

## SINDHI- Story of a Short story

MOHAN GEHANI

In fact the story is said to be as old as the language itself, but the short story as a separate genre of literature is comparatively a recent form. Its simplicity and short length is deceptive. It is a compact form and calls for rigorous discipline. The sentences have to be chiselled and all strokes are to be convergent to produce the desired effect. Its formats have changed over the years to suit different requirements and modes of artistic expression; but it has all the same retained its distinguishing character. As in other literature of this sub continental languages, in Sindhi also the short stories came via translations of masters like O HENRY, Maupassant , Anton Chekov and numerous other writers including from Indian languages primarily from Urdu, Hindi, Bengali and Gujarati.

Here let me delineate limitations of my narration and at the same time strength of Sindhi short story. It may sound paradoxical. Yes I do confess it is. Though I may desire to speak about Sindhi short story in Sindh today but due to restriction of free exchange of literature I will have to confine myself only to the literary scene in respect of short story in India, during my narration of post partition period. There is no doubt that in India this form has emerged in all its strength and has assumed various forms and formats. Today we are proud to say that Sindhi short story does not lag behind in any sense when compared to short stories of other Indian languages. The variety, the innovative ingenuity, creativity and quantity is bewildering taking the fact into consideration that Sindhi speaking people in India merely constitute less than half a percent of population and that also being scattered throughout length and breadth of India. It is satisfying to note that whenever Sindhi short stories have been translated in other languages they have won critical acclaim. Obviously it will not be possible in this short presentation to do justice to this vigorous literary form in its various aspects and speak at length about the trends which are reflected in this robust genre. I will have to be content with citing only a few examples and recounting the various trends in Sindhi short story. By such a selective approach it is obvious that I may not have been able to do justice to many good and significant stories by not mentioning them. For such an omission I alone owe the responsibility.

In pre partition period we find first Sindhi short story in 1914. It is "Hur maakhi-a-Ja" (Hurs of Maakhi Forest) by Lalachand Amardinomal. On the uprising against British by Tribe of Hurs living in the forest of 'Makhi'.

It is in a format of reportage but in fact the treatment of the events and character portrayal bring it more near to present day short story. The literature in those days was concerned with social reform movements and thus we get first collection of stories "Chamra Posh Joon Akharnyaoon" (Stories by one in disguise) by Jethmal Parsram. It appears to be fictionalized account of real life incidents with obvious didactic overtones. The short story that has withstood the test of time is 'Ado Abdul Rehman' written by Amarlal hingorani in early forties. This is a story set in typical Sindhi milieu of Sufi ethos. It is about a 'Malang', who is a wanderer, ascetic like, and brutally frank. This character has a habit of talking to himself in third person- a quirk which endears him and that very streak of him is used by the author to expose the hypocrisy of landed gentry and snobbishness of English educated officials who treat anyone not knowing English language as illiterate!

Another significant story that stands out during this period is 'Kiki' (A Girl Child) by Assanand Mamtora. This story is about a young girl married to an elderly person. She is dissatisfied with her husband and indulges in fantasy. This story is first of its kind in Sindhi literature that deals with Freudian complexes.

Just a few years before the partition progressive trend of literature made inroads in Sindhi literature. Many young students came under its influence. Young writers came together and published a collection of short stories 'Sufed Wahshi' (White Brute). Those young writers had much to say but had yet to master their craft. But this book should be considered a foundation on which the edifice of progressive literature was built and this trend was destined to influence Sindhi literature in India and Pakistan for almost quarter a century.

The year 1947 for the people of India marked the independence, but for those Hindus who had to migrate from Pakistan this year is etched in the memory as the year of Partition of India.

What did it mean to the people who had to migrate in the midst of the great blood bath seen in the recent memory? The words like disaster, uprooting, flying like helpless leaves in the storm- all these are not sufficient to describe the exact feeling of that time. For the Sindhi community the experience was accentuated by the fact that they did not have even an inch of land which they could call as their own! The very identity of the people who had a rich historical, cultural and literary heritage was in danger of being lost. Ironically the political leadership was too busy to reap the benefits of their 'sacrifice' for the freedom of country seeking positions of power. It fell on the young writers and educationists to realize that the language being the oldest tradition was the key to the survival of their distinct identity. The progressive trend that had began emerging just before partition found here full expression and stories depicting the reality of life in the camps were

written. It contained the pain of partition yet it brought much needed hope in the midst of total darkness when no light could be discerned at the end of the tunnel. It spoke about a 'revolution' being round the corner and promised end of all injustice, inequality and totally a new world order. It did offer the balm and solace at that time. In the hindsight it may be said that the literature of that time did lack artistic fineness and at times tended to be propagandist. But it cannot be denied that it did serve need of the time.

