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## **Yashpal's Short Stories: A Thematic Depiction of Kaleidoscopic hues of Life**

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**Abstract:** This paper aims to highlight the role of short stories in satisfying the curiosity of readers on the complexities of life. It also showcases the peculiarity of this art in furnishing practical wisdom to the readers in fewer words by conveying the essential message through the traditions, legacies and practices of human nature on Indian soil. The paper accentuates the role of this genre of literature in gaining riddance from the flawed social, political and economic practices. In other words, it also highlights the relationship of text or short stories with the author's social, political and economic milieu. This work has discussed the two popular short stories 'Parda' and 'Dukhi-Dukhi' to justify the discussion.

**Key words:** Curiosity, traditions, flawed, social milieu.

Short story in our northern parts is a playmate of our generation.

It was born with us, grew with us, attained maturity and established itself with each one of us; may be it is Vatsyayam, Krishan Chander or Sant Singh Sekhon. I am not one of those who believe that the short story as a genre lived with us in the form of fables, folk tales, parables, legends and romances... (Duggal,12)

Short story writing is an important genre of literature. It is the most treasured, unforgettable and essential part of one's childhood. With the sole purpose to forbid kids from playing in the harsh sun, story-telling is the most successful and enticing tactic adopted by mothers and grandparents. This art further strengthens the warmth and bond in grandchildren and grandparents because they get some time to share their perception with each other. This art infuses in them knowledge about mythology, gods, goddesses, demons, Kings and queens,



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supernatural characters, national heroes, etc. Aastha Bagga gambolled her childhood memories and remarks in My Grandfather's heart published in The Tribune, "I would doze off listening to his (grandfather's) stories about cabbages and kings, giants and wolves, of fairies and demons living in unknown lands..." (Bagga)

This art also inculcates a consciousness for morality in kids as these stories reward goodness and punish evil. This art infuses appreciation for goodness and condemnation for wickedness. The narrative illustrate moral directly or it is tacit. In other words, this art is not only entertaining but didactic too. Ramchandra Shukla used the word story in his book Hindi Sahitya Ka Itihaas and defined it as, "story is that mode of writing which expresses serious sentiments with the use of few expressive events and conversation" (qtd. In Solanki Ghosh 108). Story writing is the most spontaneous form of expression which communicates many truths of life in lesser words. It has the ability to compress lifetime story in brief. Despite brevity, short stories remain telling and popular form of writing amongst readers.

To estimate the origin of short story is difficult. So approximately, this art is as old as the upsurge of curiosity in one's mind. Though, it has its existence since time immemorial, yet it is considered to be the youngest form of literature. Ramnik Gupta states that, "stories must have originated when human learnt languages. Hindi short story took birth in eighth decade of eighteenth century" (5). Aesop's fables, 'Panchatantra', 'Hitopdesh' and 'Katha Sarit Sagar' are famous stories which depict religious, mythical literatures of nearly all cultures. These stories vary from region to region but are collected, translated and propagated by literary scholars. Vandana V opines:

Historically the earliest forms of stories such as 'gesta' were tales of action and adventure. The word is from the same root as are the English words. 'Jest' and 'Gesture'. The Italian and German terms are 'novella' and 'novelleu', which is like 'gesta' are used in the plural to suggest a collection. The English word 'tale' suggests a telling something or recounting. The modern



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word 'story' has its roots in the old French 'estorire' and the latin 'historia'. Thus we accommodate ourselves to the relatively modern view of prose narrative as essentially a retelling of something which actually happened. (89)

The genre gained popularity in India towards the end of 19<sup>th</sup> century with the initiative of the editors of 'Saravati' journal. The world of Hindi story writings will always be indebted to this journal because of playing an intrinsic role in publishing and propagating Hindi stories in literary circles. In the beginning, the stories were imaginative, mythical, mysterious and far from reality. Jayshankar Prasad's 'Gram', published in monthly journal Indu, was a popular work of 1911 but was a blend of imagination and mystery. Other stories of the early 1900s are Madhav Rao Saprey's 'Ek Tokri Bhar Milti'(1930), Bhaganwan Das 'Plague Ki Chudel' (1902), Kaushik's 'Raksha Bandhan' (1913) etc showcase the emotional and artistic endeavours of the time.

