

ANXIETIES OF A MODERN STORYTELLER

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Story telling is an ancient art. It is the most accessible and motivating literary genre and yet it is difficult to go to the precise origin of the art of storytelling. Probably, it was /and is, an urge to convert feelings and thoughts from impressions, experiences, gestures, signs, little cries and shouts to possibly meaningful defining of feelings and ideas in concrete and understandable language. It stirred imagination, and experiences began to take shape of tales. This art has not changed much but now it is more distinct, precise and entertaining and it usually eliminates elements of ornamentation and verbosity in lexis so that it stimulates curiosity. Stories now, not only educate, these open up vistas of human understanding fortifying universality of man's experience, which has almost similar roots and emotional dimensions but still the definition of a story escapes concision.

Many critics tried to give definition to the art of short story writing but it defies exactness and therefore, it is out of experience that one defines it. It is 'an account of imaginary or past events; a narrative, a tale or anecdote' says *Oxford Dictionary* whereas *Longman's Advanced American Dictionary* gives it more than a dozen meanings and says - a story is a, 'description of an event or how something happened that is intended to entertain people and may be true or imaginary' J. A Guddon calls this genre of writing as 'the most elusive' but for Edgar Allen Poe it is 'a prose narrative' and he discourages interpolation of extraneous words or elements not relevant to plot, situation or character.

If one goes back, one can easily find that the earlier tales generally had ethical and moral values. It was story of struggle between the good and the evil, an ancient thought, which has an equally contemporary relevance one cannot ignore. If one just thinks of *Mahabharata*, *Ramayana*, *Puranas*, *Jataka* tales, *Panchatantara* and inherent legends of other religious books and moves on to tales of fairies and ghosts, the meaning will become apparent. One finds a multihued panorama of stories relating to different aspects that deal with life in its 'totality' and that is why the art of storytelling is still as new as it was ages back.

This literary form has a message to convey in a few pages. Not cut off from life and rootless it is, and further, the story is not just a source of amusement and entertainment but it is a serious attempt to teach man the art of living a life of purpose that carries personal and social significance with definite righteous character and rationale. It is about 'you, he and me' and all the stuff around...and no one can stay away from its irresistible sway. Even in abstraction and anonymity, a story speaks of an objective with apparent principled current, or subtle or understated undertone that characterizes meaningful life and its essence.

Slowly, elites' conscious efforts rationalized and simplified this art with various adornments and now, story while it adheres to the surface realities of life, it also delves deep into the consciousness and sub-consciousness of man and gives different interpretation to inner feelings and struggles, and from here, complexities enter this creative art. If a poem conveys meaning with metaphors, similes and images, and compels or provokes man to think deep it serves its purpose. On the other hand, if novel talks of life as a whole where different thoughts, emotions and characters act and interact to convey a coherent scenario of a life of objective with a didactic approach or without sermonizing it fulfills largely literary principle of legitimacy and

relevance to man and society. Now, surprisingly, during recent times, the journey to the ‘inner man’s sensibilities and realization of anguish take roots in the heart of man, not strong enough to confront the world outside. Therefore, it is more a psychosomatic struggle where realities surface inside the man and ask man to fight outside and here, unique scenario emerges in a story, for it connects to everyone if the writer is sincere to what he depicts, for correct portrayals is the strength. In a story only a few characters, incidents and events in a short slice of time or even a moment try to encompass life, which transmit a message with pithiness and leave much to the reader to understand.

In any genre of literature, susceptibility and profundity of understanding toward cultural philosophy of a particular nation, people or region primarily work in rationally interrelated mindset and the subtle or perceptible influences invariably inspire and guide creative artists to give idiom to what they feel and how. In contemporary times, a few changes are quite apparent because literatures of various countries interact and influence.

Creative artists are not immune to the impact, surroundings exercise. However, beyond doubt, one must accept that emotional response and its crystallization despite alien influences sticks to indigenous cultural traditions and human behaviour. However, images, metaphors and similes, fundamentally fall in the domain of poetry yet these also provide extra beauty, music and effectiveness to stories and novels and these elements infuse extra energy and vigour to a work of fiction and thus, smarten thought and language.

