SUMMING UP AND CONCLUSION

Ramesh K. Srivastava is the only contemporary Indian writer in English to establish a reputation solely on the basis of his achievement as a short story writer. His contributions to Indian English literature, as a critic and as a novelist is no less significant, but the contemporary literary world has accepted him as a short story writer of irrefutable creative force and distinguished literary talent.

In the foregoing chapters, an effort has been made to analyse critically, the themes and technical virtuosities of Srivastava, in terms of his major socio-economic, cultural and humanistic concerns. It can be noticed in the analysis that Srivastava, under the influence of his time and the changes that were taking place in the literary trends, has undergone changes in his expectations, approaches and outlook.

When Srivastava entered the field of creative art the Indian English short story had taken definite shape and distinct possibility of becoming the most powerful literary medium. The efforts put in continually by the major practitioners of fiction in English and regional languages have shaped the short story genre into an effective medium to convey the essential Indian ethos.

It was Manjeri S. Isvaran who, with ten volumes of short stories, emerged as the first Indian English writer to popularise the short story genre. Bankim
Chandra Chatterjee, Sarat Chandra Chatterjee, Ramesh Chandra Dutt and a number of early Indian writers in English were primarily novelists who tried their hand at short stories. Rabindranath Tagore to whose credit there are quite a few fine short stories in English is better known for his poems and plays. The other writers of fiction like Raja Rao, Mulk Raj Anand, R. K. Narayan, Anita Desai, Khushwant Singh and K. A. Abbas wrote certain inimitable stories in English but they are better recognised as novelists. It was Manjeri S. Isvaran who considered the opinions of the great masters of the art of story-telling like Edgar Allan Poe, Chekhov, Turgenev, Gogol, Katherine Mansfield, Joseph Conrad, A. E. Coppard, Frank O’Connor, H. E. Bates and O. Henry, in accepting this literary medium as an effective vehicle for expressing contemporary realities. The first Indian English writer, to be influenced in the method of writing by American, Russian, French and English writers, was Isvaran. He was also aware of, like Raja Rao and R. K. Narayan, the rich tradition of the Indian ways of story telling found in fables, parables, fairy tales and the rich treasure of Vedas and epics. He modeled his own way of telling on them.

Just like Manjeri S. Isvaran, Srivastava after having attempted a few stories in his mother tongue and in English, was very much concerned with the investigation of the aesthetics of modern short story. In accepting the short story as a favorite literary medium, Srivastava seems to share the following opinion of Isvaran:
Today this time honoured form of entertainment and instruction seems to have received a new lease of life and power necessitating the turning of our attention to what should be the objectives and standards of one who would handle it effectively for the ennoblement of mankind. (Isvaran. “The Role of the Story Teller in the Modern World” 536)

Srivastava who witnessed that in the contemporary literary scene the short story has become very popular in English and regional languages envisaged its capacity to have intimate connections with social, political and economic upheavals in the community. The writer presents a comprehensive view of different aspects of human life in all its variety.

Srivastava had his literary apprenticeship at the advanced stages of his student life. As it was inevitable for him to study deeply all literary media as part of his academic pursuits he could experiment in his stories the knowledge and experience derived from scholastic pursuits. He grew into maturity as a writer, writing book reviews. No other creative writer in India has produced so voluminous a corpus of critical literature. He has published over eighteen volumes of critical works, seventy one research articles, about thirty two general articles and a number of book reviews, in addition to several speeches he rendered in national and international seminars. These experiences equipped him to obtain a deeper understanding of the minute details of creative art.
Though he was not as prolific as his contemporaries in creative writing, the works he has published entitle him to the rank of a talented practitioner of the short story. In thematic concerns and technical virtuosity he is on a higher plane than most other practitioners of the short story.

The novelty of this literary genre, its appeal and scope of infinite variation, attracted Srivastava. He endows his narrative with that elusive element of human interest, brings the reader’s emotions into harmony with the emotions of the personae he delineates, induces the readers to identify themselves with them in their joys and sorrows or involves them in an intricate pattern of life.

