

Historical Perspective of Modern Indian Story in English

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Abstract

Indian English short story has not been able to achieve its distinct identity so far in spite of the flexibility of form and opportunities for publication. It has been treated casually by critics resulting in the overall neglect of the genre. It has developed as a byproduct of Indian English Fiction. This should not surprise us as long as short story and action are kindred branches of literature and are interrelated. Though India has its own rich tradition of narrative tales and fables right from the Vedic times and onwards. Indian fable and earliest Indian admired tale have helped the Indian short story author in English in molding their story a specific shape. The Indian short story writer in English has tried a synthesis of the salient features of both the fable and the tale while avoiding the over didacticism of the fable and the pure description of the popular tale in his attempt to arrive at a deeper and more analytical interpretation of life. Despite all of the enriching cultural changes that are occurring, India remains a foremost abode of storytelling. The mythological epics like Ramayana, Mahabharata, continue to endow with models of human behavior for many Indian people and contribute profoundly to their identities. These epics are the institutions of values, ethics, morality, honesty, fraternity, integrity, and humanity for the present generation. The most renowned and admired compilations of creature stories, the Jataka Tales, and the Panchatantra Stories originated in India have a greater impact on the mindset of Indian civilization. It is in these stories that many Indian people seem to come across and discover their Indianness. These stories have a rich historical background which reflects in the modern story form.

Key words: Story, Historical, Indian, English

Introduction

The ancient Indian tale took broadly two forms, the fable, and the popular tale or folk-tale. The fable, form is best exemplified in the tales of 'Panchatantra' as well as in the 'Jataka Tales'. True to the universally known tradition of the fable, these are nearly always epigrammatic in structure,

frequently ending with a significant utterance by one of the character as in the Panchtantra story. Also, most of these are beast fables, in which the characters are animals symbolizing human beings. With their concentration of approach, compactness of structure and preoccupation with daily realistic life, these fables are more akin to the modern short story than is the popular tale of ancient India. The ancient Indian popular tale is an example of the typical oriental tale, a loosely constructed narrative of adventure and romance, in which the action is normally set against a background of the fantasies and the supernatural. All the same, the popular tales, as justified in the well-known 'Kathasarit Sagara' or the 'Daskumar Charitra', has one quality which has fascinated the Indian writer in English, its successful depiction of human desire and aspirations in a highly imaginative way. The fable and the popular tale have also this virtue of satisfying the curiosity of the reader by imparting to him some useful knowledge in the most interesting way. As a matter of fact, every Indian is nourished on them during his childhood and he carries fond memories of them into his adult life, he never feel tired of listening to such stories any number of times. So much so that their form and style of narration are almost in his blood; and our leading writers are no exceptions. Not that they have not been influenced by the development of the short story in the west at all but fundamentally, their way of storytelling reminds one of their own hoary past and its literature rather than of sophisticated modern method. As Raja Rao says "I go back to the Sanskrit classics for inspiration, whether it is the Mahabharata, the Ramayana, or Shankara, these are the things that have inspired me most."

Historical background of story

The narrative tale in classical Sanskrit begins with the Vedas, the earliest extant literature. Beast fables, mainly aimed at didacticism or satire, developed for a long time covering the upnishadic as well as the Epic period. The stories in the 'Panchatantra' are thus related most intimately to our life in society. The purpose of the writer of these stories being moral edification mainly, philosophizing and introduction of pithy sayings and catchy verse bringing home some moral maxim or practical truth become common. Each story refers to some incident in which the fate of the characters takes up a step ahead in our grasping the meaning. The 'Kathasaritsagara' are based on the 'Brihatkatha' of Gunadhya. The Kathasaritsagar in particular has been universally popular and has inspired many a

story-teller. The stories are not pragmatic in their subject. They make free use of dreams, ghosts and Gods, black magic, reincarnations flying carpets, and even instances of resurrection.

Curiosity, it is said is the very essence of any successful narration, and from this viewpoint, the stories in the Kathasaritsagara never let the reader down. They range from the Gods and the Goddesses to the lowest of human beings. Intrigue forms an inevitable element in the story and almost every character exhibits an insatiable zest for life. The achievements of the character are very often assisted by supernatural agencies like a magic sword or a special boon by a Goddess.

