

CHAPTER – II

The Minimalist Movement

As discussed in the introductory chapter, the minimalist short story became very popular in the hands of scores of writers in America. The word “minimalism”, according to the American Heritage Dictionary, refers to the “use of the fewest and barest essentials or elements, as in arts, literature or design” (AHD). The term “minimalism” describes movements in various forms of art and design, especially visual art and music where the work is stripped down to its most fundamental features. The term minimalism first emerged in paintings shifted towards sculpture and then to other artistic disciplines, including music, interior design and literature. The one characteristic of minimalism that is common to all works of art is that they all try to concentrate to create the works through the tendency to reduce to fundamental elements. The term ‘minimalist’ was first used in the modern politics for “Menshevik” faction and “Maximalist” was used for Bolshevik faction at the beginning of the twentieth century. It specifically referred to a member of the more moderate section of the Russian Social Revolutionary Party which opposed the extremist tactics of the Maximalists during the 1905 Revolution.¹ It was David Berlyuk who first used the term ‘minimalism’ in an exhibition catalogue for John Graham’s paintings at the Dudensing Gallery in New York in 1929. It is considered that the minimalist movement started in America in 1950s because at that time it was used in relation to the works of the painter Frank Stella whose paintings were first exhibited at the Museum of Modern Art in New York in 1959 and the works of this artist inspired many artists to reject the expressive art in their works. The exhibition in New York in 1966 titled as “Primary Structure” is considered the key event in the history of the minimalist movement. The minimalist artists believed that there should be “less but more.” The works of the minimalist artists and writers were generally considered as less in quantity and more in quality.

Minimalism in Visual Arts

The minimalist movement first emerged in 1960s in New York in visual arts. As every movement emerges as a reaction to the other, it is considered that minimalism originated as a reaction against the Abstract Expressionism (the term expressionism is considered a revolt against the artistic and literary tradition of realism. The artists and writers related to this movement tried

to express their personal vision and the emotional state of mind through human life and human society which was full of tension. The works of these artists suggest that what they are portraying and describing in their works is the experience of an individual being who feels alienated and afraid in an urban society) as well as the discourse, institution and ideologies that supported it. However the minimalists were strongly against the work of art being taken as the personal expression of the artist. The artist related to the minimal art especially in visual arts strove to focus their attention on the object as an object reducing its historical and expressive content to the bare minimum. The artists who were associated with the visual arts were sculptures and they were connected with reducing the works to the greatest simplicity. In minimalism, any clue and self-expression from artist's side were rejected. The minimalists used in their works the smallest number of colours, shapes and lines. They used the geometric forms and cubes often in repetitive patterns and normally planned colours that were always unmixed. Their works were often based on straight lines that form a square and other mathematical elements. The materials which minimalists used in their works were not intended to express anything symbolical and the colours were not used to express feelings or mood.

The American artists such as Carl Andre (1935), Dan Flavin (1933-1996), Donald Judd (1928-1994), Sol LeWitt (1928-2007), John MacCracken (1934-2011), Robert Morris (1931), Richard Serra (1939) and Frank Stella (1936) are considered the pioneering artists of the minimalist movement. Carl Andre is considered as the founder and the best practitioner of the art because the majority of his sculptures are composed of ordinary materials and characterised by the repetition of shape, size and material. His work *Lever* is considered the masterpiece of minimalist art. In visual minimalism, it does not matter what the size and height of a work of art is but one thing, which characterises it, is how less material is used for making it. For example, *The Fulcrum* (1987) by Richard Serra is a sculpture that is 55 feet high and consists of five plates of cor-ten steel, each weighing many tons.

Minimalist Music

The term 'minimalist music' was first used in relation to music in 1968 by Michael Nyman (1944) (who was an English composer of minimalist music) in a review of Cornelius Cordew's piece "The Great Learning". In music, the minimalist movement was also a reaction against the music form that was famous during the period. Minimalist compositions lay emphasis on

simplicity in melodic line and harmonic progression to stress repetition and rhythmic patterns and to reduce historical and expressive references. The American minimalist composers like Philip Glass (1937), Steve Reich (1936), Terry Riley (1935), and Le Monte Young (1935) are considered famous among the prominent minimalists. David Cope (1941), an American author and composer, defines some of the possible characteristics of the minimalist music such as: silence, concept, music, brevity, and continuities which require slow modulation of one or more parameters. (Wikipedia)

Literary Minimalism

Literary minimalism emerged as a new type of literature during 1960s in America. It is originated from minimalist visual arts and music. It is characterised by an economy with words and a focus on surface description. It can also be described as a conscious effort to present writing elements with the fewest words in order to achieve the maximum readable effect. The minimalist short story began to appear in popular literary magazines and well respected newspapers, most notably in “The New Yorker” and it reached its peak point in 1985 in America when the writers such as Raymond Carver (1938-1988), Amy Hempel (1951), and Mary Robison (1949) contributed in the development of minimalist short story. The Literary minimalism can be better understood in relation to the definitions given by many minimalist writers. Chuck Palahniuk, a contemporary minimalist writer in his novel *Fight Club*, observes: “a story is a symphony, building and building, but never losing the original melody line. All characters and scenes, things that seems dissimilar, they all illustrate some aspect of the story’s theme” (Palahniuk, 2). According to this definition, literary minimalism is a work of art in which a story is constituted in coherence. It seems to the reader that there is no coherence in the story and dissimilarity between the characters and scenes but at the end, these all illustrate a particular aspect of the message that is presented in the story.

Similarly, Linsey Abrams, in his essay “A Maximalist Novelists Looks at Some Minimalist Fiction,” describes the literary minimalism as:

Minimalist fiction at its best draws resonance from simple understandings, accumulated into structures where the whole is greater than the sum of the parts. At its worst those same simple understandings are presented linearly, rendering them simplistic, if not inauthentic. (Abrams, 24)

Therefore both the definitions of Chuck Palahniuk and Linsey Abrams show the ambiguous nature of literary minimalism constituting of simple elements to create a particular effect in the story.

