



## To Comprehend and Assess the Different Themes Found in Indian English Short Stories

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### Abstract

The short story has quietly emerged as a unique and self-contained genre that can accurately and succinctly explore complex issues, even though the novel has frequently taken center stage in Indian English writing. Indian-English short stories and fiction both have similar roots, having developed concurrently from a common cultural setting. The emergence of Indian-English fiction in the 20th century is intimately linked to the evolution of Indian-English short tales. According to Nripendra Singh, "It runs parallel to that of the Indian English novel in the sense that both came to fruition during the eventful period of the Gandhian era and gradually became able to convey the contemporary complexity of life and technique". Women tend to write autobiographically or biographically, thus the short fictions of a few writers portray the cross-cultural experiences of dislocated immigrants and the potential condition of belonging at the same time - psychologically and experientially - amid the maze of cultural plurality. Certain Indian immigrant women who write short fiction carry with them their expatriate sensibility and perpetual yearning for belonging, which are portrayed in their works. The battle between the native and the foreign, "the self" and "the other," is typically the thematic subject of writing by expatriates. On the other hand, the Indian English short story is a unique and complete literary form. Short stories provide a more straightforward, approachable form of communication than more complex and intricate fiction. This form is ingrained in Indian culture, which has long been enhanced by an abundance of fables and folktales. This cultural legacy has long been enhanced by oral and written storytelling customs.

**Keywords:** Psychologically, Experientially, Issues, Abundance, Cultural

### 1. Introduction

A relatively recent addition to the canon of Indian English literature is the short tale. It displays "an astonishing range of subject matter and a wide variety of techniques" despite being a latecomer. "The genre has evolved significantly over the past few decades, moving from individual perspectives and simplistic narratives to more complex, socially nuanced, and subtle themes." According to Suman Bala, this evolution has solidified the short story's status as a unique genre in the annals of Indian English literature. But there have been difficulties along the way. The Indian English short tale has not received much attention in the literary world, despite its great potential. The genre is marginalized as a result of writers' frequent careless approach to it. Instead of being regarded as a separate literary genre, it has mostly been seen as a byproduct of Indian English fiction. According to Professor A.N. Dwivedi in *Studies in Contemporary Indian English Short Story*, the close relationship between fiction and the short story has frequently resulted in parallels, with the two being

compared to elder and younger brothers, respectively. He notes:

Mostly, it has come out as a by-product of Indian English fiction. This should not surprise us, for both fiction and short story are kindred branches of literature, closely related to each other in the same way as the big and small sisters to their parents (9).

This analogy underscores the shared origins and parallel development of fiction and short stories in Indian English literature. Both forms can be traced back to the same roots and have matured simultaneously.

Like their longer fictional equivalents, Indian English short stories just started to become popular in the 20th century. It emphasizes how the Indian English short story has developed in tandem with the Indian English novel, especially during the pivotal Gandhian period. Both forms developed at this time as means of expressing and capturing the intricacies of modern life and all of its subtleties. The

short story has quietly emerged as a unique and self-contained genre that can accurately and succinctly explore complex issues, even though the novel has frequently taken center stage in Indian English writing. Indian-English short stories and fiction both have similar roots, having developed concurrently from a common cultural setting. The emergence of Indian-English fiction in the 20th century is intimately linked to the evolution of Indian-English short tales. According to Nripendra Singh, "It runs parallel to that of the Indian English novel in the sense that both came to fruition during the eventful period of the Gandhian era and gradually became able to convey the contemporary complexity of life and technique" (11).

On the other hand, the Indian English short story is a unique and complete literary form. Short stories provide a more straightforward, approachable form of communication than more complex and intricate fiction. This form is ingrained in Indian culture, which has long been enhanced by an abundance of fables and folktales. This cultural legacy has long been enhanced by oral and written storytelling customs. This storytelling custom precedes and profoundly influences Indian society and culture, as Professor A.N. Dwivedi points out:

It is deeply rooted in our Indian tradition, which gave us folk-tales and fables from the earliest times. This tradition has been continuously enriched through both oral and written narratives. It is unquestionably as old as Indian society and culture itself" (9).

