

CHAPTER – III

Raymond Carver: A Minimalist Short Story Writer

Raymond Clavie Carver, the most significant writer of the twentieth century, is considered as major force in revitalising the short story genre. In his short stories, he uses the short story theory which does not fit into the scheme of conventional short story theory. In the story, plot is generally considered the most significant element by the conventional theorists but in the minimalist short stories by Carver, the reader finds only one or two events and not a series of events. In his short stories, he does not even use the exposition which is the most important part of the conventional plot. He does not provide to the readers the background information, the introduction of the characters and setting. In his collection of the short story, *Where I'm Calling From* which was published in 1988, the reader finds that these stories are without exposition. In this collection, the opening story "Nobody Said Anything" simply starts with the lines:

I could hear them out in the kitchen. I couldn't hear what they were saying, but they were arguing. Then it got quiet and she started to cry. I elbowed George. I thought he would wake up and say something to them so they would feel guilty and stop. But George is such an asshole. He started kicking and hollering. (3)

The opening lines of the story suggest that the writer does not provide the background information as to what might have happened before the story begins. He does not even bother to introduce the characters and their relationship with other figures in the story. The reader is never told about the people who are talking and about whom they are talking. It is only through the indirect references in the story that the reader understands that the person who is arguing is a spouse and one boy is sleeping and another is trying to awake him are their two sons. The reason of argument is not given in the story but some indirect references are given, as when the boy says, "Later I heard Dad leave to catch his bus. He slammed the front door. She had told me before he wanted to tear up the family. I didn't want to listen" (3). These lines show that the boy's father was going to do something that hurt the family and something that their mother didn't want to happen. After sometimes the mother comes in the bedroom to call the boys for school but the boy who is also the narrator of the story says that he is feeling sick at his stomach and doesn't want to go to school. His mother gives him the permission to stay back home.

The next part of the story tells about the whole day activity of the boy who is staying at home. As his mother has gone outside on a job, the boy watches T.V. and reads the book, *The*

Princess of Mars. Before going outside, his mother gives him some instructions not to turn the burner on and not to eat too much because his stomach is sick. It seems that the boy's mother gives some indirect references when she says to the boy, "I hope your stomach feels better tonight. Maybe we'll all feel better by tonight" (4). After watching the T.V., eating the weed and having finished the chapter, the boy goes into his parents' room and searches for something. Then he makes a plan to go on fishing on Birch Creek. He writes a note that "feeling better and going to Birch Creek. Back soon. R.3:15" (5). On his way to Birch Creek, he meets a girl and she offers him lift in her car. At last, he reaches at the Birch Creek and readies himself to catch the fish. After a while, he starts thinking about his father:

I had finished here for three years, ever since we had moved. Dad used to bring George and me in the car and wait for us, smoking, baiting our hooks, tying up new rigs for us if we snagged. We always started at the bridge and moved down, and we always caught a few. Once in a while, at the first of the season, we caught the limit.
(7)

Even after a long struggle to catch the fish, he does not succeed. Then, he sees a boy near the Birch Creek who has the fishing rod and is about his brother George's size. The boy calls him and they both struggle collectively to catch a big fish. After a lot of struggle, they succeed in catching a fish. The boy also catches a green trout which he never saw in his life. On reaching at home, the boy sees his brother George riding a bicycle at the other end of the street. Then he sees his parents who are sitting at the table arguing about something. He goes into the house through the back door and tells them that he has caught different kind of fish from the Birch Creek. But his mother is scared when she sees that fish in the creel and she asks him to take it out and his father also says that he does not want to see it and asks him to take it out. The boy goes outside and looks into the creel under the porch light to find that there is something like silver in the creel.

As discussed in the previous chapter dealing with the basic features of the minimalist short stories, the one basic feature of the minimalist stories is that they are left open-ended or not resolved at the end of the story; unlike the conventional short stories, the writer doesn't resolve all the conflicts at the end of the stories. At the end of the minimalist short stories of Carver, the reader feels that the story is shifting towards the beginning. If the minimalist writer does not provide the resolution, the reader will put more effort to make out the resolution and it leaves wider space for the reader to ruminate on all. Same is the case with the stories of Raymond Carver where he does not conclude at the end of the story, to leave it on the reader to make out his own meaning.

The reader himself resolves the end and answers the questions that arise while reading. It reminds us of the Reader-Response Theory as Roland Barth suggests in the essay “Death of the Author” that, after the writer has created the text, the job of the reader is more important in analysing, evaluating and interpreting the text. The reader will interpret the text in relation to his own experiences.

The opening story “Nobody Said Anything” in the collection *Where I’m Calling From* is left open ended and can be interpreted in many ways by the reader. The boy shows the fish which he has caught to his parents. “Nobody Said Anything” ends with the confusing lines, it can be interpreted that the boy was expecting appreciation for the deed of catching the fish but instead of complimenting the boy, the parents rebuke him. As the story ends:

He screamed, “Take that goddamn thing out of here! What in the hell is the matter with you? Take it the hell out of the kitchen and throw it in the garbage!”
I went back outside. I looked into the creel. What was there looked silver under the porch light. What was there filled the creel.
I lifted him out. I held him. I held that half of him. (16)

Raymond Carver uses the climax in his stories where he forces the reader to think as to what the solution of the story can be. The climax seems like the resolution but it differs from the resolution. In the minimalist short stories of Carver, the reader does not find the falling action because in the falling action, the writer shows changes which take place in the character after the climax. In his short stories, he does not show any change in the characters because in the minimalist short stories, the writer narrates to the readers only the events concerning “the slice of life” of the characters. The reader can observe the changes in the character when the writer gives full description of the life of the characters from starting to end, giving an opportunity to the reader to find out the characters transforming at the end of the story. But in the short stories of Carver, the reader does not find any such element.