In “Minimalism and the Short Story,” Cynthia Hallett gives five prominent names which were considered as highly influential precursors to the literary minimalist movement of 1960s including Edgar Allan Poe (1809-1849), Anton Chekhov (1860-1904), James Joyce (1882-1941), Samuel Beckett (1906-1989) and Ernest Hemingway (1899-1961), “whose conscious codes of omission were designed to make an audience feel more than they understood.” (Hamilton, 105)

In American literature, minimalism owes much to the clean and spare literary style of Ernest Hemingway, Edgar Allan Poe, Anton Chekhov and James Joyce who had strongly influenced the movement. In minimalist text, a selective inclusion is achieved through the conscious exclusion. Through deliberate omission of excess, an inner unity is achieved that delivers “certain, unique or single effect to be wrought out” (105). Chekhov also contributed in the literary minimalism because he explored the singular effect by using a “plot-less design that focuses on a single experience...and an objective presentation which so distances the narrative voice that the reader is drawn in the closer association with the story” (Hallett, 2000, 31). She also points out that Joyce in his early works didn’t follow the traditional plot and his use of static episode and “slice of life” seems as the part of the minimalist style.

Ernest Hemingway’s *The Old Man and The Sea* is considered as the foundation of literary minimalism. It is generally agreed that Hemingway is one of the most finest prose stylists in English, an author whose work gave rise to the minimalist movement in American Fiction, and influenced the works of Raymond Carver as well as many others including Richard Ford. The other writers who are associated with the literary minimalism and gave their contribution to the development of literary minimalism include; Alice Adams (1926-1999), Frederick Barthelme (1943), Ann Beattie (1947), Bret Easton Ellis (1964), Amy Hempel (1951), Bobbie Ann Mason (1940), Chuck Palahniuk (1962), Grace Paley (1922-2007), Mary Robison (1949), Elizabeth Tallent (1954) and Tobias Wolff (1945).

Some basic qualities of minimalist fiction include – minimal words, minimal sentences and minimal paragraphs. It has simple sentences and easy vocabulary. In these minimalist short stories,

the figurative language is less used. The minimalist writers provide the minimal or less description of the character, setting and background information. The minimalist stories are often written in present tense and these stories have no resolution because these are always left open ended. The adjectives are used very less and if used, they are not extravagant, but dialogues are used in abundance. The words are used in repetitive pattern. The minimalist writers give more stress on 'showing' and not on 'telling' as the primary means of communication. These stories are contemporary and realistic—often dealing with common place subject matter. In these stories, important actions take place outside the story or just prior to the beginning of the story. In these stories, characters are taken as ordinary people, they are neither heroes nor larger or beyond life. They are just like the people whom we meet in our everyday life and these motiveless characters keep themselves involved in meaningless actions. In these short stories, the settings are generally in safe, domestic places like living rooms, bedrooms, kitchens or even cars. The characters are often shown as eating and drinking while discussing some trivial things.

The subject matter of these minimalist stories force readers to actively participate in the story. In the minimalist stories, we meet the characters who have the important things to say but they regularly choose not to talk, or when they attempt to speak, their message is unheard, misinterpreted or even ignored by the other characters. The proverbs, maxims, aphorisms, epigrams, penses, mottoes, slogans are popular in every culture such as "brevity is the soul of wit," "silence is golden" and it effected the emergence of the minimalist genre. Henry James, in the prefaces to the 1908 New York edition, of his novels states that "don't tell in effect and at length; and not tell a word more than you absolutely need to" (Barth, 2). Ernest Hemingway describes his "new theory" in the early 1920s: "You could omit anything if you knew that you omitted, and the omitted part would strengthen the story and make people feel something more than they understood." (Barth, 2)

The three major American short story writers: Ernest Hemingway, Raymond Carver and Fredrick Barthelme represent the three important phases in the journey of literary minimalist movement i.e. early, middle and present phase respectively. The works of these three writers show less and means more. Richness of effect in the minimalist story implies that less is used for a richer effect. The critic, Madition Smart Bell also lays emphasis on the notion that in minimalist writing "less becomes more."² The minimalist narrative technique creates an interpretive indeterminacy

in order to make a growing contribution to its meaning. In minimalist writings, less is provided because the reader will do more to find the resolution and it is always left on the reader how he resolves the question which is raised in the minimalist short story. In the minimalist short story, the reader is invited to interpret the story with his own understanding with the help of the clues that the minimalist writer provides in the story. The critic Kim Herzinger describes the role of the reader in understanding a minimalist text in his introduction to the 1985 Winter edition of *Mississippi Review*. He says, “The reader of minimalist fiction is asked to face the people in the world, people who do not – in my experience at least – ordinarily declare their personal histories, political and moral attitudes or psychological conditions for my profit and understanding” (Herzinger,17). The minimalist writers do not tell the entire details but provide the indirect references in the story which have more importance than the omitted details and force the reader to think deeply about the story. In these stories, the reader finds that a single word or phrase reveals the specific meaning. With the help of the ambiguous words or phrases, readers of the minimalist short story try to find out his/her own resolution of the story.

