

Ruskin Bond as a Portrayer of the Indian Reality

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Abstract

Life in the countryside represents an eternal India where life has changed very little indeed during the last two thousand years. Urban life in India attracts the novelist by its excitement, sophistication and violent contradictions between affluence and poverty, splendour and squalor. In the interior, the areas of obscurity have their attraction too and sometimes bring out the best in the creative novelist.

Ruskin Bond is British by race, but has assimilated the spirit of India not only in his writing but also in his soul. Ruskin has made his abode in the beautiful Garhwal hills where lives a unique culture, with values, myths and traditions of North India. His stories present a realistic account of the people, their customs and belief that lie scattered in the valleys and mountains of the Himalayan foothills. He looks at India not as an outsider or observer but as an insider and a participant. He does not indulge himself in any political or historical analysis rather he portrays that "*India reality which he himself has experienced and observed and which has become a part of his psyche*"¹ The sights and smells of India that he crafts in his stories are real and easily recognizable.

Keywords: Ruskin Bond, Nostalgic, Garhwal, Myths.

Introduction

For Ruskin, Writing is not propaganda of life. It is a means of expressing his inner feelings, his understanding and love of man, of nature and of God. It is his passion for nature and life and his way of paying homage to all those that have created in him the vision of an author. He has taken the task of reincarnating the true essence of Indian culture which lies in the lyrics, short stories and myths of India whose ancestry goes back several centuries. His love for the flowers, plants, trees, mountains, birds, animals and attachment to the people lead to his recognition as a Garhwali.

Another story that he has woven around the unique Indian reality is 'The Garland On His Brow'. It evokes the image of India caught in a period of transition. Hasan, the famous wrestler acts as the protagonist of the story. The narrator becomes nostalgic and goes back to those precious childhood days of his life to remember the time when wrestling was taken as the game of skill and power. And Hasan was known for being "the outstanding representative of his art in the entire district."² But with the passing of the time, social changes took place rapidly and modernism dictated wrestling as a sport that could be discarded along with no longer fashionable ideas and sports.

Ruskin makes a vivid comparison of the 'Good Old Days Gone By' with the present fast moving indifferent life which has reduced the status of a wrestler to a beggar where the only rescue left to escape from this humiliating life was death. This also brings alive the bitter truth about how competitive life has made man mechanical. The warmth, friendship, love and empathy that were once the natural ornaments of people are replaced by artificial ones. People are busy to keep pace with the fast moving world. They have no time to think of anything other than their own profit.

Bond is overtly sympathetic to rural Garhwali who are free from cunningness and deception. Ruskin's characters have the ambition to touch the sky, to explore the world. Form '*In my beginning is my end to In my end is my beginning is a full circle indeed.*'

Bond evokes in his stories the real India where he has lived, sensed and experienced. He prefers to write about familiar things, he avoids the highways of romance and sophistication but explores the by-lanes of the villagers of Garhwal. The works of Ruskin have the capability to sustain the interest of every literate person.

Ruskin's language throbs with the vernacular warmth and vigour which kindles the imagination of millions. He has a conversational and colloquial but controlled style. His emotions and thoughts find a free flow through his writings to the mind of the readers. Through his prose, we hear the voice of a man, a man speaking to men. For Ruskin, India is more than a land, it is an atmosphere and through his magical stick he has tried to recapture some of its old charm and imprisoned it in his tales.

Ruskin is also at ease with handling Hindu mythology. In 'Panther's Moon' he uses the myth of Ganesh:

"Ganesh is the god who blesses all the beginnings. The author who begins to write a new book, the banker who opens a new ledger, the traveler who starts on a new journey, all invoke kindly help of Ganesh."³

In 'Sita and the river' he presents a world where both man and nature are part of God's creation. Here Bond has tried to portray nature's duality, her mysterious power both creative and destructive with ease and felicity. Sita in the story is the character depicted with symbolic overtones. She is the representative of Jagat Janani and protectress Durga. At the same time, she becomes the force of nature, while Krishna her savour with the flute and the peacock is symbolic of Lord Krishna himself.

Aim of Study

Bond has imbibed the Indian values regarding religion and morality. For instance he says- "*Then I put out hand and touched the rough bark of the tree and this felt good to me. So I removed my socks and the shoes as people do when they enter a holy place*".⁴ This is purely an Indian concept according to which trees are taken as objects of devotion. People in India worship trees and take them as the abode of gods and goddesses. The belief in a tree as a totem lays the foundation of yet another story of Ruskin, 'The King and the Tree Goddess'

Indian reality is thus an integral part of Bond's stories. It is not a practice with him to use an Indian setting to provide an unusual background for the benefit of foreign reader. On the other hand he

finds it impossible to give any other setting apart from an Indian one. His stories grow out of the unique setting that Bond has been exposed to and has loved all his life, the natural surrounding of the Himalayan foothills. According to Prabhat K. Singh-

"His art of writing, therefore is the art of feeling, the art of seeing, the art of hearing, the art of using all senses whether directly or through imagination, somewhat like Conrad who was Polish by birth, French by literary culture writing in English. Bond with European blood in his veins lyrically recreates in English language the Indian ethos and the variegated phenomenon of his surroundings especially the hills and the people."²

Conclusion

My study of Bond is an humble attempt to unravel the intrinsic quality of his writings. In the seventy years of his life, of which more than fifty years have been devoted to writing, Bond has produced a considerable volume of literature which is significant both qualitatively and quantitatively. Infact over the years he has progressed tremendously showing maturity of vision and inborn sense of effortless art. My assertion is that his work has the hallmark of genius and must be accorded the pride of place in any review of modern Indian English fiction, and his poetry is truly the creation of 'India's resident Wordsworth'.

Endnotes

1. Ruby Gupta: 'Ruskin Bond's Treatment of Indian Reality In the Short Stories', *Studies In Contemporary Literature* (Ed.) R. S. Sharma (New Delhi, Sarup and Sons, 2000), p.125.
2. Ruskin Bond: 'The Garland on His Brow', *Collected Fiction* (New Delhi, Penguin Book, 1996), p.50.
3. Ruskin Bond: 'Panther's Moon', *Ibid*, p.122.
4. Ruskin Bond: 'The Last Tonga Ride', *Ibid*, p. 448-449.
5. Prabhat K. Singh: 'General Introduction', *The Creative Contours of Ruskin Bond*, p. 8