



Indian Reality in the Short Stories of Ruskin Bond

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ABSTRACT

Ruskin Bond, adorable figure in the world of literary horizons of India, received international recognition by beginning writing at the age of 17 and further leaving no stone unturned in the world of literature specially in projection of Himalayan beauties. He started his writing with 'The room on the roof'. Since then he has written over more than 100 short stories, novel, essays and his prolific pen is still laying out beautiful on beauties of nature and Indian-ness. His stories have Indian cadence, aura and fragrance. Garhwal was so strong that their many of his stories we find settings, character and happening of Jungle and Himalayas. The paper deals with Indian-ness in his pen portrait.

KEY WORDS : Fascination, Jungle, Heart-felt, Demographic, Trees-brotherhood

Though Ruskin Bond is a British, yet his cognigence of Indianness and Indian reality is most noticeable .He has chosen to live in India, certainly there would have been some allurements from Himalayas of India for him to find his home here. He loves to portray that Indian reality which has cast its spell on his psychology as well as his physiology. He pen paints Indian reality as he perceives from his own experiences and observations. When he weaves stories they have full place for his; perception of Indianness. Indian cultural geographical and natural aroma sweetens his stories. The setting of his stories easily introduces themselves as pure Indian. In his journey down the years he writes “ Those who have spent time in non airconditioned parts of India will remember with gratitude those gracious trees that provides shade and shelter during summer : the banyan, Pipal, Mango, Neem and others “(page47) There is no doubt that he looks at India from its Indian-ness, as insider not an outsider. During readings of his stories the reader can very well smell and visualize Indian spirit.

The Warf and woof of his stories is picked up from Indian ethos such as robbers, kite making and flying, caste system etc. He is very well with India social problems related to the kids, women and lower cast people. Mostly the back ground setting of his stories remains small town or villages where as the subject matter of his stories staunchly related

to Indian ness. But one cannot find that he does not write on universal themes. Sometimes he writes on love, war , mythology even then too his prime focus remains on Indian realities

His choice of Mussoorie as his residing place expresses his love for nature and India. The content of his stories binds itself with Indian people life and soul. Despite writing within compass of Indianness he also writes on the themes beyond human life. Beauty of nature at Mussoorie attracted him so much that he finds a kind of brotherhood with the trees. In the *chapter The trees are my brother* . Journey down the years he writes “an d I still think of them as my brother although I no longer climb trees or play in them. But I still think of them as human beings possessed of individuality and charm. Just as no two humans are exactly alike so no two trees are the same, Like humans they grow from seed. They develop branches as arms and leaves like flowering hair.

Despite having great love for Indian landscapes, he never lessens his love for Indian people. He decks his writing with his experiences concerned to his own life. In his stories, readers can very well perceive Indianness in the characters of Bond’s stories. While writing he presents himself in his works giving autobiographical touches to his writings, that means his writings are projections of his own experiences. One can find a staunch worshiper of nature in him. He has written many stories on the themes of nature such as The day grandfather, Tick led a tiger, The blue umbrella, Our trees still growing in Dehra, Time stops at Shamli, Rusty ! the boy from the hills, A flight of pigeons, Looking for the rainbow and many more. Ruskin bond very well understands child psychology ergo in many of his stories he presents that for example a little girl Vinya in the blue umbrella who receives an umbrella from a Japanese and became a mole of envy in the village. A 15 year old thief of The thief and his awakening of conscience, “A flight of pigeon” based on two events on twist of fate and humanity. Rusty the boy on hill is a story of adolescent boy and his behaviors with his grandparents, Trains stops at Shamli is a story of love and loss. Thus, his stories touch all the chords of human emotions . However, he writes on plant, valleys, hills with a heart- felt affinity and feels hurt on degradation on the beauties of nature in the name of development. Due to over exploitation and demographic changes Dehra and Mussoorie are facing water shortage, congestion space shortage etc. causing great pain to Ruskin Bond.

