

PORTRAYAL OF HUMAN RELATIONSHIPS DECENCY IN SELECTED TEXTS OF RUSKIN BOND

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Abstract- The study of Human relationships in the writings of Ruskin Bond does not only develop interesting avenues to understand human nature but also ensures a retrospection and self-evaluation of one's own relationship with the others. At some point or the other we identify with one or the other characters or one or the other situations in his writings. This is the magic of a Bondian text. His approach to human relationships educate every human being to examine his/her own self in order to understand the different levels of human life across the world and in the context of a better human society. No study on human relationships in literary works would be complete without delving deep into the authors' relationship with life in general. Our attitude towards life and our broad relationship with human life affects all other relationships and shapes the way we view and appraise our relationships with others. Bond's relationship with life is full of extreme passion. It is the passion that keeps a relationship throbbing and active. It is the passion or intense drive that sustains a human relationship. In the case of Bond this passion is his vocation of writing. This paper profiles inherent qualities and readers' binding found in the writings of Bond wherein he has portrayed the decency of human relationships in a more unique way as compared to other Indian authors. This paper concludes that the Bondian literature might be partially dominated by hill folk and simple-minded common people, still relationship varieties and colorations portrayed have a universal and generalized appeal. It is a matter of myopic criticism if Bond is segregated as a writer of children's literature or as often demarcated, as an author of the young adults. It would be unfair to restrict the wide range of relationships in his works to merely a child or an adolescent

Key Words: Bondian Literature, Human Relationships, Intense Drive, Myopic Criticism, Passion, Ruskin Bond.

1. INTRODUCTION

Over the period of six decades now, Ruskin Bond has been one of the favorite Indian authors of both young and old readers worldwide. His literature has versatile theme encompassing a varied range of human relationships. The multiplicity of human perception, thoughts and behavior which form, shape, nurture and diversify human relationship, present such a broad and colorful canvas that only the adept expertise of an artist like Bond can mete out true justice to it. Human relationship is in a constant state of flux. It becomes all the more complex and difficult to interpret and present human relationship. The real beauty of his texts sets in a simple way of leading complicated way of life. His texts disclose a complicated and intriguing aspect of human life. His views of human relations are presented through a uniquely lucid, effortlessly

understandable and flawlessly simple but enjoyable thoughts and ideas. This is what is being referred to as decency in the present work.

A close scrutiny of the plots and the events in the novels and short stories of Ruskin Bond proves that even the simplest of story-lines has the capacity of enfolding a wide gamut of human relationship. His simple way of narration sustains the interest of the reader. The first impression of the critics or readers or researchers, about the reading of Bond's texts is that his writings are overtly simple. But a serious study of his texts reveals that beneath the outer garb of simplicity lies an extremely mature and sensitive reading of life. His texts are full of an immensely complex myriad of characters from all walks and status of living. The variety of characterization discloses a wide range of emotions and their manifestations. Often his fiction with details and subtle humor, which is not so obvious to the common eye, makes his texts simple. He is known and liked for a supremely enjoyable and witty humor that he uses to satirize human living conditions with a positive note that it beautifully does away with the sting. However, all this is presented within a kaleidoscope of human relationships, their development, reasons behind such developments, abrupt endings and nostalgic memories. Namely the relationships vary from man-man, to woman- woman, to man-woman, to child-man / parent, to child-child, to individual and culture, individual and religion and God. Human relationships are marked by sensitive stages of life like adolescence and sensitive issues like the generation gaps. This tremendous variety is one notable aspect of his writings. The other aspect is that a man has to live against the different sectors of human relationships simultaneously. These two aspects together make human relationship a subject of inherent complexities and ambiguities. But one would surmise how an author known for his simplicity, lucidity and straight forwardness of style, manages to encompass and express a complex theme of human relation in his literary corpus. This is where the texts of Bond emerge with his brilliant exposition of decency.

Simplicity with decency in the literature of Bond extends to his chosen themes that he has developed over the last six decades of his mastery. It is discussed in his biography written by his friend Ganesh Sali. Bond believes in a simple exterior. In his texts the underlying complexities cannot be overlooked but his principle seems to revolve around the fact that whatever fraction of life and literature is in one's control need not be complicated. This is a principle that Bond has practiced in his literature to understand human nature. If a man is a great leader or a business tycoon, he must be doing very important work but does that in any way pre-suppose that he has to have a complex personality? Can't a simple man occupy an important chair or hold an important position? Similarly, in case of literature, one often has to do the important work of presenting actual characters, incidents and relationships which are, no doubt, quite intricate and confusing. But one need not present it through equally complex plots, characters or parts of speech and language, it is so that it becomes difficult to decipher. It has been seen that in modernist literature there is a tendency to present the complexities of life in complex imagery, suggestiveness and obscure language. Unfortunately, such literature has been rewarded with a tag of intellectuality.