In “Small Worlds Minimalism in Contemporary French Literature”, the critic Warren Motte discusses as to why the minimalist writers like to focus on “simple” things in their works, such as simple plot, simple character and laconic dialogue among characters. Motte says that ‘simplicity’ might itself suggest that a work is less complete or unfinished. According to him, “simple things are free from complexities, devoid of intricacy or ruse, unembellished, unaffected, plain....” (Motte, 4). The minimalist writers consciously reject the “bulky” unnecessary details in order to focus on most important ideas expressed in the story and only provide the necessary details. Motte says that the minimalist writers deliberately prevent the reader from knowing certain facts that are revealed in a conventional text in order to provide the most important information to the readers. If the writer does not provide the ample details in story, the reader will put more effort to find out the more in the story with his own understanding and personal experiences. The missing information or facts might confuse the readers and will force him/her to find out the meaning of the text.

In the minimalist text, silence is considered to be more important. Silence is used as something which is clearly stated. Amy Hempel, a minimalist writer, describes, “a lot of time what’s not reported in your work is more important than what actually appears on the page.

Frequently the emotional focus of the story is some underlying event that may not be described or even referred to in the story” (Hempel,6). In the minimalist short story, a realistic account of the trivial matter or event is presented by the authors. In these stories, language and event seem trivial but this triviality suggests an inverse effect of importance. In the first reading, minimalist stories seem to convey that there is no connection between the sentences or paragraphs. The writer does not furnish any important message in the text but the readers reach to the meaning when it is read closely. In most of the short stories, the indirect references and clues result in a complex end.

In literary minimalism, readers are expected to take an active role in the creation of the story by giving a surface description from the author’s side. The minimalist stories seem as “the slice of life” because in these stories, the writer gives the description of a small part of his character’s life and not about the whole life. The minimalist writer doesn’t prefer to use the adjectives, adverbs or meaningless details in order to make their works minimal. The author of the minimalist short story provides the necessary information only and allows the reader’s imagination to shape story. William Strunk, Jr. remarks that in a minimalist writing, “A sentence should contain no unnecessary words, a paragraph, no unnecessary sentences, for the same reason that a drawing should have no unnecessary lines and a machine no unnecessary parts” (Strunk, 23). George Orwell, in his essay, “Politics of English Language,” defines that a minimalist writer should cut the unnecessary detail from his/her work. He asserts that: “If it is possible to cut a word out, always cut it out.” He underlines the statement, “If it is possible to cut a word.”³ The minimalist writers avoid using the unnecessary introductory section and remain silent about the events that have occurred before the beginning of the story. They never try to write two sentences to explain something that could be explained in one sentence.

Generally, the minimalist writer doesn’t sacrifice the clarity in order to ensure brevity and maintains the clarity by giving the useful information for the help of the reader. In minimalist text, the omitted information becomes more important when we talk about the inner state of the characters that is communicated without speaking the exact words. Here, the reader has to infer from some phrases, responses and euphemism that the characters use, to reach to the desired interpretation. The minimalist writer doesn’t provide every detail as the novelist does in the novels because according to Sartre, when we define everything, it loses its importance. In the minimalist writing, the writer frames a gap between the writer and the reader in the story but he tries to fill

that gap by giving to the reader an idea to infer from what exactly is given and what has been omitted. The method in which the writer presents the story, makes the reader think that there should be more to the story than the present details. But this laconic composition of the story helps to make minimalist short story as a powerful prose form.

In 1985 *Mississippi Review*, Kim Herzinger, in his introductory article, describes the stories of Carver, Ann Beattie, Robison and Bobbie Ann Mason among many other minimalist fiction writers as “work loosely characterised by equanimity of surface, ordinary subjects, recalcitrant narrators and deadpan narratives, slightness of story and character who don’t think out loud” (Herzinger, 11). In the same chapter, he also describes the other traits: compression, aggressive lucidity, sparseness and cleanness, above all the obvious craftiness and a profound uneasiness with irony as a mode of presentation. The other writers and critics like John Barth and Dan Pope also contributed in understanding the literary minimalism by their definitions. The maximalist Barth describes minimalist writing as being “terse, oblique, realistic or hyper realistic, slightly plotted, extrospective, cool-surfaced fiction,” and he described Beckett, Carver and Donald Barthelme as minimalists in the same breath” (Barth, 1). Dan Pope describes literary minimalism in *The Gettysburg Review* as:

The fickle, alienated, generic, self-obsessed, family less, alcoholic, often divorced characters; the writer’s fondness for the present tense and their concurrent disregard for background and historical explication, the monotonous use of colloquialisms, the prime time sitcom speeches, the unresolved situations and the character’s vague sense of emptiness and disillusionment, the trendiness evidenced by endless references to brand names...the willingness of these others to mirror social and cultural structures without probing toward a sense of human spirit.(College, 333)

According to the critic Dan Pope, in the minimalist writings, the characters generally remain changeable in an unreasonable way. These are often found as alienated, self-centred, family-less, alcoholics, and divorced. The writers try to eschew the background information and other historical references and prefer to narrate the story in the present tense and use the colloquial language in a monotonous way. The events or situations are left unresolved and the characters are presented as disillusioned, the evidence is provided with a number of references and sometimes brand names are also suggested to state the importance of the things.

Cynthia Hallet discusses the similarity between minimalist work and the short stories in general and says that the literary minimalism is similar to the short story, because, the short story

and literary minimalism are compact, condensed and contrasted in design and are especially dependent on figurative language and symbolic association as channel for expended meaning.