Ancient stories like the Panchatantra and the Buddhistic Jatak Tales have long served as a source of inspiration and creative nourishment for Indian English short story authors. A "didactic tone, gripping narration, and epigrammatical structure" are characteristics of the stories found in these ancient manuscripts, according to Dwivedi (9). The contemporary Indian English short story is still shaped and influenced by these characteristics, which reflects its lasting literary and cultural importance. According to Dwivedi, the Panchatantra and the Buddhist Jataka Kathas are both tales in which animals stand in for human virtues and vices.

An additional noteworthy storytelling genre in ancient India is "folk tales." Two notable examples of this genre are the Kathasaritsagar by Somadeva and the Dashakumaracharitam by the renowned Sanskrit author Dandi. Numerous old legends can also be found in the two great Indian epics, the Ramayana and the Mahabharata, as well as several Upanishads and Puranas. This genre has also benefited greatly from the Jain heritage. Examples of outstanding works in this tradition are the Padmapurana by Ravisena and the Mahapurana by Jinasena and Gunabhadra. These pieces show how Jain storytelling has evolved alongside other Indian customs. When taken as a whole, these old writings have given Indian English short story writers constant motivation and creative stimulation.

Both prose and poetry can be used to write short stories. But in this genre, the presentation and subject matter are more significant than the medium.

The statement that "much of the popularity of the short story today is due to the diversity and unexpectedness of the subjects" (IX) by A.J. Merson effectively emphasizes this point. He goes on to say that "manner as well as matter

reveals the individuality of the writers" (XI). This implies that the subject matter, which frequently has deep meaning, is what gives the story its relevance rather than the media limiting its worth or impact. The short tale is a versatile form that may handle a wide range of themes and styles, far from being a limitation. Anything from the earth to the sky can be the subject of a short narrative, providing a wide range of themes and concepts. On the other hand, a short story's presentation is crucial. It "must be presented in such a manner that it carries the impression of being unified and whole in a limited sense" (10), as Dwivedi correctly observes. A short story needs to make a powerful first impression by evoking a single, focused effect. Usually, the author envisions the story's ending from the very beginning in order to communicate their thoughts and impressions. The language is purposefully brief in order to do this, making sure that every word adds to the intended outcome. A short narrative must have the three fundamental components of fiction: plot, character, and place. To increase the narrative's effect and make a lasting impression on the reader, these elements are frequently streamlined and shortened.

## 2. Importance of the study

The varied topics of pre-independence and contemporary short stories would be easier for readers to understand thanks to my suggested research project. Additionally, it will have detailed information about Indian culture.

It will concentrate on orthodoxy, social conventions, local superstition, the characteristics of illiterate Indians, etc. Additionally, it will examine Indian issues and the lives of Indians. It will draw attention to India's pressing problems, such as poverty, loneliness, isolation, and untouchability. The purpose of the research is to help literary students understand Indian sensibilities through the characters in short stories.

## 3. Review of Literature

Metter of Work: the Center for Comparative Study of Indian Languages and Culture at Aligarh Muslim University, presented a paper titled "Cultural and Linguistic Issues in Translation of Fiction with Special Reference to Amin Kamil's Short Story The Cock Fight" in the Asian Journal of Social Science and Humanities. The translation of a collection of stories called "Kashmiri Short Stories" served as the basis for this essay. The Cock battle is the story he has selected. M.S. Beigh is translating it. He wants to highlight the language and cultural problems that were present in the original and how they were fixed during the translation process.