His main tenet is the need of simplicity in today's complex world. He believes that there is often a much simpler way of doing things if you make the effort to look for it. The greatness of Bond can be realized from this benchmark statement of De Bono, in his book *Simplicity* (published by Viking, Penguin Books, England back in 1998), that "Simplicity

does not just happen" (*Simplicity*, 2). Therefore, those who think it's easy to be simple might better try it out themselves and especially with a complex issue like that of human relationships. Actually Bono rightly analyses: "Simplicity is easy to use but can be hard to design. You may need some creativity." This is where the true mettle of Bondian literature surfaces. His literature is in fact an epitome of creativity. Bond is somewhat motivated to design simplicity. It may be linked to the kind of authors who influenced Bond.

Once the exercise of simplicity coupled with decency within the literature of Ruskin Bond is realized and assimilated, the study reserves the potential to contribute to the expansion of the area and aspects of the study of English Literature and throws some new light on the works of Ruskin Bond. Ruskin Bond is not an exponent of just the art of simplicity. His works spell a unique beauty, purity and clarity. Readers feel completely relaxed with his texts for they are free from the hardships, efforts or confusions of the so called post-modern texts. He is perhaps the best of modern writers who did justice to Henry David Thoreau's appeal- "Our lives are frittered away by detail; simplify... simplify". But the journey has not been smooth and always elevating because simplicity is very easily brushed aside. A very few realize that the wisdom to be simple but it is not easy to attain. In modernist and postmodernist literature there has been such experimentation with form and style that it might appear that conventional tales about ordinary people and gentler and healthier relationships and richness of the human heart are themes out of date. But Ruskin Bond once again articulates some of them in his writings. It is highly interesting to note the ever sustaining yet neglected and unnoticed power of undefined and unnamed relationships which are seen through the eyes of Ruskin Bond.

2. RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN DIFFERENT CULTURES

Before we go into the manifestation of human relationships in a cultural perspective and its representation in literature we do first need to understand what Culture is.

Culture is a complex concept, with many different definitions. But, simply put, "culture" refers to a group or community with which we share common experiences that shape the way we understand the world. It includes groups that we are born into, such as gender, race, national origin, class, or religion. It can also include groups we join or become part of. For example, we can acquire a new culture by moving to a new region, by a change in our economic status, or by becoming disabled. When we think of culture this broadly we realize we all belong to many cultures at once. (weblink 1).

Relationships with people from different cultures may result in the development of new and hybrid cultures or else a peaceful co-existence of two or more cultures where each share the beauty and benefits of the others culture or else most regretfully in the history of humanity two communities may remain in constant conflict due to their cultural differences. Whatever be the case, relationship between different cultures undoubtedly influence the individual as well as the collective psyche.

Building relationship with people from different cultures may lead to tremendous societal change and the achievement of significant goals. The evidences of changing cultural relations and the effect of such relations on life and people can be best had from the writings of Bond, who not only exercises a deep sensitivity towards such issues but also stands testimony to more than six decades of Indian life. India is a country of diverse

cultures and ethnicity. It is also acquainted with foreign cultures with the coming of the Mughals and the British and a whole lot of others as well. Bond through his novellas, short stories and memoirs traces how such cultural relationship, the life and living of the diverse communities in India prospered and co-existed over the years. History records facts but fiction holds the true significance of life. Thus, what Bond records directly or indirectly gives us a genuine picture of how human relationships are affected by cultural relationship. Bondian literature proves how in order to thrive and work with people from different cultural groups effectively, one need to build sturdy and caring relationships based on trust, understanding, and shared goals.

Cultural Relationship itself is a complex issue but the complexity enhances when the relationships evolving from cultural differences cannot be well defined as those of love or hatred, co-operation or collision. These are the grey areas of human relationship and psychology which we get glimpses of in Bondian texts.

3. RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN DIFFERENT GENERATIONS

Human relationship between different generations is closely linked to his/ her relation with the past. Human beings have a never ending relationship with the past – whether their own or the common or general past. This is a relationship which nurtures and shapes all further relationships. It is rather impossible to sever one's connections with one's past. It is, rather, believed that one's own awareness of human relationship with one's past keeps one rooted to one's existence. It is this relationship that further extends itself to maintain relationship between different generations and the family members of different age-groups. Thus, other than stock relationships Bond explores an individual's relations with his/her past. In an unforgettable contribution and stories like "*The Prospect of Flowers*", "*The Garland on His Brow*" and "*The Kitemaker*" the nostalgia and remembrance of the past is so sweet and so involving that the characters hardly care about their dismal present. It's surprising how their relationships with their good old days prove to be a source of sustenance to them. The remembrances of the past and the extreme love for its preciousness are the hallmarks of such stories and characters. The account of their past proves how their present fails them. This is a simple truth and understandable. But the fact that their past helps them live by happy musings in the present makes this relationship with the past a decency. As they share their experiences with the young there is an inevitable underlying message that the young should make efforts to improve their relations in the present and hold on to them closely. They should realize that perhaps it is the best time of their lives that was slipping by.

Even Bond's biographical writings proliferate on an over-reigning idea of nostalgia and longing for his own past. The most significant of his memories are those of his childhood days which he had spent with his father. Having lost his father abruptly at the age of 10 and not being allowed to attend his funeral even, he has perhaps never been able to come to terms with this great loss. Most of his biographical works like *Scenes from a Writer's Life*, *Rain in the Mountains* and *The Lamp is Lit* are full of incidents of his past. This bears testimony to the depth of his relation with the past. It's such a close relation that the writer is at his best with the gems of expressional variety and quality flowing out rapidly and randomly from his pen.