Srivastava finds the short story a fine vehicle to undertake his journey into Indian sensibility. Even when he selects characters and incidents other than Indian he sees them in relation to the characters, settings and outlook which are Indian. In order to do so he singles out the episodes and characters. He was not concerned with socio-political movements. He was more interested in unfolding the inner realities of his characters. While making inroads into the human mind he could not ignore whatever affects it. The study reveals that Srivastava just like great contemporaries is pre-occupied with the lives of the poor and deprived masses as well as the hard realities underlying their day to day wretched existence. His literary works show that he has skillfully exposed the ills of contemporary Indian life and society. In doing so his models were Chekhov and O’Connor. Though he works on a small canvas, his readers feel that in the slice of life that he presents, there is the totality of it. The most striking feature of a
modern short story is its capacity to present certain moments of life which in a flash reveals the larger significance of a whole life time. Srivastava has been aware of this truth about the short story in every attempt at writing it. The presentation of Srivastava’s characters is such that their inward reality is directly accessible to the readers. It is very well manifested in their actions as well as in their dialogue.

Srivastava’s themes have a realistic touch. Hunger, starvation, deprivation, hypocrisy, pride, deceit, treachery, the evils of untouchability, illiteracy, superstition and East–West interaction—all find their way into his stories. His themes depict his objective vision of life, the miserable lot of the deprived masses and their ruthless exploitation by the bureaucracy, politicians and the rich. Srivastava’s deep concern for the deprived classes has found a spontaneous expression in the stories “Under the Lamp,” “Road to Prosperity,” “Spilled milk,” “Handicapped,” “Cooperative Colony” and “Human Thirst.” Srivastava observes the social scene as it affects the individual, largely because he thinks that the enlightenment of the individual will be in fact affected by the exposure to the social scene in India. Prior to Srivastava, Mulk Raj Anand, K. A. Abbas and Khushwant Singh were writers who were much vociferous in exposing the social evils. The themes in the stories of Srivastava highlight the fact that they stem from the day-to-day incidents of the ordinary human life and the writer’s perception of life. This study explores the techniques employed by Srivastava in his stories and evaluates his art from the point of view of his
Srivastava has a higher consideration for a search for the significant truths underlying human relationships. His stories originate from certain features of the mind; develop from the realities underlying human relationships. As a writer, he believes in basic human goodness and values. Quite often Srivastava makes the readers aware that in the present world human relations are not based on emotions of love but on selfish motives. Just like many Indian short story writers he could not liberate himself from the fetters of the traditional tale, invested strongly with moral and ethical values. The depth and complexities of human life are transformed in his mind and art to suit them the best subject for his aesthetic expression. One cannot deny his personality behind the fictional world.

His immediate predecessor Anand was mainly concerned with creating in his readers an awareness of the social evils. Anand aimed at a world devoid of economic exploitation and social degradation brought about by evils like untouchability. Raja Rao focused on the creation of myths idealising his characters. R. K. Narayan’s world is peopled with the middle class with all their problems. His approach is realistic rather than reformative.

The varied themes of Srivastava get their strength from forceful characters, powerful language, and careful structural designs. Everybody knows he has presented nothing new. His themes have been handled efficiently by his
contemporaries and immediate predecessors. But in handling themes, Srivastava stands apart from the other writers of the short story genre.

He has a rare gift in delving deep into the inner realities of his characters. He has developed a short-hand technique of presenting the characters and situations. He presents the characters in their fullness with a few deft touches of their physical and mental make-up. He knows that short story being a flexible form of writing eminently suits to portray the diversity of life.

Though all fictional literature is informed with emotions, the way the writer handles it determines his achievements. The emotions and feelings of the characters, are revealed either explicitly or by subtle implication. He makes the emotions of his characters valid, that is, justified by the nature of those characters and the dramatic situation in which they are caught up. It is particularly noteworthy that the emotional qualities which inform his approach to the stories are valid and honest. He weighs everything in the story for its subtlest emotional implication, from the choice of characters and the nature of those characters to the slightest constituent of style.

However, it is interesting to note that none of his stories has themes too far removed from the reality, to allow fair, effective, comment on the society. His appeal consists in his successful dealing with the crisis in his characters, with the inner landscape.

Srivastava’s stories are noted for their emotional combustibility, and they represent his attitude to life. In the most appropriate manner of a shapely short
story, each of his characters represents an “outlawed figure wandering about the fringes of society superimposed on a symbolic figure whom they caricature and echo” (O’Connor 17-18).

