

GHOST AND SUPERNATURAL IN RUSKIN BOND'S WORK

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Abstract:

Death is inevitable and the most frightening fear of all the fears of an, this powerful emotion gives birth to a host of diverse superstitions; one of them is life after death. Almost all the religions adopted the doctrines of survival after death. Many works of literature present various views on life after death or existence of supernatural elements. J.G Frazer's The Golden Bough is full of wealth of colorful myths and enigma of the life beyond. Ruskin Bond the brightest star of children literature and nature lover decorates his treasure of literature with delicate themes like nature, love, Indian ness or children. Unlike his contemporaries he believes the main function of literature is to relieve or refresh the souls of readers in the world full of cruelty and harshness. This Indian author of British descent achieved the Padma Shri in 1999 and Padma Bhushan in 2014.^[1] He got the Sahitya Academy Award in 1992 for Our Trees Still Grow in

Dehra, for his published work in English. And John Llewellyn Rhys Prize, (1957) at the age of 17 years for his first novel Room on the Roof.

I. Introduction

This research paper is an attempt to reveal the shrouded element of Bond's writing as well as to throw light on the versatility of India's renowned story teller.

II. Emancipation of own feelings

In a forest bungalow in Sivaliks, Ruskin Bond encountered the world of ghost first time. He with the perfect amalgamation of superstitious tradition of east and west in his short stories raises the most sensational emotion of man i.e. fears. From four decades Bond had been writing ghost stories, which clearly shows his interest in this genre.

Ruskin Bond writes about his own experiences but some of his horror stories are purely fictional. The fact is really astonishing that a simple and sensitive person like Bond can imagine horrible situations and depict them to horrified readers. The monkeys of 'The Night Train at Deoli' (1988) are a horror story of Miss Fairchild, who lives with many dogs. As a wrathful respond to monkeys' act of destroying of her dahlias, she shoots a monkey. And consequently she faces the anger of monkeys and was killed by them. The neighbor takes care of the dogs till they die. After many years when Bond goes to live in the same house, he feels the whole ghastly scene of the killing being re-enacted, though it had actually taken place several years earlier. The story reminds us Kipling's 'Mark of the Beast', 'A Face in the Night' is a brief but remarkable story of an incident where Mr. Oliver the teacher of the school in Simla, meets a boy with weird face without nose and eyes. He was so scared and runs away to find a man with lantern in his hand but he dies of heart-attack after seeing the face of man as he too has a plain face like boy.

Supernatural elements enhance the effect of terror in Ruskin Bond's stories. 'The Eyes of the Cat', 'The Haunted Bicycle' and 'Whispering in the Dark' are some finest stories from his collection. The first two stories present a transformation of the innocent into something dreadful. In 'The Haunted Bicycle' two lost children are transformed into horrible hairy forms with

bloated limbs at sunset. Similarly in 'The Eyes of the Cat' a schoolgirl just to take revenge from her teacher of her insult transformed into a leopard and killed her. The former is a adaption of the folk story 'Churail' and the latter is a modified western traditional ghost story.

III. Skillful Use of Plot

Bond's uses his plots to evoke a sinister atmosphere of thunder lightening, whispers and figures seen by candle light to provide a befitting setting for a story with supernatural element. In His story 'Whispering in the Dark', two sisters lure travelers to their boarding –house, rob them and then kill them. The background of the story is scary.

Bond's stories are manifestation of his agony. He started writing from his teen to emancipate his loneliness and sufferings. Bond uses plot or background to create the atmosphere of insecurity as he himself had faced this insecurity throughout his childhood. With the passage of time there is a marked variation in presentation of the ghosts.

Bond is immensely popular for his simple style of writing. His readers believe that he writes from soul. Without using heavy didactic tone he preaches man to love nature as a sensitive environmentalist, to understand a child's perspective as a master storyteller of child literature. In this context this is really difficult to understand why and how he gives impetus to existence of ghosts, which is merely a superstition. The supernatural element is also perhaps a hidden expression of his personality. It is not visible superficially but it exists in ignominious darkness of any part of Bond's personality. That unrevealed self is a face 'lonely in the crowd ', which crosses the walls of this world to take a look at the inhabitants of the other world, as lonely as the writer himself.

IV. Inspiration from Indian Folk Tales

The incomplete relationships and unattained desires made Ruskin Bond highly conscious of his fantasies. He borrowed his ideas of superstitions from Indian folk tales instead of western tradition.