In the minimalist short stories of Carver, the characters cannot be characterised as antagonist and protagonist because here, the reader does not find the conflict between the two—good and bad. In the minimalist short stories, reader finds no conflict between the feelings of the character and circumstances in which he lives which helps in determining the type of character. In the stories of Carver, characters cannot be characterised as round or flat because the reader fails to distinguish between the two owing to the limited space in which they are located. ‘Character’ which is considered as one of the most important element of traditional short story, gets restricted

in the stories of Carver where there is hardly any scope for the reader to identify the ‘dynamic’ and ‘static’ character. Therefore, in Carver’s stories, all the characters may be taken as ‘flat’.

As it is described in the chapter titled “Minimalist Movement”, the setting of the minimalist stories is narrow. They are set inside the home, bedroom, kitchen or drawing rooms. The reader finds that the second story “Bicycles, Muscles, Cigarettes” in the collection *Where I’m Calling From* is set in the kitchen and the bedroom. It is a story about the missing cycle of a boy named Gilbert in which Kip, Gary Berman and Roger are also involved. Gilbert’s mother asks his son to call Roger, Kip and Gary Berman’s parents. When the boy reaches to Roger’s house, his mother Ann Hamilton is seen preparing for dinner in the kitchen. Putting the plates on table, she says to her husband:

I’m so sorry, dear. I know what you are going through. But, if it’s any consolation, the second day is always the hardest. The third day is hard, too, of course, but from then on, if you can stay with it that long, you’re over the hump. But I’m so happy you’re serious about quitting, I can’t tell you.” She touched his arm. “Now if you’ll call Roger, we’ll eat. (17)

Both Mr. and Mrs. Hamilton are discussing about Hamilton’s quitting up smoking on the dining table in the kitchen. It is at this moment that the boy asks Roger’s parent to come with him to his house to discuss about the missing cycle of Gilbert. Mr. Hamilton goes with the boy to his home. The boy turns into a driveway, gets off the bicycle and leans it against the house. When the boy opens the front door, Hamilton follows him through the living room and into the kitchen, where he sees his son sitting on the one side of a table along with Kip Hollister and another boy. Hamilton looks closely at Roger and then he turns to the stout, dark-haired woman at the head of the table. While discussing about the missing cycle of Gilbert, Roger’s father Hamilton and Gary Berman’s father Mr. Berman start arguing on trivial things and so have a fight between them. On seeing his father in such an unpleasant condition, Roger starts crying. After sometime, they both come home. Hamilton asks Roger to go inside and eat something and have a sleep. He is very tired and desires to sit on the porch for a while. Mrs. Ann Hamilton comes outside the house and sees her husband in such an unpleasant condition and takes him inside. Hamilton asks his wife for a drink and goes in the bedroom to have sleep where he pacifies Roger not to mind the missing of the cycle and warns him to stay away from those boys and that part of the neighbourhood. Roger asks about his grandfather to know if he was also a brave man like Hamilton who used to be in the habit of smoking cigarette. Here, he asks his son Roger to smell his knuckles and fingers to make

sure that it is true. On Roger's denying any smell in his fingers, Hamilton himself smells his fingers and knuckles and says, "Now I can't smell anything" (25). At the end of the story, Mr. Hamilton wants to tell or show something to Roger but the minimalist tendency doesn't allow Carver to show what that thing is which he wants to show. Instead of giving the description, he further asks Roger either to have a sleep or go outside. Like a typical minimalist short story, it also ends without a conclusion.

"The Student's Wife" in the collection *Where I'm Calling From* is a minimalist short story which presents the middle class characters that are involved in meaningless actions like eating, drinking, sleeping and discussing about the trivial things. The story starts with the character Mike who is reading something for his wife from a poet Rilke whom she most admires. Meanwhile, she falls asleep while listening to the poem but after sometime, she wakes up suddenly. As it is discussed that the characters of minimalist short stories are involved in meaningless actions, after sometime his wife Nan asks him, "Make me a little sandwich of something, Mike. With butter and lettuce and salt on the bread" (26). As he wants to sleep, he does not pay any attention towards her request. He does not go to bring sandwich and she stares at him. He asks her not to go to sleep because it's very late but she again wants her husband Mike to bring her something to eat so that she might enjoy sound sleep. It is only after the repeated requests that Mike brings sandwich for her to eat. After eating it, instead of going to bed, she starts discussing her dream which she enjoys while sleeping. All these conversations, in the opening of the story make us realise that the characters are just discussing about trivial things. She describes her dream to her husband:

Well. It seemed like a real long drawn-out kind of dream, you know, with all kinds of relationships going on, but I can't remember everything now. It was all very clear when I woke up, but it's beginning to fade now. How long have I been asleep, Mike? It doesn't really matter, I guess. Anyway, I think it was that we were staying some place overnight. I don't know where the kids were, but it was just the two of us at some little hotel or something. It was on some lake that wasn't familiar. There was another, older, couple there and they wanted to take us for a ride in their motorboat. (27)

The characters of Raymond Carver's short stories choose the spots like fishing as a better way to spend their time. The boy in the opening story "Nobody Said Anything" goes out to Birch Creek for fishing. In "The Student's wife," Mike's wife also gives the description of catching the fish when she says, "The next morning he had hooked a big trout, and people stopped their cars on the road across the river to watch him play it in" (28). After sometime, she asks her husband to

tell as to which things he likes and which he dislikes. He says that he does not want to think anything at that moment but she starts explaining the things which she likes. The reader is all the time curious to find out the reason behind the uneasiness of Nan who says:

“I like good foods, steaks and hash-brown potatoes, things like that. I like good books and magazines, riding on trains at night, and those times I flew in an airplane.” She stopped. “Of course none of this in orders of preference. I would have to think about it if it was in the order of preference. But I like that, flying in airplanes.... I like going to movies and drinking beer with friends afterwards. I like to have friends. I like Janice Hendricks very much. I’d like to go dancing once a week. I’d like to have nice clothes all the time. I’d like to be able to buy the kids nice clothes every time they need it without having to wait.... (29)

Carver’s short stories essentially deal with mundane affairs and trivial events. In “The Student’s Wife,” Carver’s experiment with triviality gets exhibited when Mike and Nan hear two men coming downstairs and her children bumping in another room. Even the actions like her inability to sleep, washing the hands and face, and going to the kitchen to sit there for a while are prominently narrated. She comes in the living room after watching the children sleeping, sits on the chair and page through a magazine and tries to read. Like all other stories of Carver, this story also ends in an open-ended style. When Nan looks at the sunrise, the narrator gives the clue that she had not seen a lot of sunrises in her life but only a few when she was a little girl. Nan finds all sunrises as terrible as this one and the story ends with a very complex line, “God, will you help us, God?” she said. At the end, the story can be interpreted in many ways Nan, Mike’s wife Nan is depicted through the story but at end when she feels scared to see the rising sun, the reason of her feeling scared is not suggested in the story.

One of the characteristics of the minimalist writing is that the writer does not use the adverbs and adjectives much. Raymond Carver being a minimalist writer is equally miserly in the use of adverbs and adjectives as he does not express anything in an exaggerated way. For example, the story, “They’re Not Your Husband” opens with the lines which are quite simple without any touch of exaggeration. The opening lines of the story are as simple as nursery tales:

Earl Ober was between jobs as a salesman. But Doreen, his wife, had gone to work nights as a waitress at a twenty-four-hour coffee shop at the edge of town. One night, when he was drinking, Earl decided to stop by the coffee shop and have something to eat. He wanted to see where Doreen worked, and he wanted to see if he could order something on the house. (33)

This is a story about a husband and wife Mr. Earl Ober and Doreen. Mr. Ober is a salesman and his wife Doreen is a waitress. One night when he is on his way to go back home, he decides to go to the place where his wife Doreen works. While he was sitting in the cafe to take coffee, two men come and sit near him. When Doreen serves those two men, they start commenting on her physique especially her fatness. Earl is sitting near them and is obviously hearing all these comments about his wife. He doesn't like all these comments and when Doreen comes home, he asks her to see herself in the mirror. For a while she fails to understand what it is he wants to show her. On being asked the reason, he questions as to why she doesn't think losing her weight. As a loving husband, he wants to make Doreen slim and so asks her to manage her diet. The very next morning, he returns home only to find her eating scrambled eggs and meat. He doesn't like this and so rushes to the bedroom and slams the door. Explaining herself, Doreen says that though it is hard for her to manage her diet, she will try her best to control herself. Therefore, she starts managing her diet and subsequently loses her weight. After two weeks, she finds that she has lost much of her weight and now she looks very slim. After losing her weight, she goes on work in the cafe where everybody says that she looks extremely pale and she doesn't look like herself. When she comes home, she tells her husband about the adverse remarks of the people on her health. On this, her husband gives the answer:

“What is wrong with losing?” he said. “Don't you pay any attention to them? Tell them to mind their own business. They're not your husband. You don't have to live with them.”

“I have to work with them,” Doreen said. “That's right,” Earl said. “But they're not your husband.” (37)

These lines in the story shows ambiguity because Earl is asking his wife not to pay any attention what her friends are saying about her because they're not her 'husband,' but at the same time, he himself forces Doreen to lose her weight when he hears the two men commenting about her obesity in the coffee shop. The reader is made to contemplate whether he wants to say that it is the right of the husband only to think about her wife and take important decisions about her or she should pay equal attention to the observations of others. When Doreen goes on the job after becoming very slim woman, Earl again goes in the coffee shop and asks her wife to serve bear and other things. At that moment, a man sitting near him is observing Doreen while she is serving her husband. At that point, Earl asks that man whether Doreen looks beautiful on getting slim. The man does not give any answer, though the contradiction in the character of Earl gets reflected here.

Therefore, like other minimalist short stories, the end of this story is also ambiguous as on the one hand he asks his wife not to bother about what others say while on the other hand he wants to know from others as how she looks after getting slim.

“Fat” is a story by Raymond Carver that revolves around the petty matters like eating, drinking, smoking, watching T.V. etc. The story starts with a fat man who is sitting with his friend Rita and telling her a story or an event. The narrator tells his friend Rita that one day he met the fattest person whom he had never seen in his life. Its language is also characteristically minimalist because like a typical minimalist short story, very simple language is used here. In this story, the man is giving the description of the fat man in a very simple language. He says:

This fat man is the fattest person I have ever seen, though he is neat-appearing and well dressed enough. Everything about him is big. But it is the fingers I remember best. When I stop at the table near his to see to the old couple, I first notice the fingers. They look three times the size of a normal person’s fingers—long, thick, creamy fingers. (48)

In the next part of the story, the narrator gives the whole description about the food that he serves to the fat man and it suggests that like all other minimalist short stories of Carver, here also, the characters keep themselves busy in eating and drinking. The narrator serves the fat man a large variety of food and the fat man keeps himself busy in eating and drinking throughout the story. In the following lines, the narrator tells the fat man what they have got for eating:

I think we will begin with a Caesar salad, he says. And then a bowl of soup with some extra bread and butter, if you please. The lamb chops, I believe, he says. And baked potato with sour cream. We’ll see about dessert later. Thank you very much, he says, and hands me the menu. (48)