No picture of India can be complete without a mention of her jungles and unique wildlife. Bond portrays this in triniscope of Indian reality by writing vividly of a time when there was still considerable greenery and abundant wildlife in the Himalayas. The distinctive flavour of the Indian jungles comes alive through his skilful portrayal of nature and observant descriptions. Bond has also written several stories that belong to the bygone

era of India when Rajas and Ranis were the norm. Infact he introduces a Rani (more often than he does a Raja) in several stories like: "Garlands on the Brow" A Case for Inspector Lal" and "The Room of many Colours". Perhaps he creates this exotica too for the benefit of the western reader. Or perhaps the reason could be that when Ruskin was a young boy, his father worked for the Jam Sahib (Maharaja) of Jamnagar. And young Ruskin would only see the Rani, never the Raja who was always away on some trip or the other. Later when he did meet Ranis, the Raja had either died or the Rani had got rid of the Raja somehow or the other! So Ranis held a fascination for the young Bond. Evidently he was unable to outgrow this fascination and so introduces them in several of his stories. Apart from Jamnagar, Bond has spent a major part of his life in Mussoorie, Dehradun, Shimla and Delhi, And so he recreates the ambience of these places in several of his stories. Dehradun and Mussoorie most often, as seen in the stories "Coming Home to Dehra" "My Father's Trees in Dehra" "A Gardina Angel" "The Night Train at Deol!" and others. His true-to-life descriptions of the Dillaram Bazaar, Allahabad Bank and Clock Tower of Dehradun, and Picture Palace, Kemptee, and Landour Bazaar of Mussoorie are such that make the two cities come alive. One of the famous landmarks of Shimla-Jacko Hill (also called Mount Jakho), makes Shimla instantly recognisable. Of Delhi he says: "...about a mile along the Panchkuian Road the pavement has been obliterated by teashops, furniture shops, and piles of accumulated junk" (1962).

Any one familiar with Delhi would not fail to identify with this realistic description of Panchkuian Road. In passing he also mentions such characteristics of Delhi as Humayun's Tomb, the inflow of Punjabi refugees into Delhi following partition and the fact that they make up more than half of Delhi's population today. Ruskin Bond has spent a great deal of time travelling by Indian trains. He has a fascination for trains, almost akin to the fascination that a young rural boy has for one. It is said that men are essentially little boys at heart, more so Ruskin Bond. His stories reveal that the child within him is ever-present. Perhaps this is due to the fact that he had written these stories when he was a young man and although he had just stepped out of childhood, he has been unable to sever the connection completely. As a young boy Bond travelled by train very frequently. Mostly to and from boarding school. And he paints a realistic picture of whatever he has observed. The sights and smells of a typical Indian railway station come across in several of his short stories like: "The Night Train At Deoli" "The Woman on Platform No.8," "The Eyes Have it" "Going Home" and "Time Stops at Shamji". Thus his stories are firmly grounded in a familiar Indian setting that makes for the effective portrayal of the reality of India. He seems to enjoy writing about children belonging to Garhwal. Perhaps because he can easily tell stories about them. He has been a witness to the fact that their life itself is a story of hardship. However, by dwelling too much on it, Bond sometimes becomes repetitive. He

