

Ruskin Bond's *Angry River* : A Thematic Analysis

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Abstract: Ruskin Bond is an outstanding contemporary Indian English writer. In fact, he is a living legend who has portrayed life and experiences through different genres of Literature. His writings are equally popular among the children and adults. Besides, his writings revolve around the subjects of love, pets, animals, orphans and abnormal children, Indians, nature and contemporary life. There is always something valuable and dearest in everyone's life, without which he/she cannot live. But, with the passage of time, he/she has to give up that thing. In other words, one has to compromise with situation when life comes near death. In this context, Ruskin Bond's *Angry River* is quite suitable. The paper aims at exploring the varied dimensions of human character and the sense of compromise in *Angry River*. It will examine how Sita starts leading her life in the state of compromise without that doll. It will also explain the changes in Sita's behaviour and conduct with time, as situations change in her life.

Keywords: compromise;contemporary;death;humanity; life; situation.

Ruskin Bond is one of the most prominent Indian English writers of British descent. He is honoured with prestigious awards like Padmashree in 1999 for his life time contribution to Indian English literature. He occupies an outstanding position among the contemporary English writers. He was also awarded Sahitya Akademi Award for his book, *Our Trees Still Grow in Dehra* in 1992. He is a free-lance writer. Ruskin Bond has faith in the power of humanism. In other words, his religious view is humanity. But his vision resembles to that of R. K. Narayan's cosmic vision regarding Bond's inclination to Indianess:

Bond's writings give the true flower of the Indian soul which T.D. Burnton calls 'national quintessence'. Bond is not 'exporter of India' or like R.P. Jhabvala a writer of shifting loyalties...sharing the literary temper of Henry Derozio and Aubrey, he gives his reader the true feel of Indian life he has seen or lived. His European blood seems to be fully naturalized with the Indian spirit. (Singh 1995: 70)

He is born on May, 19,1934 in Kasauli, Himachal Pradesh. His parents were Edith Clark and Aubrey Bond. Ruskin's father had been in the Royal Air Force from 1939 to 1944. His mother separated from his father and married with Punjabi Hindu Hari when he was eight. Ruskin Bond spent his childhood in Jamnagar (Gujarat) and Shimla. At the age of ten, he went to live at his grandmother's

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house in Dehradun after his father's death. In the later part of his life, he lived with his mother and step father. He completed his schooling from Bishop Cotton School in Shimla. He won several writing competitions in the school including the Irvin Divinity Prize. He graduated in 1950 from Bishop Cotton School, Shimla. He wrote one of his first short stories, *Untouchable*, at the age of sixteen in 1951. The same year he went to his aunt's house in Channel Island in the U.K. for the better prospects. He stayed there for two years. Here, he started writing his first novel, *The Room on The Roof*. It is a semi-autobiographical story of the orphaned Anglo Indian boy named Rusty who did various jobs for his livelihood. He won The John Llewellyn Rhys Prize in 1957 for this novel. He worked in a photo studio to get his book published. He used the advanced money to pay his sea passage to Bombay and settled in Dehradun.

At that time in India, hardly any publisher was around to encourage the budding writers. So, he had to concentrate on journalism during his struggle for a comfortable life. He wrote novellas, *Vagrants in The Valley*, *Delhi is Not Far*, and *A Flight of The Pigeons*. The movie, *Junoon* was made on his novel, *A Flight of The Pigeons*. In the mid-seventies, he wrote *The Sensualist*. It was published in Bombay magazine *Debonair* for the first time. In this magazine, it was serialized over four issues. His novel, *The Sensualist* was banned just after a few months as it was charged of its obscenity. But, Nissim Ezekiel and Vijay Tendulkar made a fervent appeal against the ban at that time. The Judge gave an honourable acquittal. In the eighties, with the project of publishing all his work Penguin India came forward. Hundreds of his stories, sketches, poems, essays and novellas were published. His two novels *The Room on The Roof* and *Vagrants in The Valley* were published in one volume in 1993. The novellas *A Handful of Nuts* was written in 1995. He has also edited several anthologies – *Classical Indian Love Stories and lyrics*, *Indian Railway Stories*, *Indian Ghost Stories*, and *Rupa Book of Ghost Stories*. Penguin India published Ruskin Bond's *Complete Stories and novels* in 1996 in the Omni bus volume. Thus, his fiction can be appreciated on the whole rather than in isolation. He has well defined the relationship between life and fiction:

Life is not a novel; it does not have the organization of the novel. People are not characters in a play. They refuse to confirm to the exigencies of a plot or a set of scenes. Some people become an integral part of our life; others are ships that pass in the night. (Aggrawal 2005:16)

Angry River is a children novel. It was published in the year 1972. The novel was published in India and England as well. It was translated into Dutch, French and Hindi. It is a story about a girl named Sita, who lives with her grandparents in an Island. Her grandfather was a good fisherman. Suddenly, her

grandmother fell ill for three days. Sita tries her best to make her grandmother feel better. But, it does not work. Her grandmother's situation becomes even worse. As a result, there is no other option than to admit her in hospital. Therefore, her grandfather takes her to hospital in a nearby town. Because of her illness, she looks much older than her grandfather. While going he instructs his granddaughter that if the water comes into the hut she must climb up the Peepul tree. It is a strong tree. It will not fall. And water cannot rise higher than this Peepul tree. In other words, this tree was the hope for people to survive during flood. Further he says that he will take the goats with him to sell to pay for good food and medicines for her sick grandmother.

Sita has a rag doll. It was made of her dadi's old and torn clothes. She named that doll-Mumta. She was deeply attached with that doll. Since there was no other child in that island to talk or play with, Sita talked with that doll and shared her secrets with it. Though she had no secret but she made a few of them. This doll never let Sita feel alone till it was with her. It served the purpose of a good companion. Sita expressed every small and great things of her life with it. She shared happiness and grief of her life. Ruskin Bond seems to convey through Sita that every human being needs someone to express his feelings and emotions. Sharing feelings is a part of human nature. Ruskin Bond has also shared all his bad and good times through his writings.

It was a monsoon time. So, the sky was dark with monsoon clouds. And it had rained all night before her grandparents left the island. The weather of that island changed. As if, a heavy hailstorm was to come there. She was alone. She got busy in her daily work like feeding the hens and sweeping her home. She could do all the work a boy could do. And sometime she did better than the boy. Because she was the only child of her parents. And her parents had gone to work in a factory in a city, nearly a hundred miles away. So, she lived with her grandparents. Her grandmother had taught her all the things that a girl should know. But her grandparents could neither read nor write. Sita, too could not read or write either. Here, Sita suffers owing to her family's ignorance and illiteracy. Suddenly, the flood entered her hut. But she did not notice. She noticed it when she went to check the food on the kitchen fire. She ran towards the safety of the Peepul tree. She climbed it and sat on one of its branches. There was a jet-black jungle crow's nest on the tree. And it was flying and cawing disconsolately though it was miserable. Its presence brought some cheer to Sita:

Better to have a crow for company than no one at all. (Bond 41, 2015)

The current of the river was strong. It floated everything with it whatever came in its way. Her doll appeared before her in that flood webbed in bushes. That

river flooded the villages and islands. The tree could not stand for so long. Soon the tree left its place in the earth and tilting, moved slowly forward, turning a little from side to side, dragging its roots along the ground. It was an old tree. Its seed had come with water of river fifty years back. But, somehow, she managed to survive in that flood at this moment. Here, Sita thought being rational. She thought that even the company of crow was better than nothing at all as her companion, Mumta was left in that hut in hurry. Drs. Travis Bradberry and Jean Greaves remarked on emotional intelligence:

Emotional Intelligence is the ability to recognise and understand emotions in yourself and others, the ability to use the awareness to manage the behaviour and relationships. (Bradberry and Greaves : Internet)

Sita noticed that the crow kept flying around the tree. And the bird was in terrible rage. The nest was still in the branches, but not for so long. She saw the eggs going one by one. The crow swooped low over the water, but there was nothing it could do. In a few moments, the nest had disappeared. The bird followed the tree for about fifty yards, as though hoping that something still remained in the tree. At last, it flew across the river until it was out of sight.

