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## **Development of Short Story as a Literary Genre**

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### Introduction:

We can all recognize a short story when we see or read one. But when it comes to defining a short story, problems arise one after the other. There are so many different kinds of short stories, that no single definition would cover all. So, the best way is, to define the sort story in the most general terms. The short story has never been adequately defined, even the short story writers disagree with regards to its native and scope. Each one has tried to define it in his own way. H. E. Bates say that a short story has “ something of the infinitely and indefinite variable nature of a cloud.”

H. G. Wells in his definition of the short story emphasizes its brevity and calls it, “ The jolly art of making something very bright and moving; it may be horrible or pathetic or funny or profoundly illuminating, having only this essential, that it should take five to ten minutes to read aloud.”

### What is a Short Story?

A short story is a piece of prose fiction complete in itself and of a moderate length. This definition excludes all stories written in verse. For example, Chaucer’s Canterbury Tales, written in the closing years of the fourteenth century, can be seen as an interesting collection of stories, but as they are written in verse they cannot be taken as examples of the short story. Moreover, a short story is different from a tale or a fable because it is not just a story but a complex and developed literary form that can be traced only to the early nineteenth century. A tale is primarily oral form. The oral tradition of short story telling still exist in the villages of India where generations of children, sitting around the fire of a winter evening, still listen in awe to stories of fairies, gods and demons.

A fable is a short tale which usually conveys a moral. The characters is a fable are usually animals telling like human beings. Panchatantra is a collection of fables. Short stories are also different from parables. A parable is a story which presents a moral. The contemporary short story also has a meaning, a point to be made, but it is not a parable because that meaning in itself is not important. A short story is also different from an anecdote. An anecdote relates an interesting happening or a series of happenings or events. A short story may also present these events. But the difference lies in the fact that in a short story these happenings or events are not important in themselves but are a manifestation of the true nature and significance of a character or situation.



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### How 'Short' is a Short Story?

It is difficult to establish the average length of a short story. Edgar Allan Poe ( 1809-1849), an American short story writer, says that it requires 'from half an hour to one or two hours in its perusal.' The short story should have unity of impression and singleness of purpose. Sir Hugh wolpol says:

“ A short story should be a story: a record of things happenings full of incidents and accidents, swift movement, unexpected development leading through suspense to a climax and a satisfying denouncement.”

This conception of short story as finished product of art is, however, opposed by Anton Chekhov who believes that the short story should have neither beginning nor end. It should only be a 'slice of life' presented suggestively. Chekhov does not round off his stories; he their ends hanging in the air for the readers to draw out their own conclusions. He suggests a situation, and by the time we turn to him to know the conclusions he is going to arrive at, we find that the narrator has disappeared.”

Ellery Sedgewick says:

“ A short story is like a horse race. It is the start and the finish that count the most.”

Somerset Maugham adds to it that; a short story should be a finished product of art with a beginning, a middle and an end.”

H. E. Bates sums up by saying: “the story can be anything from the death of a horse to a young girl's first love –affair, from the static sketch without plot to the swiftly moving machine of bold action and climax, from the prose poem pointed rather than writer to the piece of straight reportage in which style, colour, and elaboration have no place, from the piece which catches, like a cobweb, the light subtle iridescences of emotions that can never be really captured or measured to the solid tale in which all emotions, all action, all reaction is measured, fixed, glazed and finished like a well-built house with three coats of shining spant.”

### Characteristics of Short Story:

#### 1. Subject within limits:

The short story characterized by brevity. It is necessary that its subject should be of a nature that can be adequately and effectively developed within the prescribed limits. It should be clear in outline, well-proportioned and complete in itself. It should also convince the reader that nothing could have been gained by further elaboration.



## 2. Unity of Impression:

The next important characteristic of the short story is unity which includes unity of motive, of purpose, of action and of impression. There must be only central idea or one single episode as a short story deals with a single character, and a single emotion or a series of emotions called forth by a single situation. W. H. Hudson says “ it may be laid down as a rule to which there can be no exception, that a short story contains one and only one informing idea, and these idea must be worked out to its logical condition with absolute singleness of aim and direction of method.” It is this essential kind of unity which will characterized every real good short story, whether it belongs to the highly concentrated type, like Hawthorne’s, Dr. Heidegger’s Experiments, Poe’s The Cask of Amontillabo, and Stevenson’s The Siethe ur de Moletroit’s Door, or the highly expanded type like Maupassant’s Parure; or like Bret Horte’s The Lock of Roaring Camp. The time involved in the story is condensed to its minimum. When a long stretch of time is unavoidable, as in Maupassant’s The Necklace or Rudyard Kipling’s Baa, Baa Black Sheep, so as to not to destroy the unity of impression.