Though, formally the short story writing originated in the West with Edgar Allan Poe, an American writer, but did not influence the Indian psyche as they had their own observations and experiences. According to Manjri Isvaran, "India was the nursery of story and fable and the Indian story teller was as fertile in tales inculcating practical wisdom as in illuminating epic and religious myths" (ii).

New Historicists propound that a text can best be evaluated in the light of history, society and culture. Many events of the author's time which gain greater historical significance with the passage of time along with the cultural practices become a part of the text. In fact, a text undertakes the task of bringing to the surface the ideas and thoughts of the author with respect to the historical and social scenario of the age in which he lived. In a way the author shares his experiences and influences with the readers through the context that shapes the text. A text is a thorough manifestation of the author's social conditioning and the historical situation and reflects the author's beliefs, concerns and perception and also his attitude towards the social circumstances. It becomes a platform for investigating the standards of behaviour and the social rules and decorum



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followed by the people of author's time. Literature highlights the vital issues through the multiplicity of themes as it derives its content from society. In fact, the analysis of a text, many a time, presents a clash of conflicting beliefs and social practices.

The beginning of the nineteenth century was the age when Hindi stories moved away from the themes of imagination and romance directly linked it to society. Hence, fantasy, mythology, heroic stories and entertainment gave way to realism. Indian consciousness began to shape the writings of the times. Depiction of abstract traits of virtues and vices portrayed in fables became concrete with life-like characters and situations featured in all the genres of literature.

Many writers experimented with realism but Munshi Prem Chand is actually responsible for giving a new meaning to literature. His short stories depicted harsh reality and ugliest truths of his times. His first short-story, *Duniya Ka Sabse Anmol Ratan* reflects the spirit of patriotism that gripped the country at that time. In 1907, *Soz-e-watan* (Dirge of the Nation), another collection of patriotic stories was published. He also wrote *Hamkhurma-o-Hamsavab* which is a story of a man who marries a young widow and faces a lot of social criticism, while his 'Idgah' is the story of a young boy who cannot celebrate the festival of Eid because he has to earn his daily meal.

*Shatranj Ke Khiladi* is about two aristocratic idlers who become so involved in chess that they lose their estate to the British. His works hold up a mirror to society and reflect the major concerns of the time.

Yashpal is amongst the foremost literary figures who continued the traditions established by Munshi Premchand, carrying forward Premchand's legacy of social realism. As Madhuresh observes, "...After Premchand it is only Yashpal in Hindi literature who dives deep into the political life of the country and presents true and faithful picture of the mass struggle..." (62-63).

Many critics hold that he was the most gifted writer of Hindi literature after Munshi Prem Chand. Nikhil Govind observes that Yashpal's relationship with Premchand in comparison to latter's relationship with Jainendra was less deep yet, he, "... was a more comprehensive inheritor and student of Premchand's social realist method and broad canvas..." (137). Much inspired by Prem Chand, Yashpal's writings too reflect the concerns of the marginalised sections of society. Almost all the works of Yashpal candidly depict the tumultuous class struggle.



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Through his writings he hoped to bring about a social revolution by foregrounding the class disparities and injustices prevalent in the country.

Yashpal has written 'Sampooran Kahaniyaan' which comprise four volumes. While writing the fourth volume he died and hence left it unfinished. Yashpal has not even one story in his account which is not from society. His writings are shaped by the social trends. He voices all the social, political, economic incongruities prevalent in society. The plots of his stories are depicted from life experiences and situations. Yashpal's stories question the practices of the times. His stories explore the narrow mind-set, inhuman practices and prejudices trapping the weak and feeble section of the society.

Yashpal's writings question the unethical practices in society. From the beginning of his writing career, he was clear that his writings would never dwell into utopian world but would show things as seen and not as perceived. All his works speak of common themes of human life. The plots of his stories and novels are largely realistic and clarify his ideological position. In his works, the place of authentic facts is central. To mirror the past history and make it look real in his works, he also added imaginative details. Yashpal created masterpieces which truly reflect his intentions. His stories range from poverty, domestic violence, freedom struggle, partition, corrupt hegemonies and power structures to those other practices which weakens the edifice of nation and the scope of its prosperity. Yashpal knew that writing was the most viable method of social change. Even during his involvement in the whirlpool of revolutionary activities, he aimed to purge his society of the social evils. His consciousness towards the shameful indignities prevalent in society inspired him to write.