Cynthia Hallet also describes the important role of the reader in the minimalist text that at first reading, these stories seems that there is no connection between the sentences, the ending of the story seems as the beginning of the story, but when the reader reads these closely he/she finds that all the references provide a particular meaning of the text. She says that first of all the reader should try to make out the meaning of the indirect references and then try to use his/her own imagination and experiences to make out the resolution of the text. She says:

At first reading, many minimal narratives can seem internally disconnected; the sentences detached from one another, the ending as much as beginning as the first line; but when the stories are read closely, oblique references and dim designs combine into a rich texture of trope – exposing a pattern of meaning within the symbolic structure. The minimalist reader first of all tries to understand the indirect references and what the author is going to suggest in the story then he/she uses his/her own imagination and experiences to make out the meaning of the text. (Hallett,12)

The two categories of minimalist writers that are formal and social are described by Mark A.R. Facknitz in *Benet's Reader's Encyclopedia of American Literature*. He describes that the formal minimalist writers use the clear and colloquial language and a plot which is constituted by one or two events and prefer the present tense and first person narration. He says that a minimalist writer is “a technician with a taste for clear, colloquial language and uncluttered plots using “narrow temporal frames, present tense and first person narrators while eliminating editorial intrusion” (Perkins, 714). He says that these traits are also applied to the “social minimalism” which is also called as ‘dirty realism’ and ‘k-mart realism’ and it seems to be a subset of the formal minimalism.

Ernest Hemingway is considered as the most famous and influential fiction writer of America in twentieth century and the one who established the foundation of literary minimalism. His writing style has been characterised by simple diction, understatement, short and declarative sentences expressed primarily through dialogue. The writers like Raymond Carver and many others were influenced by his writing style. Hemingway in a non-fiction book *Death in the Afternoon* (1932), first introduced the “theory of omission”, that is also known as the “iceberg principle”. Ernest compared the minimalist story with the “tip of the ice-berg” aesthetic principle

by which he suggests that seven-tenth of the story lies beneath its surface. According to Hemingway:

If a writer of prose knows enough about what he is trying truly enough, will have a feeling of those things as strongly as though the writer had stated them. The dignity of movement of an iceberg is due to only one-eighth of it being above water. (Hemingway,192)

Hemingway suggests that a writer should omit the information that is not more important than what is depicted on the page. Hemingway says that an unskilled writer can damage a story by omitting information that is more necessary for the reader to interpret the story. An omission in the story does not weaken the story but it helps to strengthen the story because these omitted details invite the reader to become actively involved to interpret the meaning of the story. The skilled minimalist writers often fill the gap which is left by certain omissions by creating a sense of comfort and familiarity for the readers. *In The Old Man and The Sea*, he uses a number of minimalist techniques such as heavy dialogue, repetition, ambiguous narrators and situation to shape the stories, and forever changes the landscape of American fiction. Harold Bloom writes in his introduction to *Modern Critical Interpretations: Ernest Hemingway's The Old Man and The Sea*, that "Hemingway's greatness in his short stories, which rival any other master of the form, be it Joyce or Chekhov or Isaak Babel.... The art of ellipsis, or leaving things out, indeed is the great virtue of Hemingway's best short stories" (Bloom, 2). Hemingway uses in his works the repetition as a means to present the necessary information, including the repetition of words, phrases and ideas, and the use of heavy dialogues and limited exposition to create a sense of verisimilitude which invites reader to actively participate in the story telling process. In Hemingway's minimalist short stories, "Hills like White Elephant", the critics observe the ambiguous resolution and the striking symbolism of the setting and title. Hemingway's "Hills like White Elephant" and Carver's "What We Talk About When We Talk About Love" are considered as the most minimalist stories by the critics. In these stories, dialogues are in abundance and there is no exposition provided by the narrators. The technique of using the minimal exposition and heavy dialogue is one of the most important and continuously used features of the minimalist stories as it invites the reader to associate the story to their own personal experiences and knowledge when they try to understand the work.

During the 1980s and 1990s, important minimalist works continued to appear from the authors such as Frederick Barthelme, Amy Hempel and Raymond Carver who portray the everyday contemporary life in America. Fredrick Barthelme, an American minimalist writer of short fiction and novels, was the son of famous minimalist architect Donald Barthelme. He contributed in the development of the literary minimalism by producing famous literary minimalist works. He has been given the label of minimalist writer along with the other writers like Raymond Carver, Ann Beattie and Mary Robison. The label like “dirty realism” and “k-mart realist” are also associated with his name. The minimalism has been characterised as the hallmark of Barthelme’s style. His work is marked as a reaction to the meta-fiction that dominated literary production in the 1960s and 1970s. His minimalist work is characterised with the accuracy of description, the precision of imagery and the economy of words. Barthelme lays stress on the importance of the reader in the instruction to “convicted minimalists”:

Tell them that you prefer to think you’re leaving room for the readers, at least for the one who likes to use their imagination, that you hope those readers hear the whispers, catch the feints and shadows, gather the traces, sense the pressures, and that meanwhile the prose tricks them into the drama and the drama breaks their hearts. (Barthelme, 27)

The minimalist story emerged in the reduction and apparent simplicity with stark prose and tacit narration which established a highly stylized language. Reductions and implications are used to express the unstated in minimalist stories and this type of language was described by minimalist American writer Amy Hempel. Many of Hempel’s stories are considered as minimalist because they are extremely short—around just four hundred words in length. A large number of Hempel’s stories are narrated in the first person female characters struggling to cope with the emotional pain caused by some understated event which occurs prior to the beginning of the story. Amy Hempel says that the readers of minimalist short stories are presented with a random bit of information. And it is left on the reader to fit the pieces together and to make out some sense of the story.