The topic of the work is Narasiman's (2015) article, "Social Realism in Arvind Adiga's Short Stories," which was published in English in The Criterion International Journal. The study focuses on the themes of Arvind Adiga's stories, which are despair, gloom, and misery. Adiga has discussed the religious circumstances of Indian women, and Arvind Adiga's stories convey a social message to the Indian populace while also highlighting the degrading aspects of Indian culture. Arvind Adiga's stories present accurate depictions of Indian society. At the start of the paragraph, the publication provides Adiga's background. The Sultans Battery, Last Christmas in Bandra, and The Elephant from

2008 to 2009 are the stories that have been discussed in the paper. All of these anecdotes have been altered to describe his novels. The article also explains how Arvind's stories are new. Arvind's characters are typical members of the populace, such as rickshaw drivers, laborers, and underprivileged kids. According to the report, poor people in India lead incredibly miserable lives. They lead wretched lives.

The Sultan Battery tells a tale of Karma and fate. Another tale is Smack, which tells the tale of Raju, a young drug addict. The author demonstrates how children are compelled to work on the streets and in other locations in order to get money. It demonstrates the horrible circumstances of Indian youngsters. Indian society is accurately shown in the story Last Christmas in Bandra. The Elephant depicts the harsh reality of the elephant's master, who endures agony and destitution. The essay demonstrates that Arvind's story makes a lot of sense and that many issues facing India have been covered.

#### 4. Objectives of the study

1. To comprehend and assess the different themes found in Indian English short stories.
2. To comprehend the ways in which society shapes the characters.

#### 5. Research Methodology

Since no practical or experimental investigation in a live setting is necessary, this study will be entirely based on secondary data. The following is the suggested research procedure: thorough examination of the numerous books and periodicals that have been consulted from different libraries in order to do study in the field of English literature from India. The research gaps will be determined based on the literature review. The creation of research will follow the identification of gaps.

The history of contemporary Indian short stories will be thoroughly examined, along with a selection of pre-independence short story writers' thematic works by authors. A conclusion will be drawn to explain how the goals of the study were met.

#### 6. Results and Discussion

As is widely recognized around the world, writing has become one of the most important and powerful instruments for women's liberation from oppression and silence, as well as for dispelling the myths about them and helping them to accept who they are. The entrenched interests of governments, societies, and families appear to still be threatened by women's writing, despite the fact that it has proven stimulating and rewarding for the women who write. Sigrid Nielsen and Gail Chester write,

One of the most moving sessions of the 1986 Oslo International Feminist Book Fair was 'Writing as a Dangerous Profession', where women from Spain, Kenya, South Africa, Northern Ireland and Uruguay spoke poignantly of being imprisoned by authorities, and of being rejected by their own communities, simply for communicating in writing with others (10).

Writing has traditionally been associated with women because it can be a powerful force for social and personal change. For women, writing appears to be a means of surviving, a way to express their emotions and thoughts to a quiet, muffled conscience. There are other repercussions to this. Women can take charge of their own life through writing. It affords them opportunities for individuality and agency. Because a growing number of women in the recent past have started to write about the "real," "actual," rather than the "ideal," aspects of their lives. According to Gayle Green, their texts accomplish socially successful "counter hegemonic interventions" (7).

Feminist studies reveal that Indian women have been writing for over 2,000 years. It is an odd phenomena that women writers in the nation still perceive writing as a "isolated, solitary activity, often surreptitious, generally unacknowledged and undervalued" (Joseph *et al.* 4), despite their enthusiasm and skill. The concept that Indian literature lacked "the literary" or "the scientific information required for the moral and mental cultivation" of the indigenous people to accept and appreciate excellent (British) administration was spread by the British rulers as their influence and stakes in India increased. Individual works by the underprivileged groups of society, including women, were thus completely disregarded and denigrated, while the "whole literary traditions" of the indigenous people were "delegitimized and marginalized" (Tharu and Lalita 10-1). Rather than talking about women's writing in general, feminist beliefs in Britain also focused on the issues of women's representation and ancestry in literature.