The poignant story depicting those times is by Tara Mirchandani 'GOPOO'. This story deals with a situation in a family where a young boy Goppo (A short form of Gopal) has to hawk his wares in the local trains of Bombay. While moving from one compartment of train to another he falls and loses his life!

In fact those were such turbulent times that every member of the family had to work in order to eek his living. The cloistered existence of the women came to an end. The women would prepare eatables to be hawked in the city by their men folk. A sort of home industry sprung up. Women would make 'Papad', 'Kheecha', 'kachdis' and many such things and would go out to sell them in the affluent households of Bombay. 'BHOORI' by Sundri Uttamchandani is one such story about a girl who in pre partition days was a heart throb due to her enchanting beauty and was referred to as a ceramic doll. Suddenly she appears at the door of her erstwhile neighbor quite haggard and tired, selling papads. She has lost her physical beauty but she has retained her grace and poise and yet her labour has endowed her with great dignity and she still walks like a queen! This is one of the shining example of Sindhi progressive Short Story.

This period did see women emerging from the age old traditions and moving shoulder to shoulder with their men folk and as a result of this many women writers emerged, who were to contribute to Sindhi literature for more than half a century. Popati Hiranandani emerged as a vociferous voice for change in the traditional social mindset which denied equality to women. She wrote numerous stories and essays espousing the cause of gender equality. Kala 'Prakash' emerged as an emotional writer depicting household tensions arising out of the paucity of resources in the family and their struggle to meet competing priorities.

As stated earlier, the question of retaining distinct Sindhi identity engaged the writers from the very inception as one of the important question related to their rehabilitation. As Sindhi Language did not find mention in the eighth schedule of the Indian Constitution it was totally ignored by all officials and would not find place in any programmes. Hence an agitation was launched to include Sindhi language in the constitution which continued for more than 16 years after which Sindhi language found its rightful place in the Indian Constitution. Thus a mass movement for the

preservation of Sindhi language and literature popularly called movement of 'Sindhyaat' ensued. In many parts of India, Sindhi periodicals started and on a literary front, many young writers/poets emerged from various parts of India. In literature this movement reinforced the feeling of nostalgia about life in Sindh. This till this day remains as one of the strong under current of Sindhi literature.

Sindhis had to leave their homes and hearths under difficult circumstances. The literature portrayed loving relationships between Hindus and Muslims. Immediately in the aftermath of partition the short story 'Dastawez' (A Document) by Narayan Bharti, stands out as significant. The writer reminisces about the time of friendship and cordial family relations that existed between the writer and his 'Haari' ( agricultural labourer) . He was thinking of lodging the claim for his land and he knew it will result in his 'Haari' being uprooted from that very land which he loved as his mother. This thought brought tears to his eyes and they fall on the document and signature gets smudged thus leaving it untenable. Writer heaves a sigh of relief. Thus it would be seen that being displaced from the soil Sindhis did not harbour any feelings of anger or rancour against Muslim population; instead there was feeling of love, affection and longing. Soon it was to be discovered that these feelings were reciprocated in the Sindhi literature of Pakistan also. The loss was felt on both sides of the borders. This resulted in poetic dialogue cutting across the border. It is significant that a renowned Sindhi poet, Sheikh Ayaz had to face imprisonment in Pakistan for his writings in 1965.

Another significant story of this genre is 'Khanwan' by Kala Prakash. The story is set in train while the family is travelling to Ahmedabad. The youngest child of the family believes that they are going to Khanwan (Their ancestral Village in Sindh). He has heard his elder brother and sister speaking about their wonderful life in Khanwan, . The elders of the family also felt that as most of their relatives and their cousins have settled at Ahmedabad they would relive their memories with them. The child wants to have all the sights and scenes and food about which he has heard from his elders so much and demands to know why he is being denied all those. Resulting in the cry of helpless and agony from the parents.