Raymond Cleve Carver, the most famous minimalist writer of short story and poetry was born in America in May 25, 1938 in Clatskanie Oregon which is near Columbia River and grew up in small town Yakima which is situated in Eastern Washington. Raymond Carver is widely seen as the writer who introduced the minimalist style to American fiction in 1970s. In doing so, like Hemingway, he influenced many other writers of his time. Raymond Carver’s father was a

sawmill worker, a fisherman and heavy drunkard. Carver's mother Ella Beatrice Casey worked as a waitress and as retail clerk before she decided not to join any job for a long time. Carver's younger brother James Franklin Carver was born in 1948. Carver's father was a heavy drunkard and he used to wait for his father at the bus stop to come home from work. But most often, he did not come on the bus stop and went to drink with his friends from sawmill. Carver says about his father's drinking habit in the Paris Review, "I still remember the sense of doom and helplessness that hung over the supper table when my mother and I and my kid brother sat down to eat" (Carver, 2). Carver got his education from a local school Yakima in Washington. After being graduated in 1956, he worked with his father as sawmill worker for six months but he didn't like the job of this type and he knew this from the very first day. At the age of nineteen, he got married with Maryaan Burk who was sixteen year old at the time of their marriage. In 1960s, he went to California with his family and worked as a night custodian at Mercy Hospital. He did this job for three years and liked this job because he had to work for three or four hours and was paid for eight hours and was able to get up early in the morning and could write. In 1959, Carver started writing when he was shifted to California with his family. There he joined a creative writing course under the novelist John Gardener who had a major influence on his writing career. Raymond Carver started writing poetry before he started to write fiction and continued writing and publishing poetry throughout his career. He once said in Paris Review interview with Mona Simpson, "In magazine, I always turned to poems first before I read the stories. Finally, I had to make a choice, and I came down on the side of fiction. It was the right choice for me" (Carver,13). Raymond Carver didn't write any novel in whole of his writing career. He says about his choosing to write short stories and poems in the Paris Review:

Nobody ever asked me to be a writer. But it was tough to stay alive and pay bills and put food on the table and at the same time to think myself as a writer and to learn to write. After years of working crap jobs and raising kids and try to write, I realized I needed to write things, I could finish and be in hurry. There was no way I could undertake a novel, a two or three stretch of work on a single project. I needed to write something I could get some kind of a pay off from immediately not next year, or three year from now. (Carver, 5)

In 1960s, Carver met poet Dennis Schmitz when he was in Sacramento state college. They became friends and Carver first published his collection of poems "Near Klamath" under the guidance of his friend Schmitz. The publication of "Near Klamath" in the respected *Foley Collection* and the death of his father coincided in the year 1967. Carver went to Palo Alto,

California with family to get a job as a textbook editor at Science Research associates where he met Gordon Lish, who was an editor and writer and the one who influenced his writing style. Later, Raymond Carver's short story "Will You Please Be Quiet, Please?" was included in *The Best American Short Stories* in 1967. Carver was fired from his job as editor at Science Research Associates because of his inappropriate writing style. During the years of working different jobs, rearing children and trying to write, Carver started to drink heavily. He was depressed to the extent that he kept on drinking all the time and confessed that during this time he gave more time drinking than writing and almost no writing. In the Fall semester of 1973, Carver was a teacher in Iowa Writer's Workshop with John Cheever. He was busy in drinking with John Cheever and confessed in the *Paris Review*, "When we were teaching in Iowa Writer's workshop in the fall semester of 1973, he and I did nothing but drink.... We made trips to a liquor store twice a week in my car" (Carver, 7). Raymond Carver reveals in the *Paris Review* about his drinking habit and states the reason for why he started drinking heavily:

I suppose I began to drink heavily after, I'd realized that the things I'd wanted most in life for myself and my writing, and my wife and children, were simply not going to happen. It's strange. You never start out in life with the intention of becoming a bankrupt or an alcoholic or a cheat and a thief. Or a liar. (Carver, 5)

It was on June 2, 1977 that Carver quit drinking and that very day was considered the day of his resurrection as then on he resumed writing and concentrated on creative thinking.

Carver talks about certain influences shaping his writing and says that when he was a kid, his father used to tell him a lot of stories about himself and his dad and his grandfather. Carver liked his father's company when he told him stories and anecdotes. About the contents of his short stories, Carver says that all is not fiction as there are some elements in the story which are derived from the real life. He described as to how it came in his mind to write when he tells that it was on his visit to some writer friends in the mid 1970s. They were all sitting and drinking and someone told a story about a barmaid who got drunk with his boyfriend one night and decided to move all of her bedroom furnishings into the background. They really did it. There were four or five writers in the room and after the guy finished the story, someone asked who would re-write this story. "Well who is going to write it?" Carver wrote this story later and did not know if anybody else wrote it or not. He said that it was his first story that he wrote after giving up drinking.

In November 1977, Carver went to Dallas in a Writer's Conference and there he met the poet Tess Gallagher. In the beginning of January 1979, Carver and Gallagher lived together in El Paso, Texas in a borrowed cabin in Tuscan Arizona. In 1980, they went to Syracuse, where Tess Gallagher joined as the coordinator of the creative writing program at Syracuse University and Carver taught as a professor in English Department. Carver was separated from his first wife Maryaam Burk in 1978 and took divorce in 1982. Later he married to poet Tess Gallagher in 1988 in Reno Nevada. Raymond Carver died on August 2, 1988 in Port Angeles, Washington from lung cancer at the age of fifty. It was the same year when Carver was inducted to the American Academy of Arts and Letters. He was buried at the Ocean View Cemetery in Port Angeles, in Westminster Abbey.

"The Furious Season" was Carver's first story that was published in 1960. This title of the short story was later used for a collection of stories published by Capra Press. The story "Will You Please Be Quiet, Please?" was published in 1967 and this title was used for his first collection of short stories that was published in 1976 by Mc-Graw Hills and later this collection was shortlisted for the National Book Award. In 1984, his short story collection *Cathedral* that is considered as his best work was nominated for Pulitzer Prize. During 1970s and 1980s, Carver taught in several Universities throughout the states.

Throughout his lifetime, Carver won six O' Henry awards. The award winning stories include "Are These Actual Miles?" (1972), "Put Yourself In My Shoes" (1974), "Are You A Doctor?" (1975), "A Small Good Thing" (1978), "Errand" (1988), and "Kindling" in (1999).