However, the so-called "Woman Question" had already been discussed in Victorian British society as early as the 1830s. The "Woman Question" discussion, which questioned the limitations placed on middle-class women's lives, was complex and multidimensional. There was a call for more educational and professional opportunities. Late in the century, a new feminist movement for women's rights was sparked by this argument. Many female writers expressed a desire for self-fulfillment and full social acceptance during what became known as the Silver Age. A movement known as "New Woman" literature in the 1890s inspired British women writers to create novels, novellas, and poetry that foresaw bright futures for women in the century to come. British novelist Sarah Grand first used the phrase in 1894. Society began to view the "New Woman" as bold and free, a challenger to the sexual dogma of the 19th century, and a supporter of women's rights, including the ability to vote. In fact, the "New Woman" aimed to restrict avaricious masculine sexuality.

Aleksandra Kollontai gained notoriety as a leading agitator for a drastic reorganization of gender relations following the 1917 Russian Revolution. Women in the new Soviet Union thus gained full civic rights. The "double burden" of working both within and outside the family, however, continued to weaken them according to customary thinking. Meanwhile, women's literature that focused on women's experiences and was written and read by women began to emerge in the US book market. Fighting for women's rights, the Women's Liberation Movement first appeared in the US and Britain in the 1960s. The female activists called

for an end to the economic and legal oppression of women both within and outside the house.

According to Tharu and Lalita, the appreciation of women's writing and the idea of preserving the centuries-old traditions of women's literature that had been forgotten only began to take shape in the 1970s, primarily as a result of American feminist activities. The 1969 book *Sexual Politics* by Kate Millet brought attention to how women are portrayed in "canonized" literature. Feminist critics were inspired to seek out alternate representations of women in women's literature after becoming aware of the stereotypical depictions of women in literary works produced up until that point. They discovered that women were flattened out by the canonical books' portrayals of them, which were either overly ideal or completely malevolent. These literature just served to highlight the masculine preconceptions and delusions regarding women and their personalities. First published in 1973, Mary Anne Ferguson's highly regarded anthology *Images of Women in Literature* showed how literary texts "commonly cast women in sexually defined roles" of "mothers, good submissive wives or bad dominating ones, seductresses, betrayers, prim single women, or the inspiration for male artistes" (Tharu and Lalita 17), as dimwits, as home birds, and as the blissfully uneducated. Because, as Tillie Olsen argues in *Silences*, the conditions of production actually affect the quality of the output and are therefore interdependent, such representations of women were "simplistic" and far from reality. The familial, social, political, economic, and literary contexts in which women are framed and formulated produce their "real" worlds and experiences, which are typically dismissed as personal. Given the enormous burden of countless taboos and pressures, women's lives are rarely as one-dimensional as they are typically depicted. The most common feminist claim that "the personal is political" makes the unbiased reader aware of the countless limitations that overshadow women's writing, such as censorship, poverty, lack of empathy, safety, freedom, and education. According to feminist studies, the portrayal of women by female authors is typically more nuanced and less stereotyped than that of male authors of canonical works. Additionally, studies of literary criticism showed that women writers were consistently labeled as feminine and family-oriented, and their experiences were condemned as dull and unimportant, failing to elevate the reader to sublimity. "Books by women are treated as though they themselves were women, and criticism (by male academics and reviewers) embarks, at its happiest, upon an intellectual measuring of busts and hips," according to Mary Ellmann's 1968 book *Thinking About Women* (29).

In *How to Suppress Women's Writing*, published ten years later, Ellmann and Joanna Russ made a strong case against the "phallic criticism" tradition, which has come to be seen as the "mainstream criticism," in which women writers and their works were never mentioned. They proved that, aside from the occasional passing mention, women writers seldom got the real attention they so richly merited. Feminist critics quickly noted that this disregard for and animosity toward female writers was caused by both male superiority, which had become accepted by both men and women and was a social norm, as well as male writers' assumptions about women's logical capacities. Ferguson cites Frank Kermode's

assessment that the Western literary canon is revered as much as the Bible and is closely guarded against potential intrusions by "outsiders," the young and uninitiated, "like women and Blacks" (Ferguson 15). Literary critics' standards were long believed to be tainted by works written by women and people of color. Therefore, their publications were seen with "condescension or scorn as minor and crude" when they were given any consideration at all. As late as 1959, a male reviewer of Emily Dickinson exemplified the bias against women that permeates views (toward literature) by arguing that the title "woman poet" was a contradiction in terms (Ferguson 15).

