

Ruskin Bond's Touch and Tone: Study of Human Relations

In Selected Short Stories

***Ms. D Sravana Jyothi**

Research Scholar

JNTUK, Kakinada

****Dr. M. V.Raghu Ram**

Research Supervisor

Professor, S&H, VVIT

*****DR. M. Suresh Kumar**

Research Co - Supervisor

Dept. of Eng, ANU, Nambur

India

Abstract

Ruskin Bond - the modern English writer, an Indian author of British descent and one of the most unforgettable figures of Indian English Literature - writes in the light of his own experience of life, as reflected by the autobiographical elements in his works. The collected stories are about irresistible virtuousness, empathetic love and longing for incredible, someone who is just out of reach. The bond of human relationships emphasizes Bond's understanding of the human mentality, nature, thoughts, and behaviour. The incomparable way in which he alters the unexciting, dull things in our everyday life into something really striking and interesting fascinate not only the common reader but also the literary world. Bond portrays the utter alienation and the negligence experienced by his characters. They are caught in the whirlpool of changing time. He explores the subaltern Indian voices with a touch of a sociologist and details their characters in the tone of a behavioural psychologist. This paper attempts to analyse selected short stories and present some details of the treatment of physically challenged and socially

ostracized personalities, orphaned kids, and destitute women. Also, social themes of insecure childhood, loneliness, social belongingness are explored in this paper.

Key words: *Ruskin Bond, Human Relations, Short Stories, physically challenged and socially ostracized personalities, orphaned kids, and destitute women, insecure childhood, loneliness, social belongingness, subaltern.*

Ruskin Bond - the modern English writer and one of the most unforgettable figures of Indian English Literature - writes in the light of his own experience of life, as reflected by the autobiographical elements in his works. The collected stories are about irresistible virtuousness, empathetic love and longing for incredible, someone, just out of reach. The bond of human relationships emphasizes Bond's understanding of the human mentality, nature, thoughts, and behaviour. The incomparable way in which he alters the unexciting, dull things in our everyday life into something really striking and interesting fascinate not only the common reader but also the literary world.

Ruskin Bond, an Indian author of British descent is considered to be an idol among Indian writers. His adaptable, original and graceful writing style has positioned him among the most triumphant Indian short story writers. His first novel *The Room on the Roof* fetched him the John Llewellyn Rhys Memorial Prize in 1957. Since then he has written over three hundred short stories, essays and novellas and more than 30 books for children. He has also published two volumes of autobiography. *Scenes from a Writer's Life*, and *The Lamp is Lit*. In 1992 he received the Sahitya Akademi honour on behalf of English inscription in India and was awarded the Padma Shree in 1999 for his contributions to children's literature.

The collection *The Night Train at Deoli and other Short Stories* encompass thirty stories, it includes diverse themes of virtue, love, courage, beauty of nature, consideration and supernaturalism. In the preface of the collection Bond has written these stories for "gentle kind of person" respectively his main characters are also moderate and benevolent. The stories are about people and their social backdrop with which every Indian can correlate, his stories take the reader into the psyche of his characters. They revolve around the narrator's meetings with a stranger's departure a lasting impression on him. The promise between the speaker and the stranger is such strong that the slightest movement of consideration and gentleness of the stranger lingers into the memory of the narrator for a long time.

Bond's stories display human feelings like affection, care, kind heartedness, insecurities, sorrow, and disgust. As his art is often referred to as autobiographical, his characters are real and we can find them in our neighbourhood. He describes the poor, middle class men and women who have their own way of life. He writes about beggars, villagers and even thieves. He studies their attitude, behaviour as well as relationships with other fellow being. He points out that every human being whether a thief, sweeper or a beggar has a sense of honour, virtue and self-respect. Bond, therefore, loves humanity.

