexplored, the only reason, in my view, could be that their readability is more important. If one chisels and polishes the language of the short story, and makes it poetic, the theme and the totality of effect could become secondary to the language and its readability could be adversely affected. (E-mail interview)

Inspite of this opinion one can see that he has used a polished and sophisticated language which has marred the lyrical quality of some of his
stories. At the same time he distinguishes the difference between a lyric and a shapely short story: “In a short story, the writer’s sense or meaning of reality is uppermost. Not so in a lyric where a poet is more concerned with representation of a mood or a feeling aroused by a particular object. Both of them aesthetically aim at a totality of effect.” (E-mail interview)

What John Hampson has written in his introduction to a collection of short stories entitled No Anklet Bells for Her by Manjeri S. Isvaran, is interesting:

As in a lyric poem the duration of some of his stories offers the reader a segment excised from the flow of time, a segment and a mood held still, yet filled with fleeting memories, half formed regrets and random thoughts. The short story is a form that often attracts the talents of poets whose gifts make them generally masters of this form of writing. Walter de-la Mare, Stephen spender, Dylan Thomas, Robert Graves and William Plomer, for example have each given brilliant demonstrations of their skill in the art. (xiii)

The events that a writer describes in a short story order the events in a particular way. Through the narrative the writer can create a wide range of effects, such as creating suspense, raising the action to climax, resolving
problems, leading the reader in particular ways and leaving endings open to a variety of interpretations.

One of the narrative devices is that the narrative structure is a straightforward progression in which one event follows the other and moves towards a conclusion where all is resolved. Short stories often have a moment in the plot upon which the whole structure of the story turns and which affects the outcome of the tale. Karnail Singh believes that “the form of his stories is not an end per se. It is the content that determines it and that the tone and timbre of stories modulate accordingly as the context demands” (Dwivedi192). Sometimes this trigger can be a quite trivial incident or experience but it signifies a moment of revelation to the central character.

Irony of statement involves a meaning contrary to the one it professes to make. Irony is not merely saying what one does not mean. It is rather a method of suggesting the complexity of an object or an idea by bringing into play the opposite or the discordant side of it. A contrast is always involved between what is said or done or what is meant or intended between appearance and reality, between expectation and fulfillment, between desert and reward, between the professed and the unmasked actual. It is an irony of coincidence that contrives the story’s whole point. Irony inheres the very theme of the story. It inheres too in the author’s world view or outlook on life.
In an interview with M. L. Mehta, Srivastava makes it clear the prominent place of irony, wit and humour in his fiction. He says:

Since humour, irony and satire are part of everyday life, there is no reason why they should not be represented in a work of realistic art. Besides, a good work must be readable before it conveys anything. I am told humour and irony make my writings fairly interesting and readable. Satire obviously is to demolish those institutions, individuals, customs and traditions which have outlived their use.

(171)

Irony understandably appears to be Srivastava’s forte.

Just like R. K. Narayan who constantly reveals the contradiction between appearance and reality, individual and society, good and evil, Srivastava uses irony as a mode of perception. Srivastava’s perception of characters and situations is sharper. Appearance and reality have struck him very deeply and the revelation of them is seen in the most effective form in many of his stories. The best examples of handling of irony are seen in the stories, “Hospitality,” “Masks and Men,” “Maharshi Satyanand” and “Ganga Ma.” Many other incidents in other stories are charged with the irony of statement. But unlike Narayan, who reconciled to the contradictions with a calm resolve, Srivastava is quite intolerant of these contradictions. He exposes the masks and shows his willingness to punch the face of the mask bearer. So the reaction against social injustice is another serious concern of Srivastava. He knows well that the culprits cannot be
punished always. But he presents certain revelations which are more intense than other sorts of punishment. The end of Garib Das in “Cooperative Colony” is such a glaring example. In “Seeds of democracy,” Prabhua who stands up against social injustice is crushed up mercilessly. The reactions and responses of Karmaibai, in “Under the Lamp,” are those of the author himself, who is fully aware that no community or region is free from the sin of wearing masks. The story “Rescuers” is an added striking example of it. Srivastava believes: “An appetite, like the one needed to enjoy a hearty meal, has to be created in the reader to see something new in what appears to be the oft-trodden ground, and then to sustain it with legitimate artistic means, such as suspense, humour and irony” (Games 10).

The Irony of statement adds to the narrative technique of Srivastava a distinct shape. The stories end up in ironic reversal of fortunes. The situation in the end of most of the stories is quite reverse to the situation in the beginning. “Friendship, Love and Marriage” and “A Drowning Man” illustrate the point. In the beginning Chaturvedi, the protagonist of “Friendship, Love and Marriage,” befools Loveleen and her mother and in the end the action is reversed. Similarly in “A Drowning Man,” Sarala who is supposed to be chaste turns out to be no better than her American counterparts. The narrative devices in these stories contribute to the ironic effect at the end.