In the first ten years after partition hundreds of nostalgic stories were written by various writers. Such a gushing literary output was never witnessed ever before! In this period even poets and novelists started writing short stories. Sujan Ahuja and Krishin Rahi (prominent Poets) even brought out collection of their short stories. In this context the story 'Chuhao' (A feminine Touch) by Ishwar 'Anchal' and 'Robb' (Awe) by Sugun Ahuja are significant. The first one describes the joy

and sensation experienced through innocent and spontaneous female touch and the other is about a child whose rebellious streak is inspired by the awe in which his father wants to hold him. Both are psychological stories and written by those who were then part of progressive movement in literature. A fine art student, K S Balani, a painter wrote short stories also. His Short story 'Prabhain Kranti' has endured the test of time. This has a widow as a central character and this story peeps into her inner life and desire for full bodied life. This is a psychological story with Freudian shades.

Mohan Kalpana, Guno Samtani and Lal Pushp ,had started as progressive writers but soon they came under the influence of a literary trend which at that time was called 'Prayogwad'. This trend emphasized individual as against primacy of society. .

Mohan Kalpana had a powerful pen and imaginative expression one of his significant story is 'Atheen Katha' (Eighth story). It is fantasy related in a very interesting manner. In the end it shown that in the heaven a dead person is lying at the feet of lord Vishnu with one arm outstretched. All Gods have been summoned to find out the identity of that person. At last they decide that life should again be granted to him. At this point the man screams 'NO I DO NOT WANT LIFE.' This has obviously existential shade. Guno Samtani has remained frugal with his literary output. He consciously adopted the style strewn with words of Hindi language to lend his stories a classical flavour. His story 'Pralaya' (Mythological great flood) is one such example. Whereas, Lal Pushp remained quite prolific. He traverses a long path in his career as a writer and eventually adopted 'modernism', also quite readily. A trend that was to dominate Sindhi literature in late sixties or early seventies.

In this period a significant name that emerges from Ajmer is that of Ishwar Chander. His world is of lower middle class. A society consisting of lower division and upper division clerks. He mainly focuses on generation gap, the breakup of joint family and emergence of nuclear family. As a consequence a sense of insecurity faced by elder generation, the extra burden of the parents which younger generation could not bear and the tensions arising from such situations. His story 'Na Maran Jo Dukh' (The pain of not dying) depicts a story of a young person whose mother is at death bed and end seems imminent. In order to meet the expenses for last rites he takes loan from his office. Instead money is spent on medication, sisters and close relatives are also called as per custom. His mother recovers and he carries a pain and worry with him. From where will the money come when she would really die?

As state ealier in late sixties and early seventies, as gainst progressive trend, all other theories of literature and art which placed ' individual' at the centre, like Pre revolution Russian formalism,

Kafkian fantasy, Freudian theories, Philosophy of absurd, black humour, existentialism were lumped together and a collective adjective 'Modern' was added before literature. It sought to replace the preponderance of social aspect by an individual; it was inward looking and exploring dark recesses of psyche. It portrayed total collapse of value systems and its horrific effect on an individual. Subjectivity of an individual is main focus of this trend. In some cases in the narration, time element is sought to be convoluted and a plot line in story is also sought to be dispensed with or greatly diluted. It was said that it is not necessary for a literary short story to have a 'story'.

In Sindhi literature this trend came as torrent! It brought about a new breath of sensitivity to the fast changing world. Their sensitive treatment of the themes chosen by them was their hallmark. Quite a number of Sindhi writers across India emerged and made quite a significant contribution. In this high tide whatever was created may not have endured but it has left many literary gems in its wake of which Sindhi literature can be justly proud of.

Sindhi community mostly lives in urban centres. Urbanisation in itself entails its compulsions and some times extreme compromises bordering on abounding of 'normal' values. Compromises are some times 'gruesome' or simply 'cruel'. Lal Pushp's story 'Machine Jo Hik Purzo' ( Cog in a Wheel) depicts one such instance. A working couple in a metropolitan city, whose need for live in maid to look after the children and the household is uppermost, at one stage conceded to the demand of the maid that she may be allowed to share the master of the house itself. Shyam Jaisinghnai has contributed some of the important stories of this period. His story 'Another day' depicts the events of one day in the life of a young working couple. How the contradictory events unfold during one day and adjusting to ever changing situations, a 'Roller Coaster' of emotions, how they feel emotionally and physically choked. His story 'Adai Ghar' (Two and half homes) is about a business man who has his home at Poona where his parents stay, where he has relatives and society. He has a home at Hong Kong where he stays with his wife and children and a 'home' at Tokyo where he has a mistress. He makes neat compartments of life and does not suffer from any emotional turmoil. He mechanically slides from one to another role even without realizing it. Here Two and half is a measure, that a Horse treads on the chessboard has been used as a metaphor.