His vivid description of Nature and people, and gentle humour are characteristics of his writing. Warmth and care that Ruskin's young protagonist experiences on platform 8 of Ambala Railway station is narrated in *The Woman on Platform 8*. Arun a twelve year boy all alone on his way to boarding school meets alien- a furtive female. The forlorn child finds in her a caring mother as she treats him like a son and offers him feast and refreshments. That woman helps him feel at ease:

She questioned me quietly from time to time, but preferred listening; she drew me out very well, and I had soon forgotten that we were strangers. But she didn't ask me about my family or where I lived, and I did not ask her where she lived. I accepted her for what she had been to me – a quiet, kind and gentle woman who gave sweets to a lonely boy on a railway platform. (14)

Arun overlooks that he is speaking just before an unfamiliar person as he talks roughly about his school, his contacts, his joys and aversions. When she comes to Arun's rescue and introduces herself to Satish's mother, "Yes, I am Arun's mother" (15) her gentle and caring sign brings relief to Arun. In contrast to her dignity and affection is the pride and arrogance of Satish's mother who nags Arun when she advises that he must be wary of strangers. Arun reacts sternly saying "I like strangers" (17) which points out the unique bond that Arun shares with the strange woman. Arun calls her 'mother' at the time of departure, which is a sweet gesture of acknowledgment of an affectionate relationship:

Good –bye mother... Satish's mother was talking to her, but she didn't appear to be listening; she was looking at me as the train took me away. (17)

Written during a major period of growth in the movement for humane treatment of physically challenged people, *The Eyes Have It* became the work that represented the movement. It is not only the primary mode of transportation of feeling; it has also become a symbol or myth for light. It shares the need for new learning to learn about good care of physically challenged and marginalized people. Bond's creative format most effectively voices his concerns because it appeals to a large audience. The narrator of *The Eyes Have It*, is blind who on his way to Dehradun meets a girl. Once the train leaves the station, he picks up a conversation with her and quite boldly tells her that she had an appealing face. She giggles and responds that it was undoubtedly a wanted eccentricity from the repetitive phrase: "You have a pretty face". The story ends on a shocking note for the narrator when the girl departs and another passenger enters into the compartment and tells him, "She had beautiful eyes- but they were of no use to her. She was completely blind". (37)

In *A Guardian Angel*, Bond explains the grief of life when the narrator recalls the monstrous truth of his Aunt Miriam's wicked occupation, the broken pieces of a guardian angel that stood at her gravestone pains the author in spite of her unholy profession he remembers her as "the very special guardian angel of my childhood"(87). *Chachi's Funeral* is an amusing tale of a Child's innocent disgust for his aunt. It describes a love – hate relationship between Sunil and his aunt. The story presents the authentic and pure feelings of a child, when he says, "Nothing Chachi. I love you so much. Please don't leave us" (30). *A Job Well Done* is a comprehensive hate story where a child with the help of his gardener gets rid of his hateful stepfather. *The Boy Who Broke the Bank* is about the hustle bustle of the mundane life of small town people. It is a humorous account of how people in small towns react to trivial situations.

The Thief explores a relationship between twenty year old young man and a fifteen year old thief who befriends the young man to rob him. Though he runs away with his master's money, his conscience pricks him and he comes back to put the money in its place. The Thief enjoys being part of Arun's life and cooking for him. The Thief's shrewd character is shown in how he manages to make a profit for him in the shopping he does for Arun, as indicated in this line:

"I would tell Arun that rice was fifty-six paise a pound (it generally was), but I would get it at fifty paise a pound."

It's essential to understand in this short story that deep in his heart, the thief does want a better, more truthful life. He says that once he learns to write properly, it might be an "*incentive to be honest.*" Therefore, there is some sort of a moral compass within him. He ends up stealing money from Arun, but in the end returns the money. The Thief is fond of Arun, and sympathetic towards him. The Thief wants to learn to be an educated man and turn his life around. At the end of the story he is shown as taking the first steps to improve his lot in life. The thief's sense of guilt is expressed aptly in the following sentences, "He was the most trusting person I had ever met. And that was why I couldn't make up my mind to rob him" (40). The story elucidates that even the criminals understand the bond of trust in Bond's world.