## 3. Plot, Character and Setting:

Like the novel, the short story also contains the elements of plot, character and setting. But in a short story all the three elements cannot be treated with the same detail as in a novel. They are reduced to the minimum and used only as much or in need to convey the final impression clearly and forcefully. The author’s first impression usually comes to him from a situation – a new grouping of circumstances, a haunting personality challenging analysis, or a bit of background giving new color to people and events. Sometimes, one of these elements predominant over the other two. Not that a good plot-story can be constructed without characters or good characters portrayed without incidents. But time is so limited in stories that plot may be reduced to a single point of decision and characters become puppets in order that the other and may be served. Stevenson understood this three-fold manner and once said to Graham Balfour: “ there are, three ways, of writing a story. You may take a certain atmosphere, and get actions and persons to realize it or you make or take a plot and fit the characters to it, or you may take a character and choose incidents and situations to develop it.” The three stories of Stevenson can be taken as illustrations. The Sire de Maletroit’s Door, from its first conception till the last word is spoken by its puppet characters, is a story of plot. Will of the Mill is a character study with just enough plot to keep it from being a sketch. The Merry Men is Stevenson’s own example of a short story of atmosphere of islands on the west coast of Scotland and he gradually



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expressed his sentiments through the medium of this short story.

#### 4. Vast Range of Themes:

The range of a short story is practically unlimited. A good short story may be written on almost any theme and may deal with any kind of motive and material. A few examples of various kinds make it easy to understand. W. H. Hudson says, "In Washington Irving's *The Stout Gentleman* a whimsical fancy is worked out with admirable skill, slightness of the substance and an element of impression. Edgar Allan Poe's, *Gold Bug* turns on a puzzle and *Mystery of Marie Roget* aims at sensation; *purloined Letter* is a "tale of ratiocination", *Marque of the Red Death* a pure impression or a "tale of effect." Hawthorne's *Wakefield* attempts to reconstruct a character on the basis of bare facts and events. Gogol's marvelous *Madman's Diary* or Stevenson's *Olalla*, is a fine example of morbid psychology, *Minister's Yeil* is a fine piece of mysticism, *The Great Stone Face* is a great example of allegory. Stevenson's *Bottle Imp* is a pure fantasy. R.K. Narayan's *Malgudi Days* and *Swami and His Friends* are remarkable short stories with a wide range of themes of school going children and their naughty days of childhood.

#### 5. Style and Diction:

The language of the short story is judged by the economy and the directness. The short story aims at economy of phrasing and singleness of effect and therefore style and diction play a very important role for the short story writer. Every word should have its own importance and must contribute as an organic whole. Novelists like Dickens support this point of view. In novels, passages can be dropped off if it damages the effect as an organic whole. But it cannot happen in a short story. The ideal short story should be as perfect as an organism with no extra words or paragraphs. Descriptive passage may be included only if they have some specific purpose. If the writer tries to indulge in stylistic elegance for its own sake then it will only ruin its total effect.

### Two Schools of Short Story Writers

There are two different conceptions regarding the art of short story. The followers of Edgar Allan Poe emphasize on plot and sacrifice the neat working of climax. This type of short stories are mostly conventional dramatic, rapid of pace, readable in style and aiming at a surprise ending. This mode has been very popular with the majority of readers. Writers like O. Henry follow this tradition in a modified form. The Russian school on the other hand revolved a more realistic type of story. Concentrating mainly on the



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character and atmosphere. It allows the plot to develop naturally without being forced into a conventional pattern. This type was known as 'slice of life' school and Anton Chekhov was the master of this. His stories dealt with creed of objectivity, practice of presenting a slice of life with complexity of plot, have stimulated a whole school of story – tellers such as Katherine Mansfield in England and Sherwood Anderson in America. Effect for its own sake is replaced by effect for life's sake. The ideal of such short story writers was compression of a maximum of life within a maximum of space.