Story 'Ghanti' by Harish Vaswani( One of the leading light of 'modern' literature in Sindhi )is much discussed and appreciated story. It is written in the background of Sindhi language being banished even from homes, as it is no longer a medium of communication in the upper class professionals in the cosmopolitan cities. In fact due to globalization all languages are facing the same challenge but in the case of Sindhi Language as it does not have a backyard consisting of villages this problem has assumed an alarming situation. It is story of an elder person of a family, who is living in a room alone during the day as all members of the house remain out. He has been provided a

bell which he could press in any emergency and it is connected to neighbour's house, they would immediately come to his rescue. One evening a guest comes who speaks to him in Sindhi. While all are leaving to escort the guest back to station he presses emergency bell. As all rush back he tells the visitor that he wanted another look at a person who spoke his own language and he may be last such person whom he would see before his death. This story runs at two parallel planes. One is total alienation and sense of utter insecurity and the other about the vanishing use of Sindhi language due to globalization, urbanization and the utilitarian approach even to language in the context of changing values.

Krishin Khatwani who started writing stories after partition under the influence of progressive writers but with the passage of time carved his individual niche. He soon developed his inimitable style and wrote mainly on the inner conflicts and man - woman relationship and a nostalgic way about Sindhi way of life he bemoaned the values of love, respect and indifference to culture by community excessively obsessed with amassing money . Due to his education at Shanti Niketan his stories carry Bengali aura. Lakhmi Khilnani has been writing about the changing values or rather falling values in consumer society to which Sindhi neo rich class has fallen willing prey to. His story 'La Waris,' is about a son settled in USA who uses his old mother as a carrier of drugs and when she is caught he does not even care to look back! A shudder passes one through as one reads this story. Mr. Kaladhar 'Mutwa' a resident of 'Bani' an area of Kutch has given stories rooted in the soil about the toilers and cattle grazers. This has come as a whiff of a fresh breath as he has brought rural flavour to sindhi short story.

Sindhi writers have written stories on 'taboo' subjects also. This reflects the maturity of our readers as well. Vishnu Bhatia has written stories with explicit sex content. His early story 'Awshiwās Jo Janam', (Birth of the doubt) is one such story. Gopal Thakur has written a story about son successfully sending his father to a sex worker for his satisfaction. His other story speaks about incest- relationship between a brother and sister. Param Abhichandani has written of live-in relationships. Hiro Shewkani has written 'Sareer Dharam' (Body's Nature). In which he depicts oral sex. Some writers have written about pre-marital and extra- marital relationships.

According to anthologies of short stories published by Sahitya Akademi and Book trust of India more than 40 writers of short stories have been covered. In fact today we have more than hundred writers writing short stories and more are emerging. In the beginning there were handful of women writers. Now we have a number of women writers contributing some fine short stories.

It is gratifying to observe that the adversity of Sindhi Community, being spread all over India has afforded Sindhi literature to absorb the fine literary traditions of various regional languages thus is

acquiring a Pan Indian character, which fact alone is bound to add to its enrichment.

Many critics in literary discourse are using terms like post modernism- New Historicism-Magic realism but on the creative level these trends have not been able to produce work of any great significance, but it is continuing process all the same. It is being widely realized that the creation to be of any significance has to transcend all theories and philosophies. It is now strongly realized by creative writers that the philosophies- trends and labels are to be transcended as it is mastery of the craft and strong creative force that goes into making of really enduring literature. The creative urge is irresistible and it cannot accept any straitjacket of any ideology however noble it may be.

Yet it is extremely disturbing fact that as is the case in all other Indian Languages, due to process of globalization the readership is fast dwindling! This is a paradoxical situation the magazines and printed literature is appearing more than ever before this situation needs to be addressed with UTMOST URGENCY. I AM SURE THAT MAN WILL ALWAYS REMAIN HUNGRY FOR A STORY THEREFORE THIS IS A LULL BEFORE THE STORM.