Every Indian short story writer approaches his themes, with a particular angle of vision which he feels best to bring out the real India around. Mulk Raj Anand resorts to humanism for the moral tone of the ancient tales. He focuses frequently on corruption, social injustice, ignorance, hypocrisy and snobbery. Raja Rao also presents the contemporary India with all its duality and paradoxes. R. K. Narayan, with a bit of emotional attachment to his characters makes a mild comment on the stupidity and ignorance and muddle-headedness on the part of the so called politicians and social workers. Khuswant Singh delightfully exposes the stupidity of the superstitious mind. His vein is mainly ironic and humorous. K. A. Abbas is concerned mainly with the destinies of a group of people. He writes most interestingly on men and movements. Bhabani Bhattacharya recounts the impact of modern civilization in corrupting the rustic mind. The major focus of Chabwala is the follies and foibles of Indian life. She is predominantly cynical in her depiction. Shashi Despande finds human relationships immensely fascinating. Her stories are revelations of the joys and sorrows emanating from human relationships. Her characters and situations are put in varied contexts which attract the interest of the readers. Hypocrisy, exploitation, racism, human relationships, legends and myths are favourite themes of Sashi Tharoor. Anita
Desai, along with presenting the tempo and rhythm of city life, traces the complex emotional relationship between the East and the West.

The action in Srivastavas’s stories begin with credible situations. These situations may not be encountered in everyday experiences but the conflicts unraveled are credible; they reflect reality. The autobiographical mode of his writing makes his works more convincing, genuine and full of life. Through his stories, Srivastava created a mesmeric world of his own, which has enthralled the readers of all age groups.

Srivastava was not much bothered about the impact of religion on his fictional world. Manjeri S. Isvaran was very much influenced by his religion and the impact of religion is everywhere in his literary output. He sees his religion as an integral part of man’s existence and a means by which the individual acquires the moral virtues.

Religious practices help the individual for moral upliftment. Mulk Raj Anand considers religion as perpetrator of social evils like untouchability, casteism, superstition and exploitation, and hence a pernicious force. Raja Rao portrays in his stories the spiritual and metaphysical aspects of religion. His characters have firm faith in God who invests their life with larger significance. Srivastava unravels in his fictional writings predominantly a Hindu world but nobody is aware that his religious world is a Hindu world until he tries to unravel the exploitation of the innocent lot by the so called religious men.
The setting of the story is made in such a way as to ensure credibility, or to win for the story the readers’ “willing suspension of disbelief.” The setting also establishes the motivation of the characters. Srivastava, on a higher plane, maintains an intimate relationship of the struggles of the characters and their actions, thoughts, tastes and their physical appearance. He has carefully drawn the relationship of the values of the characters to the houses they live in and their general outlook or view of life. Their thoughts, words and deeds reveal what they are. The events which happen in the lives of the characters are not memorable or of any major import but draw wide attention through history.

Srivastava, as a writer had experimented with the language of the short story. He, just like A. E. Coppard and Katherine Mansfield, liberated Indian English short story “from the slavery of prosaic dullness, heavily loaded metaphors, morbid sluggishness, adult infantilism and romantic fantasy” (Hormsaji 103). Every word that he uses is exact. No other word can replace it. Unlike other writers of fiction he has a well considered opinion of the language to be used in every branch of literature. The language that he uses is capable of communicating in totality what he has in mind. His language combines suggestion with compression. It is engrossed and alert. The narrative invariably shows an unmistakable interfusion of events and characters. An online article on fictional language says:

English here is an amorphous signifier, which connotes not only the language used in translation and in original writing, but also the
western-cum-english socio-linguistic culture, the political economy implicit in the English speech-pattern, the colonial hegemony purveyed through its use in the Indian society. These issues are integral to Indian short stories both in English and in vernacular languages.

The influence of the great masters of the art form in India and abroad have been instrumental in shaping the artist in Srivastava. Many of his stories which abound in lyrical qualities pay more attention to the sentimental being in man’s existence. The objective world requires no artist to reveal; so he is more interested in man’s subjective life. His stories are an adventure through the jungle of human nature. They represent almost all sections of the society, rural as well as urban, literate as well as illiterate, affluent as well as deprived, untouchables as well as upper class. Srivastava displays deep sympathy for the odd and the misfit.

The influence of journalism seems to have changed the attitude of Srivastava. When he was writing he had to take into account the permanent readers of the journals for which he contributed. So he was often required to write something which had immediate popular appeal. In the style of narration and selection of themes he could not free himself from journalistic jargon. He could not resist the temptation of playing up to the masses.