A short story is not merely a report on incidents but it is identifying mix-ups of incidents, animate or inanimate characters with imagination before it imparts life to diverse characters. Now, scientific temperament encourages inquiry into the minds and hearts of people with cautious analysis of psychological areas. Therefore, an awareness of inner and outer world provides encouraging moments to ingenious intellects. Now, it is not only explicating or defining life externally only but it is also an inquisitive diffusion and incursion within that develops a tale in different situations and dissimilar aspects of a character or characters, which reflect life in near perfection.

It is one picture of true life and leaves abundant scope for diverse conjectures. If it ends with an opening of another beginning, it adds colour and charm to the edifice of the story. This makes a shorts story exclusive and distinctive as an art form.

As on today, the story writing is intricate when society is undergoing drastic changes. Now not only materially but also at the intellectual and spiritual level, life is acquiring different meanings. It is increasingly becoming difficult to hold fast to a specific stream of thought, for conventions with inbuilt rituals and customs appear fractured, and culture is obtaining a new texture little by little. Industrialization has changed the face of society and man has deeply involved and affected man and society in entirety.

Various thoughts in the society fight back to establish sovereignty and so man is prone to not only religious, economic, political and philosophical thought but at another level, which is more widespread and strong, it encompasses man’s outlook on life, women, children, and human and social relationship that quite often go through a process of transformation. Silent spread of thoughts of Gandhi, Marx, Ruskin and Freud even without awareness alters perception of life and existence and so the birth of a new story that not only talks of the outer world but also the world within more intimately. These thinkers have given a new angle to human sympathies and constructive imagination. In stories, one finds consistent preference for socialistic life and living with rightful propensity even as enlightened and progressive thinking begins to overwhelm.

Therefore, stories depict life in its various hues from humanitarian consideration. If life in society is becoming difficult, challenging and perhaps unbearable, at the personal level emotions play a major role in keeping a semblance of warmth. Again, a search for identity also continues to tease and destabilize relations.

The structure of a story speaks of a particular incident, subsequent action or occurrence in certain situations, locations, circumstances and conditions, which gradually lead to definite denouement. At a different level, it interprets life partially or in ‘totality’ while it also questions the very thesis of existence. Storyteller’s precise phrase, terseness in the frame of story, nature and characterization, exposé of chief protagonist if it contains a few actors and finale are essential ingredients that convey the argument clearly. If a storyteller, takes care of such anxieties, psychosomatic and thematic worries, mostly period related or contemporary, then, not only he is effective but is also a master artisan.

Ease and sophistication in a short story epitomizes essence of existence and continuation, which is about the life of people and of course, it is the culture and social ethos of a society in a country that makes a statement of far reaching impact on life. In wider perspective, a story opens up glimpses of varied aspects of life, cultural viewpoints and modern knowledge and wisdom that go to ancient roots of man and society.

Further, stories of human relationship tell about anguish and agonies, challenges and struggles of man in totality. Emotions, thoughts and earthly existence reveal the real location of man, of what he thinks on life and the world. At times, it looks as if stories mostly tell about pains and joys in life but a close and in-depth inquiry will reveal a different scenario. Therefore, a story offers a wide range of experiences and thus, at times, subjective response to persons and situations stays strong but inconspicuous and the fact remains uninterrupted to give strength and authenticity to the storyline and the objective behind it.

Indian English story like poetry goes back and is not more than two hundred years old. In early literary efforts in an alien language, the authors take refuge in ancient Indian literature and draw inspirational stuff from folklore, tales, myths, legends as contained in *Puranic* literature and epics and so put emphasis on love, adventure, sacrifice with surfeit of moral and ethical undertones. Gradually, it turned to contemporary man’s challenges and sufferings. Later, with the growth of science and industry, psyche of people began to absorb changes in the internal and external world of material growth.

If early story, exhibits love for the ancient culture and heritage and love for the country, later storytellers take up contemporary anxieties of man seriously. Therefore, the region of story expands and in short, begins to argue on life and its burning problems forthrightly and realistically as well. Not only urban but also rural life forms the backdrop of storytelling with emphasis on human relations while not ignoring social, economic, political and philosophic anxieties. With the passage of time, it may reflect mystifying contours of expression and add beauty to the structure of storyline.

Bio

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