His final collection of the short story was *Elephant* which was published in 1988 but it was incomplete. The other compilations are *Where I Am Calling From* (1988), *Short Cuts: Selected Stories* (1993), *Collected Stories* (2009).

The novelist Chuck Kinder acknowledged the influence of Carver through his association with him in 1970s by publishing *Honeymooners: A Cautionary Tale* in 2001. Carver's first wife Maryaam Burk also wrote a memoir "What It Used to Be Like, A Portrait Of My Marriage to Raymond Carver" which is about the moments that she spent with him. The Scribner published an unauthorised biography *Raymond Carver: A Writer's Life* by Carol Sklenika in 2009 which was considered as one of the best ten books of that year by the New York Time Book Review.

Every writer is known for a distinct expression or style. Raymond Carver also used in his works a different style which is known as minimalism. The objective of the research is to analyse Raymond Carver as an exponent of minimalist movement and to trace out the typical minimalist characteristics in his short stories vis-a-vis traditional short story. It is an attempt to explore as to how; short story writer Raymond Carver is distinguished from his contemporaries and how his unique style helps him to emerge as a minimalist writer with a difference.

The tracing of changes in Raymond Carver's short style is one of the most persistent topics of Carver criticism. Critics have overlooked one of the most consistent aspects of Carver's short stories i.e. the sense of menace. Throughout his career, Carver achieved a sense of menace by providing only clue to crucial aspect of the story. The critics like Arther F. Bethea, Jeffery Kenneth, Birkenstein, Russell Banks, Kasia Boddy, Sam Helpert, to mention only the prominent-few, have come out with the comprehensive analysis of Raymond Carver's thematic and stylistic aspects. Besides, Raymond Carver has been researched by the scholars worldwide under the aegis of International Raymond Carver's Society. In spite of all the critical sources available on Raymond Carver, the relevance of the present research lies in its intention to locate Carver not as a writer with minimalist style but also as the short story writer paving the way for the next generation of short story writers.

As an exponent of minimalist writing, Raymond Carver immensely contributed in paving the way for the future generation of the short story writers and emerging popularity of minimalist movement. His short stories and poems are an epitome of the minimalist writing in the literary genre, where the cardinal principle is that the artistic effect is enhanced by a radical economy of words. Gradually, Carver was considered the most influential practitioner of minimalism, and then through the rewriting of his earlier stories, a writer who repudiated the style.

Raymond Carver described himself as "inclined towards brevity and intensity" and "hooked on writing short stories". He chose the subject matter for his stories from the blue collar experience. Minimalism is considered as the hallmark of his work. He was most influenced by his editor Gordon Lish who helped in shaping Carver's prose style and to whom Carver once wrote, "If I have any standing and reputation or credibility in the world, I owe it to you" (Harvey, 1). Lish could be considered his beacon during the years of struggle in shaping his career towards minimalist style because his tutor John Gardener advised him to use fifteen words instead of twenty

five while his editor and friend Gordon Lish asked him to express his views in five words instead of fifteen. When Carver met Gordon Lish during a meeting in 1980s in New York, Carver gave him the manuscript of *What We Talk about When We Talk about Love*. Lish was impressed by his way of conveying the stories. In the following weeks, Lish worked on those stories and reduced each one of the story to half of its original length. He reduced some of the characters in the stories and made the plot very simple, and by doing all this he was reducing the stories to its minimalist expression. When Lish sends the manuscript to Carver, the manuscript was reduced to 55% of its original. But Carver didn't like Lish's heavy editing and broke with him and submitted his poetry to James Dickey who was then editor of *Esquire*.

The term 'dirty realism' was applied to Carver's work which was associated to other writers of 1970s and 1980s such as Richard Ford, Tobias Wolff because these writers depicted the everyday life of ordinary people belonging to lower middle class and the people who felt isolated and marginalised. Many people who knew Carver closely and the others who only evaluated him by his writings claim that Carver was the "American Chekhov". It seems that the writer himself was proving the claims of those people not only by his statements, fiction and the sympathy which he shows for his characters, but by publishing his story "Errand" on June 1, 1987 in the *New Yorker*. In this story, the protagonist is Anton Chekhov himself and so it is considered as a tribute to Chekhov by Carver. Later, this story won the O' Henry Award to him which he received just months before he died.

Raymond Carver is considered the father of American minimalism but he never liked the term 'minimalist' to be applied to his work. In an interview with Mona Simpson, Carver says, "somebody called me a "minimalist" writer. But I didn't like it. There's something about "minimalism". That smack of smallness of vision and execution that I don't like" (Carver, 10). In another interview, he gives the reason for his disliking the term minimalism that is applied to his work when he says:

Critics often use the term "minimalism" when discussing my prose. But it's a label that bothers me: it suggest the idea of narrow vision of life, low ambitions, and limited cultural horizons. And frankly, I don't believe that's my case. Sure, my writing is lean and tends to avoid any excess." (Carver,8)

In spite of his strong advocacy against his being labelled as a minimalist, his works show the characteristics of the minimalist fiction. David Ballamay praised Carver as, "the most

influential stylist since Donald Barthelme”⁴ and Michael Gorra called Carver as “the chief practitioner of what’s been called American Minimalism” (Meyer 239). Carver employed many techniques in his works which were later considered as trademarks of his minimalist style, such as simple and precise prose, mundane settings and subject matter, and recalcitrant narrators who struggled to communicate effectively. The minimalist work of Carver was concerned with paring down the sentences by removing words, phrases and depended upon inference, elision and ambiguity. When we compare Carver’s new volume with old one, we find that the effect is to remove certainty and introduce ambiguity. For example, here is the opening from “What We Talk about When We Talk about Love”—“I was in bed when I heard the gate” (WWTA). Here’s the opening from “Beginners”—“I was in bed when I heard the gate unlatch.” (B)⁵