Then the narrator serves him all the dishes one by one and the fat man thanks the narrator for such a delicious food. He finishes all the food like a very hungry man who has not eaten anything for several days. At last, he serves him the dessert and says, “For dessert, I say to the fat man, there is the Green Lantern Special, which is a pudding cake with sauce, or there is cheesecake or vanilla ice cream or pineapple sherbet” (50). At the end, the narrator’s friend Rudy also tells about a couple of fat guys whom she met when she was a kid. At the end, the narrator says that he feels as if he has become terribly fat man and Rudy is seemingly a tiny man before him. In a strict minimalist fashion, the narrator finishes the story with a complex end without giving any conclusion so that it may be interpreted by the reader in many ways. These are the concluding lines of the story: (though without any conclusion): “She sits there waiting, her dainty fingers poking

her hair. *Waiting for what?* I'd like to know. It is August. My life is going to change. I feel it."
(52)

One of the most characteristic features of minimalist writing is that it emphasises small sentences, small paragraphs and does not use adverbs and adjectives to make the sentences minimal in nature. Raymond Carver uses this technique of minimalist writing in the story "What's in Alaska?" to a large extent. The story begins with Jack who comes from his work and goes to a shoe store to buy shoes near his apartment. The clerk shows him three pairs of shoes and Jack tells him that he wants some kind of soft beige-coloured shoes so that his feet could feel free and springy. After reaching home, he shows it to his wife Mary and asks her how the shoes are. She says that she doesn't like the shoes belt but she finds them comfortable. She tells him that they have to go on the birthday party of their friends Helen and Carl and says that Helen has bought a water pipe for Carl and they are very much curious to use it at night. While asking about time, Jack converses with his wife in small sentences. They use the expression like "what time.", "Around seven.", "It's all right" etc. In the entire story, these types of the sentences are found in abundance. They argue and talk about anything in small phrases, sentences and sometime gestures. Jack's wife Mary tells him that she has got an offer to go to Alaska for job. They both converse about the topic of Alaska in minimal dialogues as:

"Alaska?" he said.
She nodded. "What do you think of that?"
"I've always wanted to go to Alaska. Does it look pretty definite?"
She nodded again. "They liked me. They said I'd hear next week."
That's great. Hand me a towel, will you? I'm getting out."
"I'll go and set the table," she said. (54)

After taking their dinner, they start for the party and drive towards the home of Helen and Carl. After reaching their home, they all enjoy the party and try the wind pipe one by one. In this story also, Carver's characters are eating and drinking most of the time. In major part of the story, Jack, Mary, Helen and Carl are busy in eating and drinking while arguing about trivial things which have no significance. They are just talking about eating in the following lines of the story:

"I should have made some dip for these chips," Helen said.
"Wasn't there another bottle of that cream soda?" Carl said.
"We bought two bottles," Jack said.
"Did we drink them both?" Carl said.

“Did we drink any?” Helen said and laughed. “No, I only opened one. I think I only opened one. I don’t remember opening more than one,” Helen said and laughed. (57)

Carl asks Jack about Mary’s plan to go to Alaska. Jack says that he doesn’t know anything; rather, he should ask Mary about all these. When Carl asks Mary, she just argues in a joking way:

May be I’ll grow those giant cabbages you read about.

“Or pumpkins,” Helen said. “Grow pumpkins.”

“You’d clean up,” Carl said. “Ship the pumpkins down here for Halloween. I’ll be your distributor.”

“Carl will be your distributor,” Helen said.

“That’s all right,” Carl said. “We’ll clean up.” (58)

Then they all make themselves busy in eating and drinking. It seems quite trivialising when they talk about their kitchen. Helen says that they had a tiny kitchen when they lived in the city. Jack also says that they also had a tiny kitchen. Mary goes in to the kitchen with Carl to bring something to eat. Helen asks Jack about their plan to go to Alaska. She asks to Jack if they are really serious to go to Alaska. Jack answers that they are very serious. In the meantime, Carl and Mary come with a large bag of M&M’s and bottle of cream soda. They eat, drink and smoke, and while drinking Jack spills soda on his shoes. Carl asks Helen to bring a towel to wipe Jack’s shoes. Helen who read something in the newspaper before some days, now tries to remember as to what it was that she read. She tells Carl that she is just thinking about Alaska which reminds her of a man in the block of ice. Carl again asks them what they will do in Alaska and Jack says that there is nothing to do in Alaska. In the mean time, Helen hears a noise and Carl says that it is Cindy their cat that comes in the room with a mouse in her mouth. They try to stop her and so the cat goes into the hall and then to the bathroom. While watching her licking the mouse, they all start eating, drinking and smoking. After sometime, Jack asks Mary to go home. Mary is too much full with cream soda that she could not walk properly and so Jack supports her with his hand under her shoulders. They reach home and go to bed. Mary reminds Jack that she has not taken her pills so she takes the pills with the beer and goes to sleep. The story ends with Jack staring towards ‘that thing’ and feeling like ‘a pair of eyes.’ He keeps staring towards ‘it’ and thinks if it makes the slightest noise; he will hurt ‘it’ with shoes.

The ending of the story is left open-ended like the other minimalist short stories of Carver. Nothing important comes out from the story. In all the stories, the characters just discuss trivial matters. Mary’s plan to go to Alaska is also discussed in a joking way. She wants to go to Alaska

because she has received an offer to go to Alaska through her job. Again, the story “What’s in Alaska” leaves it for the reader to interpret the theme according to his/her own design. In the story, the characters talk like the people talking in their daily life—sometimes in a serious way and sometimes in a joking way. They do not discuss a particular important matter. If there is any important topic, they also take it in a joking way like Mary’s plan to go to Alaska. They do not tell her if she should go or not but use the dialogues like “What’s in Alaska?”, “what will you do there?” “Why are you going to Alaska” etc. leading to insignificant discourse making hardly any meaning.