Srivastava’s response to observed facts finds expression in his stories charged with wit and humour. The wit and humour in the stories reveal his
command of the English language which, for him is highly flexible for use in any situation. Like R. K. Narayan and Mulk Raj Anand, Srivastava draws the reader’s attention to the incongruities of life. Srivastava considers that turning his back to these incongruities is ignoring certain very important aspects of human life. The English words used by Manjula in the story “Love and Animality” reveal her ignorance by mispronouncing certain English words. The mispronunciation expressed the meaning and images which have no relevance to the context or images or objects presented. She says “TB” for “TV,” her “ideal” is “idle,” “flower like” becomes “floor like.” The narrator, Professor, of this story is “annoyed and occasionally embarrassed in the presence of his wife, yet what saves him from becoming unpleasant and bitter is his habit of taking her foibles and follies in the stride with a sense of humour” (Maini196). Loveleen who claims to have acquired sufficient knowledge of India shows off her knowledge saying that India is a part of Bombay. In the story–“Friendship Love and Marriage”–we come across a large number of amusing statements made by Loveleen and Chaturvedi. These stories are replete with amusing incidents drawn from day-to-day life of ordinary men and women we often meet. A number of examples of Srivastava’s wit can be seen in the dialogues of many stories.

Tillu, Thapa and Koore Lal are rag-pickers of a posh colony in New Delhi. The frightened Koore explained to the police:

   It is true that Tillu’s father was caught stealing a piece of rope but do you know what was that rope tied with? With a buffalo which
was what he was stealing. And it is also true that Thapa’s father
was arrested for sneezing but when? He had broken the iron safe of
a rich man, had nearly succeeded in taking the gold and diamond
ornaments away when he had sneezed. It awakened the owner who
pressed the alarm bell and got him arrested. (Under 140)

Another way he has adopted in his stories is exaggerating some personal
traits, by imploring comic and funny comparisons. In “Cooperative Colony,” we
came across such instances. The Minister for Education and Cooperation
addressed the residents in English by reading out his speech written in Hindi
Script. His speech has been written by a Sanskrit teacher who himself is
understandably poor in the use of English.

Brothers and sisters, except one because my wife is sitting here
(laughter) . . . This Cooperative Colony, this great experiment in
cohabitation (laughter) is going to bring about a new transformer
(laughter), that is, transformation in the country. You have a liar
(laughter) or lawyer who will give you honest, free advice in legal
matters. The physicist or physician (laughter) will give you free
medical assistance. You have a Pandit to solemnize marriages and
other ceremonies. You have a cheater to cheat (laughter), sorry, a
teacher to teach your children . . . We have a shepherd for your
sheep and a coward for your cows (laughter) . . . There are
institutions for people of all sexes and ages nursery for nurses
laughter), for infants infantry (laughter) and for adults adultery (laughter). (Cooperative 26-27)

His tone in the stories is satirical; his method ironic. His irony is pervasive: power-drunk politicians, unscrupulous academicians, piously impious priests and sex-starved swindlers posing as friends—none escapes its darts. It won’t be an exaggeration to say that Srivastava wields his pen like a surgeon’s knife to restore the sick society to its health. For all the ire which has gone in their writing, the stories are not just an angry vituperation. Mehta writes in his article “Men as Masqueraders” in Indian Book Chronicle that, “the story “Rescuers” unmarshals animality wearing the mask of piety and compassion. Neeru uses her darts and knives to avenge herself on her so called Messiah, Joseph Sault who has already used his dart and knife (latent sex symbols) to taint her physically. Srivastava uses zoologico-ornithological imagery (wolves and hawks) to unmask the rescuers. The story is rich in irony and ironic reversal of roles” (81).

The basic reason behind the introduction of wit and humour is Srivastava’s desire to make his works interesting and pleasantly readable, and to create fun and laughter which are often missing from the lives of tension-ridden modern urban and educated people.

Detailed descriptions of the funny activities of children contribute humour in the stories of Srivastava. Tillu, who is considered as the most intelligent as well as good natured among rag-pickers in “A Ruby of the Garbage” says, “In
my school a teacher had once asked a question: “What is that animal which provides you with milk, ghee, curd, cheese and leather shoes?” and a boy, instead of answering “a cow,” had mischievously said, “my father” because he provided these things” (Under132). Srivastava says:

For some people to have a vein of humour in a literary work is to transgress the limits of serious writing. They do not realize that comic mode is an important aspect of life, enjoyed by all, even if only a few are endowed with a vein of it. Humour demands of its writer relaxed mood, a perfect control on the language and an immense capacity of playing upon words. All this is easy enough in a native tongue but difficult in a foreign language. It is creditable that among Indian short writers, R. K. Narayan and Khushwant Singh have been successful in introducing, even in English, plenty of wit and humour which make their stories quite interesting and eminently readable. (Games11-12)

Suspense, satire and humour have been very effectively used by Srivastava. A curious mixture of these elements is found in many of his stories. His use of satire is a manifestation of his social consciousness.