One can clearly observe here that in the first line the word ‘unlatch’ is to remove certainty and introduce ambiguity. We observe that the gate has made the sound but we don’t know why. Carver emerged into the minimalist literary world with the publication of *Will You Please Be Quiet, Please?* This collection includes twenty-two well-crafted stories that deal with the everyday struggle of the common people. This collection can be seen as the beginning of Carver’s minimalist writing career. *What We Talk about When We Talk about Love* was his second major collection of short stories that was published in 1981 in which Carver experiments with the minimalist technique to a greater extent which is emerged as the best single collection of minimalist stories that was ever written. These early short story collections of Carver were published during the highpoint of the minimalist trend. In “Investing the Glimpse: Raymond Carver and the Syntax of Silence,” Graham Clark describes Carver as “the quintessential minimalist seemingly reducing to the absolute sparseness both his subject matter and his treatment of it.” (Clark,103)

Some writers like Arthur Bethea, James Plath, Larry McCaffery and other notable scholars describe the similarity between Carver and Hemingway’s minimalist techniques. Graham Clark discusses the similarities and differences between the writing styles of Carver and Hemingway in “Investing the Glimpse: Raymond Carver and the Syntax of Silence”:

Although Hemingway remains ‘one of many who have had an effect on Carver’s work, there is often a sense of simplicity between them; the sparseness the flat tones, even the subject matter seem to establish a distinct ambience between to fictional worlds. And yet there is a qualitative difference which once again, establishes the particular terms on which Carver empties and opens up the

contingencies of American myth, so he exposes the extent to which the Hemingway code is dependent upon it. (Clark,108)

Moreover, Carver says that all writers of experimental fiction must have their own “voice” prior to mastering a particular style of writing. Carver writes in an essay:

It’s akin to style, what I’m talking about, but it isn’t style alone. It is the writer’s particular and unmistakable signature on anything he writes. It is his world and no other. This is one of the things that distinguish one writer from other. No talent. There is plenty of that around. But a writer who has a special way of looking at things and who gives an artistic expression to that way of looking; that writer may be around for a time.... It should be noted that real experiment in fiction is original, hard-earned and cause for rejoicing. But someone else way of looking at things – Barthelme’s for instance – should not be chased by other writers. It won’t work. There is only one Barthelme, and for another writer to try to appropriate Barthelme’s particular sensibility or mise en scene under the rubric of innovation is for that writer to mess around with chaos and disaster and worse, self-deception.” (Fires,13)

The themes of Carver’s early works revolve around alcoholism, divorcees, the unemployed youth and similar characters struggling through the ordeals and challenges of life. They struggle to hold jobs which they do not like and the marriage relationships that have become very troublesome. To get rid of all these problems, they find relief in the glass of whisky or on weekend fishing trip. It relates most of Carver’s life. In these stories, the reader finds the portrait of Carver’s life and his family. Many of Carver’s stories are set in indoors— usually in kitchens or living rooms where telephones, radios and television sets play an important role. Raymond Carver’s short stories are so contemporary that they require almost no background material or preparation for reading and understanding by an American audience because these are related to their own society. The issues of loss and alcoholism are a part of the larger issues, which emanate from the isolation and terror of people.

One of the important characteristics of his writing style is the way in which he includes the ordinary things, language and unimportant items in his stories to heighten the meaning and create a sense of realism. Carver says, “It’s possible in a poem or short story, to write about commonplace things – a chair, a window, a fork, a stone, a woman’s earring – with immense, even startling power. It is possible to write a line of seemingly innocuous dialogue and have it send a chill along the reader’s spine” (Fire 15). In his minimalist works, Carver used the items such as ringing phones, broken dishes and dirty ashtrays to tell the story and regularly tries to exclude the

unnecessary background information and exposition. As in “Why Don’t You Dance?” which is the opening story in his most minimalist collection, *What We Talk About When We Talk About Love*, the narrator relates the strange events of a single day involving drinking and an awkward dance which happens when the boy and girl come near the man’s house and it seems to them as a courtyard sale. In this story, the narrator describes a large list of household items which are taken out from a house and set in the front yard:

The chiffonier stood a few feet from the foot of the bed. He had emptied the drawers into cartons that morning, and the cartons were in the living room. A portable heater was next to the chiffonier. A rattan chair with a decorator pillow stood at the foot of the bed. The buffed aluminium kitchen set took up a part of the driveway. A yellow muslin cloth, much too large, a gift covered the table and hung down over the sides. A potted fern was on the table, along with a box of silverware and a record.... He had run an extension cord on out there and everything was connected. Things worked, no different from how it was when they were inside. (“Why Don’t You Dance,” 3-4)

The man in the story is involved in the meaningless actions and it can be observed from his habits that he consumes alcohol throughout the story. The narrator does not reveal the reason of taking out all the household materials but the clues are provided throughout the story as it is suggested in the story that a female companion once lived with him. The “Yellow muslin cloth”, “a box of silverware” and “a record player” are labelled as “gifts” which they might have received during their marriage or other festivals.

Raymond Carver’s “Why Don’t You Dance?” is a highly ambiguous story as girl’s final attempt to talk through the events fails to throw light on the strange happenings. Like Carver’s other minimalist works, characters in “Why Don’t You Dance?” seem highly realistic. Like the young woman, the readers are left to decide what the reason of man’s strange actions was, along with many other unanswered questions. The rivals of the literary minimalism often like the stories that have traditional plot because they are against the “plot-less” stories like “Why Don’t You Dance?.” But for the minimalist writers, the plot-less stories are not the subject of concern as Carver’s “Why Don’t You Dance?” succeeds as the opening work in many of his best minimalist collections for many reasons. Carver concludes the story with the narrator speaking the following lines: “She kept talking. She told everyone. There was more to it, and she was trying to talk it out. After a time she quit trying” (10). These lines show the bewilderedness of the character. Carver suggests by “talking it out,” that she is doing an endless effort.