In the minimalist short story “Neighbour”, there are two main characters Bill and his wife Arlene. The narrator describes them as happy couple but they have developed a feeling that they have been surpassed by neighbours as Bill has only book keeping duties and Arlene has secretarial chores to do. Sometimes, they talk about their condition in relation to their neighbours— Harriet and Jim Stone. Bill and Arlene Miller think that Stones are living a full and brighter life than them as they always go out for dinner, entertain themselves at home or travel around the country when Jim goes out for work. Being a salesman for a firm manufacturing spare parts of machines, Jim creates an opportunity to enjoy the pleasure trips. Jim again goes on a trip and this time he stays away for ten days. In the meantime Stone family is given the responsibility to look after their house, feed kitty and water the plants.

After taking their dinner, both Bill and Arlene Miller go to Stones’ apartment. When Arlene sees the clock placed on the television, she remembers the day when Harriet came to her to show the clock. When Kitty sees Bill, she starts rubbing her face on his slippers and then turns toward Arlene. Bill takes out a stacked can from the drain board for Kitty and gives it to her. Then he walks towards bathroom and looks himself in the mirror. He opens a drawer of medicine and finds a box of pills bearing the label—*Harriet Stone one each day as directed by the physician* and puts it in his pocket. Bill takes the pills prescribed for Harriet. The writer gives no clue as to why he puts Harriet’s pills in his pocket. What will he do with those? Then he goes into the kitchen, waters the pitcher and goes into the living room. Where he opens a liquor cabinet and takes two sips of liquor.

The next day, Bill goes to receive Arlene. After having the dinner, he goes to feed Kitty from the cupboard and then examines other things in the cupboard like canned goods, the cereals, the packaged foods, the cocktail and wine glasses, the china, and the pots pan. Then he opened the

refrigerator and sniffs some celery, takes two bites of cheddar, and chews on an apple as he walks into the bathroom. All these things depict that Bill wants to pass most of his time with Stones' as he feels more comfortable in their apartment. It seems that he likes all the things in Stones' apartment. He enters in the bedroom and lies down on the bed and stares at the ceiling. Then he opens their wardrobe and puts on their clothes one by one.

One of the characteristic of minimalist fiction is narrow setting and like all other Carver's story, it is found in the short story "Neighbour" also. All the scenes or events in this story are set into the two houses—Millers' and Stones'. Bill Miller always keeps himself busy in eating or drinking or doing monotonous chores. At the end of the story, Arlene tells Bill Miller that she has found some pictures and shows them to Bill Miller. He is very happy to see the pictures and asks her where she has found the pictures. The writer does not tell the reader what it is in the pictures but certain indirect references are suggested in the picture. It seems that the pictures suggest that Stones' would never come back and so their beautiful apartment may be owned by Bill and Arlene Millers'. As they both converse on seeing the pictures:

And then she said, "Maybe they won't come back," and was at once astonished at her words.

"It could happen," he said. "Anything could happen."

"Or maybe they'll come back and..." but she did not finish. (70)

The minimalist writers also use the repetitive words to create a particular readable effect. In the short story "Neighbour", both Bill and Arlene Miller go to Stones' apartment. When they reach there, Bill asks for the key of the apartment.

"The key," he said. "Give it to me."

"What?" she said. She gazed at the door

"The key," he said. "You have the key."

"My God," she said, "I left the key inside." (70)

The minimalist short stories end at a particular point where the reader thinks that there should be more in the story. It seems to the reader that there would be more in the two three pages but the story just ends at the next page. The reader thinks that the story has just started and it is the middle of the story but the very next moment there comes the end of the story. The story "Neighbour" ends where the husband and wife are trying to open the lock whose key is inside the apartment.

“Put Yourself in my Shoes”, the minimalist story in the collection “Where I’m Calling From”, starts with minimal exposition because the writer does not descriptively introduce the reader with the characters, setting and other background information about them. The writer simply starts the story as:

The telephone rang while he was running the vacuum cleaner. He has worked his way through the apartment and was doing the living room, using the nozzle attachment to get at the cat hairs between the cushions. He stopped and listened and then switch of the vacuum. He went to answer the telephone. (71)

When the story starts, some information is provided by the writer about a man, without introducing him as to who he is or what he does. It is only through the indirect references in the story that the reader tries to understand that figure. The writer does not directly tell that he is Mr. Myers but it is made clear when he himself receives the phone calls and says “Myers here”. Similarly, the person at the other end Paula is also introduced through telephonic conversation. The relationship between Paula and Mr. Myers is known by the reader through indirect reference when she says, “Dick just this minute said get that old man of yours on the phone. Get him down here for drink. Get him out of his ivory tower and back into the real world for a while. Dick’s funny when he’s drinking. Myers?” (71). From this, the reader finds out that Paula is Myers’ wife and Dick is Myers’ boss. Paula breaks the horrible news that Larry Gudinas has committed suicide making Myers emotional. He asks Paula to meet at Voyles. They both meet at Voyles and decide to go to Mr. and Mrs. Morgan’s house to wish them Merry Christmas.

Like other minimalist short stories, the setting of this story is also restricted to the house—first in Mr. Myers and then in the house of Mr. and Mrs. Morgan. They reach Mr. Morgan’s house where Hilda Morgan clears the couch and asks them to have a seat. When Hilda Morgan asks them for hot or cold coffee, Mr. Myers and Paula answer in minimal words:

“Anything is fine,” Paula said.

“Anything,” Myers said. “We wouldn’t interrupted.”