In *The Kite maker*, laments the loss of appreciation for the art of kite making. He yearns for the old times when he used to make beautiful and extraordinary kites. Mahmood, the kite-maker, stood well identified during the city in the prime of his life. At the appeal of the Nawab, he had once made a very special kind of kite. Everybody heard of the 'dragon kite' that Mahmood built, and word went round that it possessed supernatural powers. A large crowd assembled on the open grounds for its first maiden flight in the presence of the Nawab. At the first effort, it did not move from the earth. He received Ali's speech in the aloofness, but did not realize that the boy

was calling out to him. Unexpectedly frightened, Ali twisted and stirred to the door, and formerly entered down the street crying for his mother. And in the banyan tree, a sudden gust of wind caught the kite and lifted it into the air, carrying it far above the struggling, panic city, into the blue sky. In this story, the distress felt at the transient of an age of unfussiness and distinction is brilliantly captured.

“Now everyone hurried, rushed in a heat of hope, and gentle belongings like kites and fantasies were flattened underfoot”. (102)

The Boy Who Broke the Bank is a short story about a boy who was salaried at a bank by sweeping up. The bank manager stood unpaid for the job. Momentarily, that got distorted and gossip had it that it was because of the unpaid boy. As the word got around that the boy didn't get paid, general public imagined that the bank had no money. The customers of the bank got anxious about their money. This story is about how rumours and Miscommunication can cause various problems and be destructive.

In *Death of a Familiar* the narrator recalls the memories of his friend Sunil who is killed. Sunil is the dominant character and his age is simply twenty. He is portrayed as a wicked man and a fit-for-nothing fellow as the story opens. But interaction with storyteller and Maureen, a school teacher in Shimla, takes him to the correct path and he converts worthy enough to marry Maureen. But, at the end of the story he dies. Bond proclaims his view on the interest of the growth of character in a short story through Sunil that it is not stagnant but a progressive one. Bond's character mature gradually as we come to know them. They go from paleness to assert according to the work that they do and the beliefs that they relish.

In *Bus Stop, Pipalnagar*, Bond exposes the genuineness of lifestyle through Suraj's character. Suraj is an orphan and an exile. He works as an assistant in a tea shop; but when he starts having epileptic fits, the merchant asks him to leave. He saves some money, and with it he purchases a small stock of combs, brooches, cheap perfumes, and armlets, and altering himself into a mobile vendor, goes from door to door selling his commodities in the Pipalnagar. He loves this life. He realizes positive attitude of this life. He is determined and has a vision. Bond gives us philosophy of life through Suraj's dialogue;

Let us go where there are no people at all. . . I am a little tired of people. I see too many of them people. (Bond: 1988: 66)

He wrote about every stage of life, his characters are guiltless boys or girls having their own private uncertainties and anxiety. Bond's resemblance to nature and human relations establishes him as an author who knows the inside out of his characters. He follows a psychological

approach to describe his characters. His uncomplicated and lucid style of writing can be read and grasped by anybody. Even if he stated that there is more fiction than reality in his stories, but it can't be ignored that most of his stories come from his acquaintance. Human being can't ignore the charisma of Bond in most of his stories.

Bond's creativity lies in the remarkable blending of the literary traditions of Indian and English literature. Like children's literature of the continent, he focuses on the individuality of children, their dreams and their adventures by capturing their true innocence in his stories. His characters bravely fight the evils of the society while spreading the message of love and understanding through the bond of friendship. Many characters reflect the subaltern themes of discrimination and hatred and overcome the marginalisation through pure and spontaneous friendship.

References

1. Ruskin Bond, *The Night Train at Deoli and Other Stories*, Penguin Books, 1998.
2. Ruskin Bond, *The Best of Ruskin Bond*, Penguin Books, 2003.
3. Amita Aggarwal, *The Fictional World of Ruskin Bond*, Sarup& Sons, 2005.
4. *Time stops at Shamli and other stories* Bond, Ruskin, 1967.
5. *The room on the roof* Bond, Ruskin, 1957