### The Short Story and the Novel:

The novel and the short story are both written in prose, both are fictional and make use of varieties of prose such as narrative and descriptive. But it is in scope that they differ. A novel is wide ranging and long, the short story is brief and is not a novel in a condensed form. We cannot summarize a novel and call it a short story. In the novel, the interest is spread over a longer area. In a short story, we find a narrow focus, but a greater concentration of interest. For instance, in a novel there are variety of characters whereas in a short story we have limited characters. A novelist has the time and space to make his/her characters unfold and develop gradually, but a short story writer must create and reveal the characters in a few suggestive strokes.

In a novel, there is usually a main plot several sub-plots. But in a short story we find only one plot with one main aim. Each word used helps in furthering the aim of the story. A novel may extend or several years but a short story usually covers a time of limited span. In a novel, the narrator may indulge in meditative remarks, digressions and detailed description, but a short story writer achieves effects by brevity. A short story achieves effect by presenting events as they occur, and by making use of suggestion rather than explanation. It also makes us appreciate the fact that the art of story- writing is not as simple as it may appear. It demands great mastery of technique so that an effect of brevity, unity, concentration and intensity is achieved.

### **The Rise of the Short Story:**

Stories always held a great fascination for us when we were young children. Interest in stories is as old as human history. Early human beings must have narrated tales of the day's hunting or stories of gods and demons to the another. There were then transmitted from one generation to the next through oral tradition. The oldest story is perhaps the Egyptian tale of The Two Brothers dating from 3200 B.C. The Jataka ( a collection of stories of Buddha's earlier incarnations) and Panchatantra tales ( Sanskrit tales of the



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Jataka tradition about animals) are India's contribution to the world of stories. The fables of Aesop (Greek fables) in the Bible and the tales from the Arabian Nights are all precursors or forerunners of the short story.

The short story as a literary form began to be written in the early nineteenth century. Following factors are responsible for the rise of the short story:

- a) The rise of the reading public.
- b) The increase in the publishing of fiction as a result of which there were more number of periodicals.
- c) Widespread literacy; education was more widely accessible.
- d) Hurry and pace of the modern life.

### The Development of the short story:

The short story has its own distinct place in the form of literature. It demands great care and skill on the part of the writer.

In America:

It began in America about the year 1830. The modern short story was first of all developed by Nathaniel Hawthorne and Edgar Allan Poe. They laid stress on the 'singleness of effect' and 'final impression' as the hallmarks of a good short story. Washington Irving (1783-1859) was the first great American short story writer who published periodical sketches *The Sketch Book* 1819-1820 and *The Tales of a Traveler* 1824. Other stories like *Rip Van Winkle* and *The Legend of Sleepy Hollow* describe great sensitivity and customs and manners of the American society. Poe's story 'The Masque of The Red Death' is worth reading.

Fitz-James O'Brien (1828-1872) was an Irish journalist of Harper's Monthly. He wrote stories in the manner of Poe and showed a preference for grotesque imagination. His stories deal with greater realism and commonplace conditions of everyday life.

Bret Harte (1836-1902) achieved great success as a short story writer. He first won recognition in 1868 by the publication of *The Luck of the Roaring Camp* in the *Overland Monthly*. He was also a journalist. His stories show clear character delineation, skillful plot- construction, introduction of local and a delightful mixture of humor and pathos.

O' Henry (1862-1910) uses a pseudonym of William Sidney Porter is one of the great and the most



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popular short story writers. He had wit, humor and a keen observation of life. His plots depend upon coincidence. His characters are plain and simple but his plots depend on surprise endings. The Furnished Room in 'The Four Million' are among his best stories.

There are several other American short story writers such as Henry James, Joseph Anderson, Faulkner, Stephen Crane, and Ernest Hemingway.

In Russia:

Though the short story attained a great maturity in the United States, one should turn to Russia to find its supreme masters. A few great Russians short story writers are Gogol, Turgenev, Dostoyevsky, Tolstoy and Chekhov. Many critics are in the opinion that Gogol (1809-1862) and not Poe, should be regarded as the father of the modern short story. He is the first known writer of the realistic short story in Russia. As a short story writer he described the native life with vivid objectivity. He took the short story back to folklore. He wrote about ordinary men and women. His followers were Tolstoy, Turgenev, Chekhov, Coppard, Joyce and Anderson.