By excluding women from the general category of humans, feminist critics were able to see through the politics of male reviewers and undermine the "difference" between women's personalities and experiences and those of men. Women started to recognize the limited and secondary roles assigned to fictional heroines, female writers, and female critics as students, teachers, writers, editors, or occasionally just readers. They then started to ask important questions about their own relationship to literary study and, by extension, to life itself. Because of the emergence of feminist literary histories and the critical standards that were required to address the issues raised by the study of women's writing, women's writing was established as a new field of study by the late 1970s. In her 1976 book *Literary Women: the Great Writers*, Ellen Moers hesitantly divided authors based on their gender. However, she defended her action as a crucial one in the struggle against male politics that "subsume" women into the human category, erasing their unique personalities and substance in the vast and ambiguous "human" society. "Women's writing was actually a rapid and powerful undercurrent distinct from, but hardly subordinate to, the mainstream," Moers argued in support of women writers. In actuality, Moer's book established the framework for the ensuing conversation about women writers, including

The exclusion of women writers (from the 'mainstream' literary establishment), the need to find new strategies to open up canonical texts for feminist readings, the idea that a knowledge of feminist history was crucial for an understanding of women's writing, and the suggestion that women writers had shared a subculture that they often secretly kept alive (Tharu and Lalita 20).

A year later, in 1977, Elaine Showalter published *A Literature of Their Own*, a comprehensive examination of "the female literary tradition" in English literature from the 1840s to the present. According to her theory, any minority group's self-expression is a reaction to and in connection to a dominating society. She argued that all such self-expressive literary subcultures could be traced back to three key stages: a phase of protest, a phase of imitation, and "a phase of self-discovery," a turning inward, freed from some of the dependency of opposition, a search for identity" (Showalter 13).

In *The Madwoman in the Attic*, published in 1979, Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar set out to identify "a distinctively female literary tradition" by analyzing the works of the main Anglo-American women writers. As a "reaction to male literary assertion and coercion," they concentrated on



"female literary creativity" (Gilbert and Gubar xii). They contended that nineteenth-century patriarchal ideology placed two demands on female writers: first, they had to dispel the misconception that creation was a male domain, and second, they had to go beyond the ideal of the "eternal feminine," which was designed to serve as a source of inspiration and accompaniment for men. Both as women and as writers, the women writers were experiencing ambivalence. As a result, "enclosure, suffocation, starvation, madness, death; fantasies of escape and freedom appeared comparatively rarely" (Ferguson 16).

## 7. Conclusion

Three of the most significant figures in Indian short story writing have made outstanding contributions, as the research in the previous chapters has demonstrated. Despite being a comparatively new creation in Indian English literature, the Indian short story has evolved as a unique and potent form of artistic expression when examined through a literary and historical perspective. By combining aspects from both Eastern and Western literary traditions, this genre has developed and carved out a place for itself in the canon of world literature.

The first generation of writers created a solid foundation that allowed the subsequent generation to grow and innovate. This literary heritage was carried on by Khushwant Singh, Ruskin Bond, and Jhumpa Lahiri, who each contributed a distinct viewpoint that enhanced the genre. In his stories, Khushwant Singh frequently presents an honest and perceptive picture of Indian culture, fusing humor with social criticism. However, Ruskin Bond emphasizes themes of nature, nostalgia, and human connection while portraying life in little Indian communities with an almost poetic sensitivity. By examining topics of displacement, identity, and cultural duality, Jhumpa Lahiri adds a unique perspective while concentrating more on the experiences of the Indian diaspora. Her writing is rooted in the structure and thematic integrity of the Indian English short story tradition, but it also speaks to the immigrant experience and echoes topics covered by authors such as Anita Desai. Essentially, in order to represent changing cultural and social realities, the second generation of Indian English short story authors both preserved and redefined the form.

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