Yashpal has not only highlighted political turmoil through his writings but has brought to fore the biggest threat to India due to imperialism and Capitalism. The class struggle has gained momentum as a subject matter in Literature. Many eminent Hindi writers are coming forward to support these views to end Capitalism and introduce a classless society. Yashpal's writings haven powerful undercurrent to highlight hiatus between the rich and the poor as the biggest curse through his short stories. This paper works on the theme of poverty and the dilapidated condition of poor through 'Parda' and 'Dukhi-Dukhi'.



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Parda is a depiction of the poverty and false pride of Chaudhary Peerbaksh, who belongs to a well to do family of Daraoga, railway clerk and post master of the time when such jobs were valued. With the passage of time, these jobs became less popular and the value of money also decreased. Peerbaksh's birth in such family makes him supercilious. Because of his lavish upbringing he could not compromise with the position of his family. He could take up any job to meet the expenses of his family but he takes white collared job of a low paid clerk at an amount of eighteen rupees, as it matched his family status. He fails to realize that with such amount, his ever growing family of elder mother, Peerbaksh and his wife and their five children could not afford survival.

Chaudhary Peerbaksh carries his family's legacy of hanging parda (curtain) at the entrance door to his house. He is respected in his neighbourhood for his lineage, respectable job and the curtain at his door. But his white collared job fails to uphold the dignity of his family for long as the family's condition worsens with each passing day. His economic condition further deteriorates the quality of parda which was protecting the false dignity of the family since long.

To survive the test of the time and to live the fake and pretentious life, Peerbaksh takes pecuniary help from the Pathan, a money-lender, who was known for tough recovery. Peerbaksh begins to miss his instalments often and without any option endures Pathan's humiliation and warnings. The threats haunt him day and night but his situation does not allow him rescue. Chaudhary tries to miss all opportunities to encounter the Pathan till one day he suddenly turns up at early morning and threatens him of the dire consequences. Peerbaksh controls the situation by saying, "The owner of the mill was away for four days. Without his signatures salary cannot be released. As soon as he gets his salary, he will present sava rupaiya to him" (Translation mine 183).

Yashpal's writings depict the harsh realities of uneven economic distribution and its cruel impact on the unfortunate. Yashpal's 'Parda' focuses on the social and economic evils embedded in the society. It attacks the threats of capitalism and the economic disparity. It articulates the aspirations and difficulties of the down trodden class of the society. Indian literature of this period drew inspiration from the Russian literature which was made available to them in translation. The writers began to focus on the need for an unbiased and classless society, emphasizing the ideals of social



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justice, political sovereignty and nationalism. Many significant Hindi writers advocated the idea of revolution to overthrow the system of unequal distribution of economic resources.

Peerbaksh turns up after six days but finds Chaudhary missing from his house. When he comes back, he is informed about Peerbaksh's visit and the array of abuses he blurted, "Badzat! the thief is hiding in the inside. I will come again in four hours. I will go only after taking the money. If not, then his skin will be sold in the market....my money is hard earned money" (Translation mine 183). When exactly he turns up after four hours, Peerbaksh's body becomes numb and could not muster courage to go out. His family beseeches before Pathan for mercy but Pathan outrightly turns down their pleadings by saying, "If you cannot return my money then why did you take it? Where does your salary go? Bastard! Do you want to gulp my money? I will tear you in pieces. If you don't have money then why have you hung this parda on the door of your house, is it to pretend that you are a thorough gentleman. You either give me your wife's jewellery or your utensils. Give me something or I will not go..." (Translation mine 183).

Pathan seethes with anger when Peerbaksh expresses his inability in providing any of these. He utters blatantly, "What will I do with your blessings and skin; it cannot even be utilised in the making of shoes, This parda is better than your skin..." (Translation mine 184). In anger, he leaves after dropping the parda which was a barrier between the real world and the make believe world of Chaudhary which is tattered and deprived of the fundamentals of living. The shambles of his life becomes public at the very dropping of the parda. In one go, Chaudhary's fragile world is dashed to ground.