“Nonsense,” Morgan said. “We’ve been...very curious about the Myers. You’ll have a hot drink, Sir?”

“That’s fine,” Myers said.

“Mrs. Myers?” Morgan said.

Paula nodded. (75)

When Hilda Morgan comes to know that Mr. Myers is a writer, she starts to narrate him a story and requests him to write it in words. She tells him a story about a man who had an illicit

love affair. Hilda Morgan calls it a torrid relationship. She tells Mr. Myers that one evening, the man announced to his wife who had been married for twenty years that he wanted divorce. She asks him to imagine how that woman might have at such a moment felt. She also tells him that reacting to the situation, the woman asked the man to get out and his son threw a can of tomato soup at him and hit him with the can in the forehead. Paula asks him to imagine the condition of boy who has almost killed his father and to write all these in the story. Mrs. Morgan says that she has no sympathy for the woman who had an illicit relationship with the man. She says that my sympathy is with the wife and the boy who was going through a tragic condition.

Mrs. Morgan tells Mr. Myers another real story about Mrs. Attenborough. She says that one evening in Munich, Edgar and she went to the Dortmunder Museum to see an exhibition. From there, they got a tram and went across Munich to Museum. When they were about to left, she leaves her purse in the living room. Here, she tells about the things in the purse. When she reached home, she didn't find the purse and asked Edgar about her purse. Then Edgar Morgan phoned to the Museum and asked about the purse. While talking, Mrs. Morgan sees a well-dressed stout woman coming out from the taxi carrying two purses in her hands. She comes near Mrs. Morgan, introduces herself as Mrs. Attenborough, and returns Mrs. Morgan's purse. When Mrs. Morgan opens her purse, she finds her one hundred and twenty dollars missing. Then the woman starts explaining about herself that she was born and reared in Australia and got married when she was a young girl. She had three children and all three were sons. One day, she lost her husband. She still lived in Australia with her two sons. They raised sheep and had land more than twenty thousand acres. Her one son is a barrister who lives in England. They talked with her for an hour and then she stood up to go. While standing up, she fell down on the couch and died in their living room. When they opened her purse to know her address, Mrs. Morgan was surprised to see one hundred and twenty dollars in her purse which were wrapped in the paper. After completing her story, she asks Mr. Myers to rewrite this story but Mr. Myers starts grinning. Mrs. Morgan doesn't like this and asks Mr. Myers not to laugh if he is really a writer. Mr. Myers and Paula stand to start their journey back home.

The first person narrative is the basic characteristic of the minimalist short story. The minimalist writers use the first person narrative to create a realistic effect by relying on the experiences of the narrator. These stories show the middle class people who are struggling in their everyday life. "The Collectors" is a minimalist short story by Carver in which he uses the first

person narrative in order to create a realistic effect. The story starts with the lines: "I was out of work, but any day I expected to hear from up north. I lay on the sofa and listened to the rain. Now and then I'd lift up look through the curtain for the mailman" (85). The reader can observe that the story starts with first person narrator. In the opening lines, the narrator is telling about himself, he is at home taking rest and waiting for the mailman. It's not only the syntactic minimalism that fascinates Raymond Carver, rather, he is equally miserly in conveying his themes and therefore thematic minimalism is quite prominent in his stories.

Carver takes long in introducing the stranger who has come to see the owner of the house. Certain trivial actions like knocking, clicking, unlocking, staring, shuffling, slapping, fastening and unfastening take place while the landlord and the stranger come into contact with each other. The typical minimalist tendency to repeat the sentences and expressions is very much witnessed here in the story when Aubrey Bell introduces himself. He says:

This is Aubrey Bell, a man said. Are you Mr. Slater?
What is it you want? I called from the sofa...
Mrs. Slater doesn't live here, I said.
Well, then, are you Mr. Slater? The man said. Mr. Slater...and the man sneezed. (85)

Equally important in the Carver's short stories is the use of body language and gestures instead of elaborate statements. In the story "Collectors", narrator uses the words like grinning, putting out the hand, nodding, shaking, shuddering and staring, rinsing, grunting, reclining etc. which suggest the dramatic elements as well as use of body language in the narration of the story. These devices make the reader come quite closer to the characters, though they still fail to identify themselves with them. The repetitive expressions are widely used in the story. For example, the word 'staring' is used many a times to create a particular effect in the story.

Hearing some noise, the narrator comes down, and under the impression that there is a mailman, he asks him to put the mail in the mailbox or push it under the door inside. To his surprise, the man knocking the door again and again, was not the mailman, rather, he was some Aubrey Bell. He asks to the narrator if he is Mr. Slater. The narrator opens the door and says that he does not know Mr. Aubrey Bell, but the visitor starts to tell him that Mrs. Slater who filled a card has won some prize. The narrator replies that Mrs. Slater does not live there, but the man comes inside the house and tells him that he wants to show him something. The narrator tells him that he is busy

and has got no time. The man asks the narrator for aspirin because he is not feeling well. After giving him aspirin, the narrator asks him to go but, paying no heed to his advice, Bell opens his suitcase which is full of an array of hoses, brushes, shiny pipes and some kind of heavy looking blue things mounted on little wholes.

