

Ruskin Bond's Writings : A Study in Human Emotions

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Abstract : Ruskin Bond, an Indian author of British descent, is the most loved one among the contemporary Indian short story writers. He composes his stories on the basis of his own experiences as it is traced in his works. Bond's stories are about the thirst of love, human relation, profundity and flux of emotions. He possesses the art of understanding the people, their social backdrops, their psyche and knits all of them in writing in such an interesting way that shows the touch of excellence and humanity in his compositions. His collection of stories sharply focuses on the ongoing incidences and explores the subaltern Indian voices with a touch of a sociologist and depicts their characters in the tone of a behavioural psychologist. Usually short-stories offer a limited medium to emotionally engage a reader but Bond's stories remind us that we should always be in touch with the child present inside all of us. This paper is an attempt to analyse the common human feelings regarding longing for love, care and a state of equality for every human being including physically challenged person who is either ignored or extra-sympathised which separates the society into two categories. The mentioned stories in this paper throw light on this issue. Besides, call for non-negligence, betterment of life and expectation for a stranger to come and set free from the present sufferings, and sorrows of a lost, but unconfessed love is explored in this paper.

Keywords : Interpersonal encounter; human relations; emotional protest; undefined longings and human suffering.

Emotions are ancient mechanism that mobilise us quickly with important interpersonal encounters. They have a primal aspect and a motivational guiding along the path of survival. (Internet)

Ruskin Bond, the modern Indian English writer of British descent is considered to be one of the most unforgettable figures of Indian literature. His adaptable, natural and graceful style has positioned him among the most popular Indian short-story writers. His first semi autobiographical novel *The Room on the Roof* fetched him the prestigious John Llewellyn Rhys Memorial Prize in 1957. He has composed over a hundred short-stories, essays and novellas and more than thirty books for children in his literary career of forty years. 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 for *Our Trees Still Grow in Dehra* and the Padma Shree in 1999 for his contributions to children's literature.

Bond describes the complete estrangement and carelessness experienced

by his characters. They are grasped 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.

His collections *The Night Train at Deoli*, *The Eyes Have It*, *Angry River*, and other short-stories including thirty stories, replicate various themes of love, care, virtue, courage, beauty of nature, consideration and super humanism. The stories of Bond are about people and their social background with which every Indian can co-relate themselves. His stories lead the reader into his (Bond's) own psyche. The stories revolve around the narrator's meetings with him. The untold promise between the speaker and the stranger is so strong that the slightest movement of thoughtfulness and gentleness of the stranger strikes into the mind of the narrator for a long time:

Yet I was prepared to sit there for almost any length of time just to listen to her talking. Her voice had the sparkle of mountain stream. As soon as left the train, she would forget our brief encounter; but it would stay with me for the rest of the journey and for some time after. (*Mindscape* 73)

The narrator is so much fascinated by her that he is lost in the memory of their brief encounter unless a third co-passenger interferes with a question:

The man who had entered the compartment broke into my reverie. "You must be disappointed", he said. I'm not nearly as attractive a travelling companion as the one who just left. (73)

Bond has shown a theme of protest also. His story "The Eyes Have It" is actually a comment on seeing. At that time of journey, the narrator was completely blind yet he tries his best and pretends like a normal person who can see because he doesn't want anybody's sympathy just because of his blindness:

I wondered if I would be able to prevent her from discovering that I was blind. Provided I keep to my seat, I thought, it should not be too difficult. (71)

Sympathy is common in human nature. But being sympathised for a reasonable or an unreasonable matter causes a feeling of negligence, insecurity and undefined guilt that the narrator doesn't require. In order to hide his hard reality he flatters the girl that she has a pale look while it is not expected from a person whose eyes are sensitive to light and darkness :

"You have an interesting face", I remarked. I was becoming quite daring, but it was a safe remark. Few girls can resist flattery. She laughed pleasantly – a clear ringing laugh. It's nice to be told I have an interesting face. I'm tired of people telling me I have a pretty face. (72)

"The Eyes Have It" shows us the power of inner eyes which has played an important role. Both the narrator and the girl were blind but it was unknown to each other. During their journey they talk regarding common matters. When she was asked about the scenery of the outside, she returned the question to him. Actually they both have the same mentality but through their inner power they carried on their conversation. From this they easily visualize their surroundings, their likings-dislikings.

