

# Short Stories of Neelum Saran Gour: A Critical Study

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A short story is a concise, fictitious literary composition. It is one of the popular forms of literature. Fables were the earlier form of Sanskrit short stories, which got popularity and contributed by Indians. Short stories in Indian writing in English may be known as a byproduct of the Indo-Anglian novel. The literary output of Mulk Raj Anand, R K Narayana, Khushwant Singh, Sudha Murty and many others have established and popularized this form of literature. The Indian short stories in English has become a powerful and effective tool for bringing social awareness and to portray the variety of Indian cultural scene.

Neelum Saran Gour has novels and short stories in her credit. The writer covers a wide range of themes such as Interpersonal relationships, suffering of human body, dilemmas, suppression of desires, repentance which have not been discussed so far. *Grey Pigeon and Other Stories* is her first book. It was published in 1993. It contains nineteen short stories. The second collection of her stories is *Winter Companions and Other Stories*, which is a compilation of 18 short stories, published in 1997. *The Song Without an End*, published in 2011, contains 15 short stories. *Allahabad Aria* is the fourth collection in the series of short stories, which comprises 8 remarkable stories. Her works are blended combination of facts and emotions. Some researchers have worked on her novels, but her short stories have been left untouched. In “Connectivity” a retired bureaucrat’s telephone line is accidentally connected to that of a grieving man’s; while a heart surgeon helps his patient across the great abyss in “Song without End”. The skillful grooming of a poet is described in “A Lane in Lucknow”; and a senile old nawab finds himself a stranger to an altered world in ‘The Taste of Almonds’. In “Through the Looking Glass” a man losing his sight finds he can get to the heart of all the books in his library by an inexplicable miracle; and in “Play” the roles an actor enacts are a source of important life lessons.

*Song without End and Other Stories* is a collection of 15 captivating short stories by Neelum Saran Gour that amuse and absorb by their lively engagement with people; places and ideas in an unforgettable way. Funny; humane and culturally vibrant; these tales portray characters who are challenged by life and who arrive at their own individual truths. The themes of Neelum Saran Gour stories find alive from her critical observation of common place Incidents and life.

Neelum Saran Gour covers a wide range of topics, which she has discussed through her stories. The themes of Gour’s stories find life from her critical observation of common place incidents and life of Indian middle class society. Interpersonal relationships, sufferings of human body, dilemmas, suppression of desires, repentance of deeds and attachment with

possessions are some themes emotionally portrayed in her stories. The stories exhibit the contemporary Indian society and in this time of commercialization her story 'The Song Without End' is a description of an unknown but a touching bond that exists between a patient and a doctor. The doctor despite of being professional in this time attaches himself to the patient and the patient blindly trusts the doctor. The end of the story leaves the readers spellbound.

Neelum Saran Gour plays with plot as if she is handling a dice. Sudden climax occurs in the story 'The song Without an End' and ended with a tragedy. The story 'Major Event' is a fine example of her skillful artistry. The story ends with an unexpected demise of grandfather and leads the story to tragic end. She controls her writing dexterously. Readers can find vivid description of incidents taking place in a sequence.

The story, "For Your Eyes Only" is a fine example of her careful construction of linear plot, which has a systematic beginning by introducing the problem why the shop owner is not ready to sell the marble Shiva idol. The plot reached to the middle when a shabby appearance, middle class man was desperate to own the Siva idol, despite the heavy cost, he would have to pay. Finally resolution occurs when readers came to know that this antique Shiva idol was auctioned after the death of Pundit Jeevan Chandra Saraswat, who own it and whose eyes were donated and fixed to that man. She introduces the events which are beyond readers' imagination.

Readers can easily accept her genius to manage conflict as the story proceeds. One can easily observe the conflict of character against her nature in the story, 'The Second Attack'. An unnamed mother who is suffering with cancer, undergoes the conflict against her nature. "She became a different person. She was no more the good-natured woman whom we had always known her to be. She uttered bitter, spiteful words in the last days of her life" (Song without End 132). This change occurred in her personality due to the painful treatment of cancer. "Something in her body betrayed her, treacherously gave her unknowing consent, and the large sluggish cells began multiplying in their millions" (Song without End 131). She was bound to visit the hospital many times for radiation and chemotherapy. But the treatment did not succeed and cancerous cells reappeared. At last, she accepted it as her fate. Whatever days left in her life, she decided to spend them happily. She started using her favorite perfumes daily; wearing her seldom used silk sarees with gold ornaments. Some characters have internal conflict, some have conflict with other characters, some have conflict with society and some have a back story. Generally, her characters are static, who emerge from a long internal journey without changing a lot.

The writer has taken the realistic characters, common man that comes from next door and day today life. She has beautifully delineated the character of a mother who after being diagnosed with cancer starts living her life to the ecstasy. She dressed up with her seldom used silk saree and wore the ornaments that were kept in the locker, as one wears for a festival, to visit a hospital for radiation therapy sessions. She relaxes her mind by planting trees of her

favourite fruits in her backyard. She immediately calls a photographer for a photoshoot, when the first awful bunch of hair fell on her shoulder as a side effect of her chemotherapy. This chapter will demonstrate her art of characterization.

She introduces characters with distinctive mannerisms. Description of their appearance, walking style, sitting posture, speaking tone, helps readers to understand characters better. Her characters succeed in arousing empathy. Some of her characters are round and some are flat.

Neelum Saran Gour has mastery to hold her pen wisely. She narrates in such a way which not only helps the reader to imagine but also enables to visualize situations. She spreads emotions on paper creatively as she did in the story, 'For Your Eyes Only'. It is a dramatic monologue in which an unnamed blind person who used donated eyes of a kind soul, and feels humble for his eyes then becomes passionate to get the hold of his most loved possession to soothe his eyes. It comes as no surprise when the story ends with a similarly chilling twist. Her narrative figure changes with stories. Jatin acts as the spokesperson in the story 'Play & narrated in the first person, an unnamed son becomes the representative of the writer in the story 'The Second Attack' and narrate in the first person, likewise, the story 'Grey Pigeon' is narrated in the first person, through a little boy who becomes the mouthpiece of the writer, grandson is the speaker in the story 'Major Event', narrated in the first person.

She employs words carefully. She knows ways to deliver what she wants to intend, as in the story, 'The Second Attack' the protagonist says "She isn't ill. Only her body is"(Gour 134). The author seems philosophically involved. Her sentences are short and punchy with simple choice of words. She has used scientific register to describe complexities of cancer and its treatment, in the story 'The Second Attack' with dramatic irony. One can encounter phrases in her writing like 'racking up old quarrels' (Gour 132), 'hate and bitterness serves one's vitality' (Gour 133), 'pink plume of cloud' (Gour 136). Her writing is elliptical with a sense of humor as one can find in story 'Play'. The story 'Play' is purely a monologue written in persuasive style. Readers can encounter a fine use of metaphors, and personification. She has employed flashback technique as well, which helped readers to understand the character well. Although the events are narrated straight forwardly, but there lies some hidden, complex meaning underneath the language, as in the story 'Major Event'.

To conclude, Neelum Saran Gour is a talented writer who chose the themes to write about common man. Whatever readers see and observe around him, she has presented that life in an appealing and effecting way.

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