also writes about the villages being left in the hands of old men and women. However, he does not actually comment on the fact that in the hills it is the women who do all the work in the house as well as in the fields. And the men remain idle. His stories evoke the images of an India caught within a period of transition. Social changes were taking place rapidly and modernism dictated that wrestling as a sport should be discarded along with other no-longer fashionable ideas and sports. The story "The Kite-maker" also chronicles the social changes sweeping across India, which demanded that in order to survive, kite-makers would soon have to choose another profession. His story "The Last Tonga Ride" brings to life an India when mechanised transport was rare. In "Hanging at the Mango-Top" he conjures up an era when encounters between the police and dacoits were fairly common place. Ruskin Bond has also created stories around Indian superstitions. For instance, the story "The Trouble with Jinns" is built around an Indian superstition that ghosts and other supernatural creatures have a fascination for long black hair. "The longer and blacker" the hair, the better for Jinns, Bond has written some stories that are completely Indian in both setting and theme. For instance, he has fashioned their morose story "Dead Man's Gift" around the Hindu religion belief that an upper caste person cannot touch a corpse because it would lead to defilement. This story tells about a miser, and heartless village moneylender who has the tables turned upon him when he is tricked into touching a corpse by villagers: "Even to touch the corpse was defilement, but as the saying goes, Where there are no eyes, there is no caste," (325) The two villagers catch him in the act and are then able to successfully blackmail him to their own advantage. This is purely an Indian concept. Even when he writes about certain universal themes like love and mystery, he uses a uniquely Indian setting to give life to such stories. He has a fascination for ghosts and supernatural beings, and with murder and death. No matter how rational a person, there is always an element of superstition in his mental makeup. Bond explores this aspect through various stories like: "He said it with arsenic" "The Man Who was Kipling" "A bicycle and DUAY depict Indian reality since all of them are set in various small towns and hill stations of India; which are easily and instantly recognisable. In his humorous stories too, Bond reveals that he is more British than Indian. This is because it is said that Indians do not have a sense of humour. In any case the works of other Indian English writers are largely bereft of humour. Bond's humorous stories on the other hand succeed in bringing a smile upon one's face. This is a creditable quality of his fiction. Some of the stories that exemplify this are: "Master." "A Job Well Done" "Going Home" and "The Boy Who Broke the Bank". The setting and theme of all these stories is Indian. Indians do not have the concept of personal space. And keeping in mind the ground reality of India, such an idea is unthinkable: "Ah! A room of your own, a tree of your own, it's the same thing. Not many people can have their own rooms, you know. Not in a land as crowded as

ours." (443) But Bond makes his need for personal space evident, so in this he is perhaps very British. As needing personal space is an entirely western concept. Perhaps this need has been inherited by Bond because he demands personal space even as a young boy: "...I went back to the house and demanded (and got) a room of my own. Freedom, I was beginning to realise, is something you have to insist upon" (144). In India the concept of freedom is also not understood. The chains of duty towards family and relatives shackle every person. One is never free as a person to do as one wants. So although Bond depicts this Indian reality comprehensively in his fiction, yet at the same time his strong sense of individuality prevents him from identifying with it. This is seen in stories like "What's your Dream" Bond's connection with England is also evident when at times he compares the natural surroundings of the Himalayan foothills with the countryside of England. But these instances are extremely rare. Overall, the broad picture that emerges from an analysis of Bond's stories is that the longer he has lived in India, the more closely he has begun to identify with Indian reality. He feels one with the land of his birth; and the points of differences are few and far between. In fact even he writes stories that are based in England, he is unable to completely sever his connection with India. An example of this is the story "The Man Who Was Kipling". This story tells of a time when the narrator happens to be sitting on a bench in the Indian Section of the Victoria and Albert Museum in London. There he meets a man who professes to be Kipling. They soon get round to reminiscing about India and Kipling is in a nostalgic mood. They start discussing the Grand Trunk Road, the temples of Banaras, travelling in third class railway carriages, fruit gardens of Sharanpur, Simla, and of course the snow covered Himalayas: And the last puff of the daywind brought from the unseen villages the scent of damp wood-smoke, hot cakes, dripping undergrowth, and rotting pine-cones. That is the true smell of the Himalayas and if once it creeps into the blood of a man, that man will at last, forgetting all else, return to the hills to die (23). and indistinguishable part of the story.

Hence it can be concluded that Bond's treatment of Indian reality is such that it makes his stories extremely effective. And it is this quality that has contributed in great measure to him being a consistently well-selling author, who even though has not received the recognition and success of an Arundhati Roy; is nevertheless commercially successful in his own right-and has won his own share of awards and accolades.

Work Cited

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