The Western idea of the Ghost” said Bond in the meeting I had with him, is slightly different. There it is a dead person being sort of seen again in a seen again in a recognizable but not physical form. May be here it has more to do with re-incarnation.

Bond is a keen observer but while depicting ghost or supernatural he borrows ideas from his acquaintances or his friends. When he lived in a room over Rajpur Road his neighbor Mrs. Singh gave him an account of the various types of ghosts that one can encounter:

“Churels, the ghosts of immoral women who appeared naked with their feet facing backwards; ghosts with long front teeth facing backwards; ghosts with long front teeth who sucked human blood; and ghosts who took the form of snakes and animals.”

Ruskin Bond portrays ghost in such a manner that readers are compelled to believe on supernatural elements in world. His stories evidence that there is life beyond the circle of light that our eyes can see, in the realms of darkness, which only a few have experienced. Yet his ghost is not so scary as the eastern tradition of ghosts. In ‘Hunter of Hearts’ from story collection of The Man Eater of Manjeri, describes the horrible experience of constable Keemat Lal, and a guide with tribals in a forest. Keemat Lal, who is saved as he is on top of a tree, was badly frightened After watching their strange customs. One another story namely ‘The Immortal Sardar’ from the same volume introduces element of supernatural. One experienced sardar undergo three experiences but survived. People used to take him an adventures man. Unfortunately he died in last accident. After many years of his death residents could listen the ramble of Bishamber Singh’s truck, “the grinding of brakes” and the sound of his “phantom horn”.

V. Mystery and Suspense

One of the most appealing factors of Bond’s writing is element of mystery and suspense. Stories like ‘A Case for Inspector Lal’, ‘He said it With Arsenic’, ‘A Job Well Done’ terrifies the readers with greedy, wily and deceptive characters. These are coldblooded murderers, flabby traders and tricky cops. In ‘He said it with Arsenic’ Bond presents the protagonist as a gentle, civilized person:

“A gentle, civilized sort of person... (Who) collected butterflies in glass cases? His ether bottle was quick and painless. He never stuck pins into the beautiful creatures.”

Dukhi the gardener in ‘A Job Well Done’ is compassionate for pigeons but kills Major Sumerskill his employer, the act being directed by his dislike for him. He then covers up his crime. ‘An Axe for the Rani’ is a story full of suspense and every reader’s mind is haunted by one question as to who killed the Rani? An inspector Keemat Lal finds out that Kamla, a young girl killed the Rani with an axe for she had baited her to be used by Mr. Kapoor. Inspector Lal With tender emotions in his heart decided not to solve Rani’s murder case though it may cause delay in his promotion. Many other stories like Dead man’s Gift, Hanging at the Mango Tope etc are skillfully weaved to bring readers to another world.

A comprehensive study of Bond’s stories reveal that his stories have elements of intrigue and also at the same time for bringing to light the darker side of human character. But Bond is a humanist and humanism is opposed to intolerance for it believes in an individual’s dignity and his right to live .Thus in such stories we come across crooks, but they are not I despicable for Bond’s compassion encompasses then its fold. In his words;

I know that there is evil in the world... but I’ve never known anyone completely evil and I’ve always found the better qualities of goodness and truth dominating. I do try to bring out the best in people, in human beings because it is there in almost each one of us.

6. Conclusion

The Himalaya, one of the best gift by nature to man attracts man with its adornments. Ruskin Bond, the great story teller has the smell of the Himalaya in his blood and while writing he never forget to return to it again and again. This connoisseur of the mysteries and macabre through his mesmerizing stories presents that how this love may persist to death and beyond. This is strange that amidst the mists and mellow magic such frightening tales are set. Ruskin Bond, the great humanist shows that the agents of supernatural may be gentle like the fairy folk or malevolent like the diners. Bond’s ghosts are not always scary, menacing, blood thirsty creatures from hell who are an embodiment of evil instead they sort of co-exist with us humans. They are

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melodramatic, comic or even friendly. After writing children's novels for most of his career, when asked about what intrigued him about this theme he says, "when I run out of real people to write about, I make up supernatural characters."

Bond's paranormal tales not just haunted but haunting. They do not frighten but often unsettle, in a lyrical and quietly touching way. Many of the stories are written in a tongue-in-cheek tone, the autobiographical style sometimes blurs the distinction between truth and make believe. The narrator often plays the part of listener and other characters narrate stories about ghosts. His skepticism helps align him with us and adds credibility to his accounts.

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