Turgenev carried on the nationalist movement further. He had a great love for the Russian peasantry and described their miserable condition and hard life with deep pathos and feeling in his stories. His stories show sympathy and compassion for the downtrodden and the oppressed. His influence is seen even outside Russia in writers like Conrad, Galsworthy and Bennett.

Tolstoy is one of the greatest writers of Russia. Though he was born in an aristocratic family, he aligned himself with the serfs and ordinary people. He was also a realistic writer who wanted to show absolute truth through the various faces of life.

Anton Chekhov (1860-1904) exercised the widest and deepest influence on the development of the modern short story. His short stories described only 'a slice of life'. His stories have neither a beginning nor a proper end. He himself was influenced by Gogol, Turgenev and Dostoyevsky. His stories are realistic in nature. He was a medical man by profession and therefore in his stories he diagnosis the ills of life. The only defect in him is that he never suggested any remedy.

In France:

Like America, Russia; France also developed a great and independent tradition in realistic fiction in nineteenth century. The French story writers were influenced by the American Poe on the one hand, and the





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Russian Turgenev, Tolstoy and Dostoyevsky on the other. Following Russia, France became strongly addicted to naturalism in her fiction. The most amusing French story writer was Balzac. Imitating the manner at Boccaccio and Rabelais, he afforded the greatest merriment by giving a faithful picture at France. His realistic method was carried further by Flaubert and Zola, who came to be regarded as the leaders at the naturalist school.

France produced one of the greatest short story writers of the world – Guy de Maupassant (1850-1893). He wrote under the influence of Flaubert and Zola and learned from them the essentials of his technique – clarity, objectivity and precision. He is the greatest master of the realistic short story.

In England:

By the year 1860 the Russian, American and the French short story had developed into an appreciable limit, but England was won over very slowly by the ideal at the modern short story. The short story had a late development in England owing to Victorian novelists until 1890 there was no existence of short story in England. It was Rudyard Kipling who first took to the art of short story writing. He was a conscious artist. He did not imitate the French naturalists or the Russian realists. His stories are based on personal experiences and observations of his story in India. The Plain, Tales from the Hills, The Soldiers, The Phantom of Rickshaw & Willy Winkie are several collections of his short stories.

R. L. Stevenson wrote romantic short stories of artistic unity of impression. His Markheim is a remarkable study of criminal psychology. Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's fame chiefly rests on a series of detective stories published as The Case Book of Sherlock Holmes. Conan Doyle was the first in England to explore short stories with mysterious ghost and crimes. His notable works are, A Study in Scarlet, The Adventures of Sherlock Holmes, The Memoir of Sherlock Holmes, The Return of Sherlock Holmes. H. G. Wells opened a new vista of imaginative delight by writing stories on the possibilities of scientific knowledge and power. His well-known stories are The Magic Shop, The Truth About Pyecraft, The Treasure in the Forest.

Other notable short story writers of England are Arnold Bennett, Katherine Mansfield, G.K. Chesterton, Galsworthy, E. M. Foster and D. H. Lawrence. The short story as a literary form is popular in all the Indian languages and many of these short stories are translated into English. In fact, the Sahitya Akadami encourages the translations of regional literatures into English and vice versa. Penguin also publishes translated short stories. Deliverance and Other Stories by Premchand and translated by David



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Rubens are most interesting to read. Mulk Raj Anand, R. K. Narayan, Raja Rao, Anita Desai and Kamala Das are some of the famous Indian short story writers in English.

### **Conclusion:**

The short story has developed in so many directions that it is impossible to list all the varieties within it. The short stories that one can find in popular periodicals are 'literary' short stories. They can also be found in anthologies. Short stories in magazines are often racy and full of interesting incidents. We read them purely for enjoyment on the other hand, when we read a 'literary' short story we often find that along with enjoyment, it also contributes to our understanding of life and human nature. Thus, short story in 21<sup>st</sup> century has ultimately become popular and a great form of literature.

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