As with the Jatak tales, the Jain versions of the stories too take a didactic aim in the presentation of already popular stories. The narrative portion of Jain literature is particularly noted for its attractive parables, while the 'Jatak Tales' and the fables and parables of Jain literature had didactic twists, the popular tale and the panchatantra largely remained secular. As S.R. Rangachar says "The didactic fable shook off its framework of fable and put on the form of mere didactic poetry. This accounts for there being no independent fable worth the name after the panchatantra"

This is uninterrupted literary activity right from the 10th Century showed a sudden disturbing decline in the 17th and 18th centuries. As K.R.S. Iyengar says, "During the 17th and 18th centuries there was in this vast subcontinent, once the home of learning the liberal arts and culture, hardly any organized education worth mention. No serious attempt was made or could be made in the prevalent condition to bridge the widening gap between the few still surviving centers of traditional learning and teeming illiterate millions. The stream of Indian culture seemed to have lost itself in the parched desert of the national enslavement."

It was only in the 19th century, with the introduction of Macaulay's scheme of modern education, that literature in India came gradually into its own once again. If primarily, the Indian short story writer sought inspiration in his ancient classics, he has also come under the influence of the short story writers of the west to a considerable degree. The Maupassant tradition reached the Indian short story writer in English through translation of Maupassant himself, as also through a writers like O. Henry

and Galsworthy and Maugham whose stories still enjoyed popularity in our country. The Indian writer had therefore little need to get these qualities from a writer from abroad.

Impact of English Language on story

The educated Indian also developed a fascination for rich and varied impressibility of the English language. The growth and popularity of journals in the first half of this century and the clamor for more and yet more, imaginative fiction came as a Gods end to the young and ambitious writer. Many an Indian short story writer in English made his mark through weekly and monthly magazines and while catering to the needs of his readers, he was also provided with an opportunity of molding their tastes as well as creating in them an awareness of the contemporary social situation.

The British or the American writer has had an advantage over his Indian counterpart English is his first language as it is of his characters. He uses the same Idiom as that of the men and women of his creation and hence the evocation of local color is no problem to him. He is therefore able to experiment freely with the technique of the short story. The Indian writer on the other hand had to face certain challenging problems in his use of the English language. It was the first language neither of himself nor of course of his characters. He found extremely difficult to translate the Indian idiom into English with ease and also to present his country in its true colors. In this regard 'Raja Rao' Says "I think I am interested in making the English language yield to the Indian needs. And that is a very hard task both in terms of rhythm and associated value"

The achievement of the Indian short story writer in English has thus been really memorable while creating tales of potential universal appeal; he has yet succeeded in giving a faithful picture of that particular part of the globe of which he has the pride to be a citizen. As the primary aim of the Indian short story writer in English has been the portrayal of a society, it would be pertinent to have comprehensive view of the social background against which his stories are written.

Impact of Gandhian Era on story

The Indian short story in English has been written against the background referred to in the last periods above. It is noteworthy, however, that although there is many a story inspired by the Gandhian Revolution and the prevailing sense of a strong feeling of patriotism, we rarely have a story which can be termed pure propaganda. While passions were mounting high all around the Indian short story writer in English maintained his equanimity and created something in which he neither over exhibited his attachment to his motherland nor gave any hint of rancor against the British.

The era of independence may be classified as the Era of an acute social awareness. In a way, it may even be termed as the Era of Disillusionment. Ignorance hypocrisy, corruption, red tape and opportunism continue to dig at its very foundation. There is a general grouse against the way the administrative machinery functioned. It is the picture of India that we generally see in the Indian short story in English.

Conclusion

The Indian author took to story writing in English under a variety of influences. The Indian short story writer however has had his purple patches. In his salient moments he has mastered the traditional technique of direct narration, spicing it with humor and Pathos Irony or allegory, as the occasion demands. Short story of English in India has generally found the ancient Indian tale form commendably suited to his reason of recreating vibrantly the contemporary social Scene. As every Indian is virtually nourished on the folk-tale in his childhood and as references to incidents and characters in it are a part of his life, this choice has been at once natural and proper; of course, the writer has effected modification to the ancient form to satisfy modern sensibility. He has avoided its overt didacticism as well as its stereotyped beginning and introducing the western method of psychological probing into situation and character, has made his stories less purely descriptive.

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