The language in his stories fits the theme considerably well. There is an intimate relation between Srivastava’s language and his themes. His language
runs so smoothly and expresses his select themes so impressively that the reader’s attention is rarely distracted by its few minor limitations which are the innate traits of Indian writing in English. Inspite of English being a language linguistically and culturally alien, he has skillfully retained to the fullest effect, all the elements which make the short story a perfect art form. His use of language maintains unity of impression and lyrical elements. Whatever he describes are smooth in their rendering. His language is direct, simple and unimpeded. He could fully maintain Indian settings, colour and rhythm in his writings.

Parody and satire that Srivastava has used very effectively help us see our everyday world very differently. Sometimes this type of the distortion of a real world leads us to see the real world more accurately.

Many of the stories of Srivastava present postmodernist techniques as they refer to a general human condition or society at large. The celebrative attitude towards the world, at least in some of his stories as in the stories which deal with East-West encounter is the technique of postmodernism which he has handled successfully. Srivastava is free from any sort of deterioration or mechanical reproduction, characteristic of postmodern writings.

He is not totally free from certain flaws of his contemporaries and immediate predecessors. In the quite characteristic manner of them he has also resorted to the use of a number of Hindi or Punjabi words, he has no other way out for the fullest expression of his themes. In the matter of dialogue mapping he
could not do full justice to the characters, especially the village folk. He puts sophisticated English dialogue into the mouth of the illiterate folk. Apart from the minor faults, his language shows his skill to mould a diction to suit the requirements of the situations he delineates. Among the Indian English writers Srivastava enjoys a unique position in using English.

If the test of a short story is the singleness of effect, Srivastava’s short stories concentrate on a selected aspect of life, employing all the elements and devices to have the intended impact. The stories may not be earth-shaking in their resolutions, nor could they claim to have epic dimensions in scope and intensity, but they do capture an unforgettable moment of life that remains delightfully embedded in the reader’s memory. Srivastava provides a new dimension to the modern Indian short story. His stories are down to earth, simple, yet effective. This narrative style is marked for its clarity and directness. They are marked with connotative nuances and Indian impressionism.

They aimed at the revelation of a little of the mystery of life. Srivastava sought to penetrate beyond surface impression to reveal a deeper truth in every story, through the great complex of events and surface data; he seeks new forms in which to express something more subtle, more complex nearer the truth. Srivastava is endowed with deep moral, ethical and humane concerns. The pervasiveness of personal element in Srivastava’s fictional world is there because he is the person who is constantly haunted by the spirit of the past. Whatever limitations are there, the fact remains that Srivastava displays superior
Srivastava is fully conscious of his prospective readers. And he writes in tune with their tastes. In an interview with Atma Ram he asserts the same,

Since I write in English, I expect the readers to be fairly educated, belonging largely to the middle, upper middle, and upper classes. Though I write often for the magazines which cater to the popular taste, I do keep in mind intelligent readers, critics, college teachers and researchers who expect something more than a merely entertaining short story. I do not believe in writing only for sophisticated readers in which entertainment is reduced to the minimum or obliterated altogether and the short story becomes a highly experimental, complicated jigsaw puzzle in which comprehension and corresponding pleasure are doled out in bits and pieces. That way I have no hesitation in being taken as old-fashioned since I introduce some traditional ingredients for the enjoyment of the common man. (Interviews 18)

Brevity, density and unity are the marked traits of these stories. No one measurement can ever take all the many dimensions of the really great short story. The purity and originality of the art and that of the artist are inextricably intertwined. Art is the revelation of the personality of the artist. The
characteristics of the art are related to the personal traits and experiences of the artist. Srivastava has not been able to get what he deserves regarding acceptance, in comparison to other contemporary writers. He learnt from the technique he found in the universal literature of the short story and applied it to the material and the life he knew. His best stories appertain to beauty and shape. The immense effort of combined technical and imaginative exploration makes him a true story-teller.

As a short story writer, Srivastava breaks fresh grounds and gives new dimensions to the contemporary short fiction. His is a simple yet effective narrative in a language marked for its clarity and directness, Indian impressionism and connotative nuances. The writer’s vast and varied experiences pass through the crucible of fertile imagination, meticulous revision and painstaking corrections. The natural result is the short story which has pace, passion and precision, the story which achieves its avowed objective—what Edgar Allen Poe calls, “the unity of impact or impression”. (Introduction Games 18)

His fiction, simple and elusive in terms of literary theory and technique, is distinctive for its voice, its fusion of the comic with the sad, and its philosophical depth. He is well-known for his lightness of touch and a style that is lean, lucid and undecorated. Ramesh K. Srivastava places a high value on spontaneity and non-deliberateness in fiction, as he maintains in real life.