That Bond's relationship with the past is full of nostalgia and longing is evident from the fact that he has often named his stories and books as *Our Trees Still Grow in*

Dehra, The Last Tonga Ride, The Last Time I Saw Delhi and When You Can't Climb Trees Anymore. Thus a feeling of loss, separation and what could have been and what was... prevails through a major part of his literature. This is a feeling that looms large in many of Bondian fiction. It's not only his fictional or biographical stories but also in verses. He always seems to be in close communion and rapport with the past and the bygone. He feels the presence of the past within his creativity so much so that he feels strongly that "It isn't time that's passing by, It's you and I...", as he quotes in a number of his love stories.

4. RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN DIFFERENT GENDERS

The relationship between opposite genders or members of the same gender is perhaps one of the most complex human relationships on the earth. This is one of the most intimate types of human relationships as well as the most controversial, hateful and the most regretful of human relationships. Complexities of human relationships also originate from the fact that when we point out the faults in others or criticize something. We are sometimes voicing our own desires and drawbacks which we would like to rectify. It is hard to believe that our complaints about others are actually complaints about our own self. But psychological studies have proved them to be so. In lieu of this it can be said that Ruskin Bond is happy with all his characters because he is happy with himself. He has always been able to develop very positive types of human relationship in his life. Even when he has been used by some of his friends he has been perfectly at ease and therefore his relationships were maintained in his life so far without any disturbance. Bond's life and his works exemplify that a self-contented man is less judgmental about relations and characters and therefore he has a very beautiful and positive vision of life. Bond describes his characters and their relations as they are, without making any comments as to how they should have been. According to the subjective model, when we forgive, accept and love all parts of ourselves, we will forgive, accept and love all other human beings as they are. The more one improves one's internal relationships, between one's thoughts, beliefs and intentions, the more loving and harmonious one's human relations will become. It is believed that true relationship does not depend upon give and take but mere giving. Unconditional love is a part of a psychic reality, if it is there in one's consciousness one will see it reflected in one's own practical life. However, most of the stock relationships whether gender based or otherwise are relationships based upon the practicality of the theory of give and take.

In the literature of Ruskin Bond, we find a number of Label- Free relations. Susanna and the young boy Arun in *Susanna's Seven Husbands*, Mulia and the protagonist in *The Sensualist*, Ramjimal and Mariam in *A Flight of the Pigeons* are some fine examples of such label-free relations. The problem of being unable to tag certain relations according to the commonly existing names of relationships, and the fact that the texts of Ruskin Bond are so full of brief, temporary and passing relations as well as indefinable ones makes it difficult to segregate the texts according to the relationships they portray. There can never be an absolute segregation.

It is perhaps the most complex of human relationships that speaks about some attachment between man and woman. The characters are entwined in strange and peculiar kind of relationship which sometimes appears to be stronger than the relations centered on blood relations. But at the same time on the other hand there are blood ties

having no attachment at all. A closer look at all his novels and other writings like *The Night Train at Deoli* helps us understand Ruskin Bond's approach.

5. CONCLUSION

Ruskin Bond has been very liberal in his preferences or selectiveness regarding the developing relationships in his life or literature. He has the potential to be friendly with a beggar or a pauper as well as with a prince. Even in the days of the British Raj, being a British by origin, he had no airs of superiority or snobbery or egotism. Added to this welcoming attitude, he is gifted with the insights and the analytical power of a highly involved and evolved writer. So, building stories based on a plethora of human relationships has been his forte. His presentation of human relations is so influencing and memorable that even his readers develop a different approach and attitude towards their own and other's relationships.

Bond writes very lucidly and matter-of-factly of style comes naturally to him but it's a conscious choice on his part. Another Indian author, writing about the changing Indian society is R.K.Narayan, who also was indifferent to Western literary fashion and style but nevertheless he and Mahasweta Devi are among the most notable Indo-English writers. Their fiction, like Bond, presents micro-cosmic India but mainly focusing on tradition and change. There is yet another aspect where Bond resembles Narayan when they present realistic pictures about India with gentle irony and subtle humor. Like Bond, Narayan also saw no point in attempting to criticize or correct things. Narayan could keep his presentation comparably simple. Thus, Narayan is the one author who comes closest to Bond in the exposition of simplicity coupled with decency often described as simplicity through his novels.

Without ruling out possibilities of further interpretations and additions, for the present we can conclude that a study of the gamut of Bondian literature and the detailed dissection and analysis done in this study proves that Bond has a deep insight about human relationships. He has a unique way of commenting about them and interpreting them. But what is commendable is the fact that he represents his observations, experience and his creations of human relationships in a tremendously simple, lucid and palpable manner which is dear to the casual and the novice reader as well as to the critic and researcher. And finally what takes him to the pinnacle of his success is that in spite of his simplicity of plot and easy-flowing language his works don't lack profundity. Rather the complexity and crudities of life are all there.

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