Mr. Aubrey Bell shows the narrator a card bearing Mrs. Slater's signature. He says that Mrs. Slater has won a free vacuuming and a carpet shampoo. The man prepares his vacuum cleaner and starts to collect the dust from the carpet, sofa, bed, pillow, chair, curtains etc. After cleaning all these things, Aubrey Bell shows the narrator filter of the vacuum cleaner which is filled with hair, dust, and small grainy things. The narrator tells the man that he wants to make it clear that he is not going to pay anything to him. After finishing the coffee that the narrator served him, the man starts to dismantle everything and puts them into the suitcase. While going outside, he asks the narrator, "You want the vacuum or not?" This suggests that Mr. Aubrey Bell is a salesman on the mission to advertise his vacuum cleaner and he comes to the narrator to demonstrate its qualities to him. The story is replete with the indirect references like, "I was out of work," and "You know I can't pay anything, I said I couldn't pay you a dollar if my life depended on it. You're going to have to write me off as a dead loss, that's all. You are wasting your time on me" (90). These references suggest that the narrator has lost his job and being jobless, he has no money to buy the vacuum cleaner. The indirect references in the minimalist short story help the reader to understand the story and make out his/her own meaning.

Like the previous minimalist short story, "Why, Honey?" is also written in the first person narrative which is the characteristic of the minimalist short story. The story starts:

Dear Sir:

I was so surprised to receive your letter asking about my son, how did you know I was here? I moved here years ago right after it started to happen. No one knows who I am here but I'm afraid all the same. Who I am afraid of is him. When I look at the paper I shake my head and wonder. I read what they write about him and I ask myself is that man really my son, is he really doing these things? (91)

In the story "Why Honey?", an unknown person writes a letter to the lady narrator to know about her son from her. No one knows who she is and where she lives but the narrator is surprised to receive the letter from someone whom she doesn't know. He wants to know about her son whether he is really her son. The writer here does not describe what type of man her son is. But he provides the indirect references in the story that helps to understand the nature of her son. She is

writing a letter to the man narrating the story about his son since he was fifteen years old and how his nature started changing. She narrates that one summer when he was fifteen, their cat Trudy disappeared and did not come back for the night and the next day. Mr. Cooper who was her neighbour told her that he saw two boys in the backyard who were firing crackers in Trudy's ears last evening. She was surprised and asked him who those boys were. Mr. Cooper told her that though he didn't know another boy, one of them was going towards her house who might be her son. When her son came home, she asked him about Trudy. He replied that he would put a notice for Trudy, but after sometime he advised her mother to forget Trudy. When Betty Wilks lady narrator's friend comes to meet her, she introduces her son to Betty who exaggerates himself to the extent that he says that he earns eighty dollars.

She narrates another event which shows his son's habit of telling lies. He tells lies when he is asked about the school trip by his mother. The next day, the boy doesn't come back home in the evening and so when he comes the next morning, mother opens the car to collect the grocery items which she has asked him to bring but she is surprised to find a shirt soaked in blood.

Finding her son a rotten child, she feels very much depressed. One night, she goes to her son's room and asks him for coffee but instead of showing regard, he rebukes her mother saying that he is fed up with her spying on him all the time. On that day, her son goes away to leave her alone. She writes many letters to him but he doesn't respond. She sees him in the newspaper and comes to know that he has joined the marines and after some days hears from someone that he is out of marines and has married a girl and has involved himself in politics. She also watches him on the T.V. that he has become a governor. She feels that instead of having a sense of pride on the success of her son, she is still afraid of him. At the end of the letter, she asks that man to write her as to how he could come to know that she is his mother.

The minimalist short story "Are These Actual Miles" starts with the two characters— Leo and his wife Toni who is compelled to sell their car in a hurry because they have gone bankrupt. For this work, Leo sends his wife because she is smart and has a refined personality, besides having salesmanship as she used to sell children's encyclopaedia door to door as a saleswoman earlier. Leo asks Toni to accomplish the task of selling the car that very night because they need money on Monday (that they bought three years ago). She wants to do something because the kids have started to go to school and she wants to go back on her job as a saleswoman. So, she dresses herself up and gets up in the car.

After she has left, Leo keeps himself busy in drinking, watching T.V. and other meaningless actions.

Inside he makes a large drink and he turns the T.V. on and he fixes something to eat. He sits at the table with chilli and crackers and watches something about a blind detective. He clears the table. He washes the pan and the bowl, dries these things and put them away, then allow himself a look at the clock. (99)

It seems that the drinking is a recurrent pastime in the minimalist short stories of Carver. The characters of Carver take the support of alcohol when they are frustrated and are fed up with the mundane affair of their life. The reader meets the alcoholic characters in almost every story of Carver. In this story, Leo is also an alcoholic character and keeps himself busy in drinking in order to lessen the frustration and tension. After drinking, he wants to call Toni to know whether the car has been sold, but at the same moment, he receives her phone call. She informs him that she is with a Sales Manager in a hotel to have a drink. She tells him that he has bought the car. He again calls her because he is very excited to know about the selling of the car but he gets no answer from the other side. She comes back at night and seems very frustrated and drunk. She starts teasing Leo's shirt due to frustration and calls him a 'bankrupt'. He takes her in the bedroom and makes her sleep. When she has slept, he looks into the driveway and a man near that. When he comes out, the man starts to go and asks Leo, "Hey one question. Between friends, are these actual miles?" (103). The story ends with Leo in the bedroom who remembers the very morning when they bought the car.

In the minimalist short story "Gazebo", the writer presents the minimal paragraphs to make his story minimalist. The minimalist short story "Gazebo" starts with minimal paragraphs and minimal exposition. For example: "That morning she pours Teacher's over my belly and licks it off. That afternoon she tries to jump out the window" (104). This is an example of minimal paragraph and exposition because in these opening lines of the story, the writer does not provide the introduction of the characters, of the events which have happened and why, and also the minimal introduction about the setting. For example:

We are sitting on the sofa in one of the upstairs suites. There were any number of vacancies to choose from. But we needed a suite, a place to move around in and be able to talk. So we'd locked up the motel office that morning and gone upstairs to a suite. (104)

From the indirect references that are provided in the story by the writer, the reader comes to know that Duane and Holly are husband and wife. The writer tells about Holly that she is an attractive and smart woman of thirty. She has lost interest in life after finding her husband Duane with another lady servant. Duane tries to remind her of the day when they first came here. He reminds her of the days when she was a book lover. He recollects the moments when they were very happy, but the day she saw him with the maid, she started thinking that Duane was disloyal. Duane's efforts to convince her that she should still consider herself a proud lady, were of no avail.