Soon she met with a boy named Krishan who was calling her from his small boat. He helped her slipping into his boat from the floating tree. Soon they made acquaintance with each other. The boat moved with the current of the river. Soon the boy offered Sita a mango. Though she never ate mango before she felt the flavour of the mango best. According to her it was like the nectar of gods:

For a few moment she forgot about the flood— All that mattered was the mango! (Bond : 55)

Krishan's company helped Sita in forgetting her grief. Now passing through forest villages, she comes to a place which is situated on top of the mountain. According to Sita, it is a safer place to escape from flood or bandits. There, she was offered food and shelter. Here she met an old farmer who had business in Shahganj. He offered to take her Shahganj. She was hoping that Krishan would accompany her. But, he said that he would wait in the village to meet his arriving family members. And she should meet her grandfather as soon as possible. As she climbed the farmer's bullock-cart, Krishan handed her his flute. It took a day and a night to reach Shahganj. There she saw her grandfather in the town area. And She asked him about her grandmother. Very soon she knew that she was no longer with them. She understood her grandfather's state of mind so she asked nothing furthermore. She narrated the whole incident to him. She also told him about the Peepul tree which was no more now. After sometime Sita and her grandfather

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returned to their village along with two goats. They rebuilt their mud hut with the support of big rock once again. Their trunk packed by Sita got saved . But the things kept inside like clothes and some spices got spoiled. Only hookah remained safe. Her grandfather told her about other floods and storms which he had experienced in his life.Sita planted a mango seed in the same root where the Peepul tree had stood. It would take many years to grow into a big tree:

But Sita liked to imagine sitting in its branches
One day, picking the mangoes straight from the
tree and feasting on them all day. (78)

Slowly the rains came to an end. The flood-waters had receded, and in the villages people were beginning to return to the land again. And they sow crops for winter months. Now Sita again got herself engaged in her household chores. Once she was spreading clothes on the rocks to dry. There she found a little wooden toy— a coloured peacock. Perhaps this toy would speak to her as Mumta had spoken to her. As soon as she picked up the toy in her hands she heard a flute-music. But she paid no attention as she thought that it was her imagination. Again she heard the music and this time it was much nearer to her ear. So, she looked up and saw the boy Krishan. He came and asked her about his flute. She replied that she had his flute but she did not know how to play it. He assured her that he would teach her how to play it.The story ends with the conversation between them. Sita said:

Sometimes the river is angry, and sometimes it is
kind,"Krishan replies; we are part of the river, deep
and strong, beginning in the mountains and ending
in the sea. (83)

Thus the story of the novel, *Angry River* explains how Sita overcomes the tough situation which came one after another in her life. Like Sita Ruskin Bond has also faced many problems one after another in his life. His parents got separated when he was eight years old. Sita also lived with her grandparents without her parents. He lost his father when he was ten years old as Sita lost his grandmother. His mother got married with another a Hindu man named Hari. At that time he wanted to be with his mother but he was paid no attention. He felt very alone. But he recovered from all that tough situation and emerged as a good human being and a writer. Usha Bande has divided her characters into two different groups – "those who fail to adjust with the harsh realities of life and those who compromise. Sita does not fail to adjust herself with the situation; she compromises with it." (Bande 1988 : 15) It is a fact that we forget our grief and fight with the present situations when the matter comes to death. Here, the same thing happens with Sita. She forgets her grief and fights intelligently with the situation. Moreover, she enables herself to adjust with everyone, who were with her in her bad times. Because, she

realises that being emotional will not work here. She herself will have to face the problem strongly.

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