In the May edition of *Viplava* (1939), Yashpal writes:

We will fight against the zamindari and capitalists who suck even the last drop of blood from the body of the labourers and the farmers. We will fight to impose such a rule in which no one is exploited and no one can loot the other. The sovereign in which one claims right on only his earnings, no one is idle, hungry or naked...(Translation mine 19)

The writer says, "Chaudhary did not have the courage to face the reality but the crowd gathered around his house witnessed everything- the ladies of the family and the daughters, stood on the





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other side parda, were trembling with fear. The sudden dropping of the flimsy line between the real and the synthetic world seemed as if the clothes on their bodies were removed. That parda was the only cloth on the bodies of these women because the torn clothes on their bodies were unable to cover their bodies...”(Translation mine 184).

Yashpal’s ‘Dukhi-Dukhi’ also depicts the glum scenario of poor India where people are dying of hunger. The male and female protagonists of the story are strangers to each other but the pangs of hunger bring them face to face. The narrator loses his purse to a pick-pocket, so cannot buy food for himself. The narrator spends three nights on the road and then reaches the railway station of Fatehpur only to witness a pitiable a situation where hungry people could be seen hovering around sweet shop to satisfy their hunger. With no money they were unable to buy sweets for themselves so waits for the rich people to throw the used plates in dustbin so that they could then lick the plates smeared with left food. The narrator also stretches his hand to grab one used plate but soon realises that, “The pride of the soul had gone but the clothes were still clinging onto arrogance” (Translation mine 47). The writer remarks, “Hunger is the worst thing. When it does not spare elephant and lion, where does human beings stand...”(Translation mine 47).

The writer also speaks about the haplessness of a deserted woman by her husband. She offers her body to the narrator of the story because she was hungry for past four days. She says, “Whatever you can give, in the name of Allah please give. I am dying. I have been here since four days. I swear by Allah, not even a single grain has gone into my stomach” (Translation mine 48). Her maternal uncle left in the market so that she could fend for herself through prostitution. India is struggling with poverty and hunger at every step. She tells the narrator that, “I entered into a deal with my mama that the money I will earn will be divided into two equal shares but look at my ill-luck not even one man has turned up since then. I am dying of hunger. He had come to lit kerosene oil box and to persuade me to wait for men” (Translation mine 48).

Prostitution taints the image of society. It is a grotesque practise in the eyes of society. But only the wearer knows where does shoe pinches? The dire circumstances compel her to succumb. The



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narrator says, “I did not feel repulsion for the lady who was waiting to offer her body to someone. I cannot say, may be my patience had died or may be my starving stomach was clarifying her grave situation. I don’t know what I would have done for a loaf of bread” (Translation mine 48).

Yashpal’s short stories do not speak about a particular section of society.

He portrays the whole society including each and every person. By depicting such serious issues, Yashpal aims to improve social patterns and its outlook towards the subjugated humanity. Yashpal’s most noteworthy contribution to society is articulating the suffering of his characters owing to social malpractices and also the gap between the powerful and the vulnerable. He not only highlights the dreadful results of such practices for the mankind but fosters contempt for them. He often emphasised that man existed for society and vice- versa. Hence, the age old customs and traditions should be reviewed in the present times. Had he not been associated with Arya Samaj and not witnessed “fake” life of morality, he would not have adopted a critical outlook towards many traditions. His close rendezvous with the artificiality and hypocrisy of human nature compelled him to expose these deeply ingrained vices of society.

Short story writing splendidly voices the cause of the poor, downtrodden, marginalized and have-not. It contributes in furthering the noble cause of the subjugated and exploited for years together in class-oriented society. K.S. Duggal asserts, “Our short story writers depicted the plight of the repressed and the tormented in vivid colours and infused in their readers a determined will to undo the injustice” (14).

Yashpal’s stories substantiate his profound concern for those who endure subjugation in the form of inequality, dispossession of rights and privileges and discrimination due to a system which leads to severe economic disparities. He accentuates the need to initiate structural changes in society, politics and economy. He envisions a society which gets riddance subjugated identities and other issues related to gender, class and caste differences. His stories voice women’s emancipation and liberation. The sole purpose of Yashpal’s writings is to promote such society which is free from unequal and irrational socio-economic disparities, power-relations and poor conditions of the exploited sections of society.



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