Though, minimalist short stories are characterised by subjectivity, Carver's alcoholism cannot be separated from his stories. Drinking plays an important role in his minimalist stories. It is present in almost all themes that Carver chose for his stories and in characters. As in "Gazebo" which is a story about Duan and Holly's battle to cope with Duan's affair. In the story, Duan describes that all their important decisions are taken during their drinking process as he says, "Drinking's funny when I look back on it, all of our important decisions are figured out when we're drinking." (107)

Raymond Carver, in an interview with Larry McCaffery and Sinda Gregory, says that it should be the writer's responsibility to compose his/her story in a way which could allow the readers an opportunity to "communicate" with the writer. He defines the term "compact between writer and reader" when he says:

I guess I'm old fashioned enough to feel that the reader somehow must be involved at the human level. And there is still and ought to be, a compact between writer and reader. Writing, or any form of artistic endeavour, is not just expression, it's communication. When a writer stops being truly interested in communicating something and is only aimed at expressing something, and that not very well – well they can express themselves by going out to the street corner and hollering. A short story or a novel or a poem should deliver a certain number of emotional punches. And you can judge that work by how strong these punches are and how many are thrown.... (Carver, 76)

In many of the stories of *What We Talk about When We Talk about Love*, Carver tries to make an attempt to "communicate" and creates a "compact between writer and reader" by making silent the character during the important moments. In the story, "One More Thing," the silence plays an important role through the story and it also ends with making the protagonists silent.

He (L.D.) said, "I just want to say one more thing."

But then he could not think what it could possibly be. (113)

Here, Carver's character L.D. could not say what he wanted to say. It is said about Raymond Carver's stories that the ending line of the stories can be concluded in many ways. The same is the case with the ending lines of the story "One More Thing" because here L.D. is unable to say "One More Thing" that he wanted to share with his wife Maxine and fifteen years old daughter Rae due to his over drinking.

Raymond Carver's style that he has employed in many of his early stories can be classified as sparse and economical. As the story, *Mr. Coffee and Mr. Fixit* begins:

I've seen some things. I was going over to my mother's to stay a few nights. But just as I got to the top of the stairs, I looked and she was on the sofa kissing a man. It was summer. The door was open. The TV was going. That's one of the things I've seen. (17)

In this story, Carver tells all the details in a very concise manner. The narrator relates what he considers to be a shocking event that resembles a still life scene where the viewer is presented in a shocking way when he sees his mother on the sofa. Carver tries to satisfy his reader by providing enough information that is necessary for the basic understanding of the story because the paragraph is filled with simple list of events and descriptions, as readers would have to do more effort to find concrete answers. As in the story, Carver does not reveal why the man is present at his mother's house, and it surprises the readers if man may be visiting that house in vacation, in town or may be visiting for other reasons. The most striking feature of the story is that the narrator begins and ends the paragraph with the same sentence, "I've seen some things" which suggests that the man is surprised to see the man with his mother. Since the character that has kissed the protagonist's mother has not given any name and is only referred as "a man", it can be concluded that he is not protagonist's father. So, there arises the question, whether his father is still living or not? Is he still connected to his mother or not? Is the man surprised that his mother is kissed by another person other than his father?. So it could be said that these questions are created in an extremely sparse manner in which the story is told by the narrator and that invites the reader to read constantly in the hope that the story will create a particular meaning.

Clarke suggests that Carver has used more "menace" in his fiction than Hemingway. In his essay "On Writing" Carver says that 'menace' and 'tension' play an important role in the story. He says that the minimalist technique of omission helps to heighten the suspense in the story. He says:

There has to be tension, a sense that something is imminent, that certain things are in relentless motion, or else, most often, there simply won't be a story. What creates tension in a piece of fiction is partly the way the concrete words are linked together to make up the visible action of the story. But it's also the things that are left out, that are implied, the landscape just under the smooth (but sometimes broken and unsettled) surface of things. (Carver,17)

In spite of Carver's emphasis on 'menace' and 'tension' as prerequisite for suspense and better effect, readers seem not to have built consensus on his claim.

The readers of Carver's minimalist short stories face some problem in the beginning to understand the stories but when it is read closely, the reader is delighted not to resolve the meaning but to conclude that it has any many meanings as one may dream of. No doubt indirect references help the readers a lot but it is always good to enjoy the romance of mystery and suspense than to have an easy access to meaning. Tobias Wolff in his first account of first reading of "Cathedral" defines Carver as a genius in practising the minimalist style. When he remarks:

I was fighting the story. but after a few pages it disarmed me and I surrender to it, and as I read I felt myself drawn up by it. I felt as if I were levitating there above the couch. I was weightless, filled with a sense of profound, inexplicable joy. Blessed, and conscious of it, I understood that I was in the presence of a masterpiece.⁶

Therefore, Raymond Carver and his short stories have much to offer to the reader than one can expect. He is not the minimalist writer who merely chews the words, phrases, idioms and proverbs to strictly follow a tradition but he brings liveliness in his stories by experimenting with minimalism.

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Notes:

¹ “minimalism, n.” (2) The Oxford English Dictionary 2nd ed. 1989. OED Online. Oxford University Press.

² <http://literaryminimalism.wetpaint.com/page/An+introduction+to+literary+minimalism>

³ George Orwell, in the essay “Politics and the English Language.” Explains the literary minimalism through examples.

⁴ <http://greaneynet.com/blogs/?p=820>

⁵ <http://www9.georgetown.edu/faculty/bassr/heath/syllabuild/iguide/carver.html>

⁶ http://www.writinguniversity.org/index.php/main/author/raymond_carver/