Duane says that may be due to frustration, Holly, does not register the guests properly. She either charges too much for the rent or collects no rent at all. She gives single-bed room to three guests and a kingsize bed is offered to a single person. Then Duane starts thinking that they are just kids and not married so far and the writer ends up the story without resolving the issue.

Raymond Carver uses minimal characters in his minimalist short stories which have one or two main characters and one or two minor characters. In his minimalist short story "One More Thing", the reader meets only two main characters L.D. and Maxine who are husband and wife and a minor character Rae who is their fifteen year old daughter. The writer provides partial description about the previous life of these characters. In this story, Maxine who is L.D.'s wife, returns home from work at night and asks her husband L.D. to get out from the house when she finds him drinking and arguing with their daughter Rae. She blames him that he has ruined their life. He tells them that he also desires to leave that nuthouse. Maxine asks him to leave and get out. He starts putting his clothes, his trousers, his shirts, his sweaters, his old leather belt with the brass buckle, his socks and everything else he had into the suitcase. He also puts his shaving cream, razor, his talcum powder, his stick deodorant, his toothbrush, toothpaste and dental floss.

While going, he declares that he'll never see them in his entire life. He lifts his shaving bag and his suitcase, and goes towards the door. At the same moment, he wants to say one more thing to them but he forgets as to what it is that he wants to say, and the story is again left open-ended. Just like "One More Thing", the minimalist short story, "Little Things" is about husband and wife. It seems that they have an argument about something. The husband is going to leave the House and is setting his suitcase. His wife says that she will be very happy if he leaves the house. They have a baby also. The man wants to take the baby with him but her wife does not want to give him the baby. They start to pull the baby towards their side in an indirect manner.

Let go of him, he said.

Get away, get away! She said.

The baby was red-faced and screaming. In the scuffle they knock down a flower pot that had been behind the stove.

He crowded her in to the wall then, trying to break her grip. He held on to the baby and pushed with all her weight.

Let go of him, he said.

Don't, she said. You're hurting the baby, she said.

I'm not hurting the baby, he said. (115)

In this trivial debate, both husband and wife try to decide the parent with whom baby will live and the story ends. The writer leaves it to the reader of the story to find out whether the baby would live with the father or the mother.

The epitome of the literary minimalism "Why Don't You Dance?" begins with the protagonist who is in the kitchen. He is busy in drinking and is looking towards the household things which he has placed outside in the courtyard of his house. In this story, the writer narrates the strange things which occur when the boy and girl see the household things in the courtyard and think that it is a yard sale. It involves the drinking and awkward dance of the man, the boy and the girl. In the opening of the story, the narrator gives the whole description of the household things which are taken out of the house and are settled in the front yard. The household things give a sense of realism. In the story, no reason is given directly for man's decision to remove all the things from the house. But it is through certain clues throughout the story like "the yellow muslin cloth" and "a box of silverware" that the reader may make out that a female companion with whom he has exchanged certain gifts on festivals might be living with him. It seems that they have made the relationship bitter for some reason now.

The characters of Raymond Carver's short stories are often found alcoholics. It is discussed earlier also that the characters use alcohol as a support when they are exhausted to face the ordeals of life and to get rid of the frustration, tension and emotional breakdown. In this story, it can be concluded that the protagonist is consuming alcohol to forget his past life and to come out from the mental disturbance caused by the severed relationship with his wife.

The strange things start to happen when the girl and the boy come there to think that it is a yard sale and start to think about the buying of the household things for their new house. When they come there, they don't find anyone there. Using the minimal words in the dialogues is the characteristic of the minimalist short story, and so in "Why Don't You Dance?," the boy and the

girl who are enjoying to see the things for their house use minimal words while speaking. For example:

“How is it?” he said.
“Try it,” she said.
He looked around the house was dark.
“I feel funny,” he said. “Better see it anybody’s home.”
She bounced on the bed.
“Try it first,” she said.
He lay on the bed and put the pillow under his head.
“How does it feel?” she said.
“It feels firm,” he said. (117)

While they were discussing the price of the items, the girl asks the boy whether they should offer the half price than that the man would ask. On the return of, the owner of the house from the market. They buy many things by offering half price than the man demands, drink and dance in the front yard. But after a week, when the girl comes to know about the entire situation, she tells everyone about the things which she bought from the man and which she calls ‘crappy’. The writer ends the story to invite the reader to give their different interpretations of the story.

The entire collection— is marked with minimalism at its best. All the features that Carver practices in his short stories stand in sharp contrast to the traditional short story. Plot, character, setting or characterisation are given a different dimension as they are not introduced in the conventional style. Exposition, rising action or resolution are undermined in the stories of Raymond Carver. Similarly, the characters used in the stories don’t stick to the traditional categories— ‘round and flat,’ or ‘dynamic and static.’ All the characters are stereotypical and flat because the minimal plot doesn’t allow them to undergo significant transformation. Setting of all the stories is confined to the four walls of the house to provide the minimalist touch to the structure of the story. Minimalism may also be observed in the minimal use of words in a sentence, small dialogues, ample use of body language, repetitive patterns, first person point of view and also in the ambiguity and vagueness which make the role of the reader quite challenging and also interesting as the reader is left with the choice to interpret the story according to his/her own design.

Work Cited

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