The story takes an ironical twist and ends with a shocking note when the new co-passenger who just boards the compartment after the departure of the girl tells him about the blindness of the girl. Readers find a sense of humour after knowing the fact that the girl, too has lost her visual ability, plays an intelligence game and the narrator who pretends against the boldness of her response, gets shocked after acknowledging because there was no necessity of pretence while they both were suffering from the same disaster.

Lively description of nature, human relation and witty humour are the other important characteristics of his writing. Warmth and care that Ruskin Bond's child protagonist feels on the platform of Ambala Railway Station is beautifully depicted in "The Woman on Platform 8". Arun, a twelfth year boy who was all alone on the way to boarding school meets a woman. The lonely and hopeless child finds an affectionate mother in her as she treats him like her son and offers him feast and refreshment. Further she makes him much comfortable by saying that she likes strangers :

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 stranger. But she didn't ask me about my family or where I lived, and I didn't ask her where she lived. I accepted her for what she had been to me – a kind and gentle woman who gave sweets to a lonely boy on a railway platform. (*The Best of Ruskn Bond* 45)

Profundity and flux of emotion reach its apex in his another famous story "The Night Train at Deoli", told in first person narrative. It is about a college student

reflecting on his annual visits to his grandmother's place at Dehradun. On one of the trips he notices a girl who was selling baskets at Deoli, a small and separated railway station of the Tarai. Their first meeting was not more than buying a basket, but the poor girl had left her impression on the narrator with her troubled yet graceful and dignified looks. The next meeting was a joyous reunion. The boy was so much fascinated that he felt an impulse and responsibility to take her to Delhi. When his train arrives at the platform, he was looking for the girl and then she smiled at him. This act of hers increased the charm between the two.

This was the first important but peculiar experience for the narrator so he himself didn't understand why he felt for her like this and how to articulate his thought in her presence, but they never meet after that, nor he brings himself to solve the mystery of her sudden disappearance though he had spent a day at Deoli to inquire about that girl. Whenever he passes through Deoli, it always reminds him of the girl who silently stole his heart:

As Deoli platform receded, I decided that one day I would have to break journey there, spend a day in the town, make enquiries and find the girl who had stolen my heart with nothing but a look from her dark, impatient eyes. With this thought I consoled myself throughout my last term in college. I went to Dehra again in the summer and when, in the early hours of the morning, the night train drew into Deoli station, I looked up and down the platform for signs of the girl, knowing I wouldn't find her but hoping just the same. (*Higher Secondary English Selections* 229-30)

Emotion has no such definition that may set limitations for human heart. We find a co-relation between the two stories of Bond. In "The Night Train at Deoli", the narrator was attracted by the girl and wanted to take her to Delhi along with him, but his unexpressed love doesn't work on the girl and their second reunion proved to be their last meeting. Again "The Eyes Have It" presents the narrator fascinated by the voice of a girl who joins him from Rohna to Sharanpur. He has tried to touch her hair and her voice seemed like a sparkle of mountain stream. He wishes to know about the looks and physical appearance of the girl co-passenger as at that time the narrator was completely blind.

Hope is also one of the themes of Ruskin Bond's writings. If we go through *The Angry River*, we find a girl child, who wishes to meet someone superhuman who may take her to a different world of joy from her lovely island. Emotional protest, human suffering and undefined hope, and expectation for a better life are the points

of discussion in the collection of India's most loved story writer. The Room on the Roof beautifully portrays the ups and downs of Rusty, a sixteen year boy, the main protagonist who lives with his English guardian after death of his parents. He, being unhappy with the strict rules and regulations of his guardian, decides to breakfree, makes many friends and starts living there. In this course of time he discovers that life is not so smooth and he has to face a number of challenges that are waiting for him. All these short-stories and novels of Ruskin Bond vividly replicate the profundity and flux of human emotions.

Ruskin Bond's ability to squeeze infinite emotions in a few words is amazingly beautiful. The incomparable way in which he portrays the unexciting and dull things in our everyday lives into something is really interesting and fascinates not only the common readers, but also the whole literary world.

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