

A Critical Study of Representative Fictional Works

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Abstract: *This paper focuses on perusal innumerable symbols used by Ruskin Bond in his fictional works. In his chronicle, the stunningly interlaced symbols flow expectedly and their impression can be felt on the typoscripts as they act as an empathy between man, God and nature. Probing deep in his works it can be distinguished that his entire corpus is embroidered with rich symbols and imagery, characters, objects, places and incidents. Ruskin Bond born on 19 May 1934 is an Indian author of British descent. He lives with his adopted family in Landour, Mussoorie, India. He lives with his adopted family in Landour, Mussoorie, India. The Indian Council for Child Education has recognized his role in the growth of children's literature in India. He was awarded the Sahitya Academy Award in 1992 for *Our Trees Still Grow in Dehra*, his novel in English. He was awarded the Padma Shri in 1999 and the Padma Bhushan in 2014 All art is affectionate symbolism. The symbol is as old as the world of fairy tales and myths man is a symbolic being by nature; human language, myth, perception, religion, science and art, are symbolic in some elementary sense. The world symbol has been derived from Latin word 'Symbolon' which implies taken insignia and a means of identification.*

Keywords: Symbolism, Ruskin Bond, Human mind, Nature symbols

I. INTRODUCTION

The symbol is as old as the world of fairy tales and myths man is a symbolic being by nature; human language, myth, perception, religion, science and art, are symbolic in some elementary sense. The word symbol has been derived from Latin word 'Symbolon' which implies taken insignia and a means of identification. A.M. Whitehead defines this process: "*Symbols become function of human mind, when some component of its experience elicits consciousness, beliefs, emotion, usages respecting other components of its experience.*"

Symbols can be divided into two main categories – Tradition and Personal. Traditional symbols are stock parts, which have been in general used under certain arbitrary chosen system. Whereas an artist employs personal symbols to convey his complex impression and units of association, the author's meaning, the mystery of life. Symbols are so naturally woven with human consciousness that they automatically spring up in the train of thought. The pioneer of this field is Meclarine who for the first time gave out the symbolic doctrine in his poetry. In English poetry William Blake is hailed as the chief exponent of this new literary device. Symbolism became a sort of international movement by 1899. Emerson, Poe, Melville and Whiteman are pure symbolist. Symbolism in these writers is a governing principle; it is not a stylistic device but a point of view.

Ruskin bond writes about nature and ordinary people and their daily lives. His stories are written in a simple, lucid and engaging style. He writes as if the incident is unfolding right Infront of his eyes. He has written all his books giving the firsthand account. His first book, *The Room on the Roof*, which he wrote at the age of 17, was a semi-autobiographical story with Rusty being the protagonist. It was based on his friends and the time he spent in a rented room, when he was in Dehradun. Ruskin Bond is not a symbolist in the manner of these writers, he does not use symbols for the sake of symbols as such, but they are a natural part of his narrative skill. One can obviously feel the impact of certain characters, incidents, plot, speeches, places and objects etc. beyond their literal perception. Some of them frequently recur in different contexts at different places and finally they act as unifying agency. They unite man to man, to God and to nature, without evolving any novel theory of symbols or belonging to a particular school of symbolism; Bond has ingeniously used symbols to achieve intensity and compactness of theme. His symbols can be broadly classified in two categories: Nature Symbols and Worldly Symbols. Nature symbols can be sub classified as:

1. Location or background (place) – India, Himalayas, hill station, platform, forest, bazaar, city etc.
2. Seasons – rain, storm, spring, mist.
3. Flora – Trees, bushes, weeds, flowers, garden.
4. Fauna – Animals like – Panther, Tiger, Jackal, Lizard, Elephant, Snake, Leech, pigeon, Crow.
5. Elements – Water, soil, sunlight, moon beam.

Worldly symbols are :-

1. Objects like – Umbrella, kite, train, doll, lamp etc.
2. Character and characteristics traits.
3. Speeches and gestures.
4. Plots and incidents.

‘The Cherry Tree’ Symbolizes invisible power to exist. The great banyan tree is a world in miniature densely populated with small birds and insects. For Bond himself trees are an over seeing power to kindle and restrain. He says:

“The trees stand watch over mayday-to-day life... they are my best critics. They are the guardians of my conscience.”

He visualized different attributes with different trees. For example, peepul tree in Indian Mythology is most sacred, its heart shaped leaves symbolize the physique of Lord Krishna, broad at the shoulder and tapering down to a very slim waist. The fact that Bond is an Indian writer living in India and writing for the last five decades about her people and culture denotes that he owes something special for this land or India means something larger than a subcontinent. He feels that India is an atmosphere as much as it is a land and it has cast an indelible impression on his mind. Rusty, The hero of *The Room on the Roof* falls under the spell of India inspite of Mr. Harrison’s imperialistic vitriolic discouragement. Here India is a land of longing an ultimate place of love and happiness. It also stands for unity in diversity, harmony in discord and familiarity in strangers. It is the ‘home’ for all the people of the world. Rusty compresses his relationship with the land:

“I have always feel that India is my land.”

The great Himalayas are the symbol of eternity of spiritual enlightenment of the universal belongingness and of harmony with nature. Real India lies in the Himalayas; Bond finds them good for writers, as they have been a perpetual source of inspiration for ages. Mountains stand for the sublimity and magnanimity which man can only aspire for. They are the invincible spirit inspiring man to remain unmoved by storm and disaster. Beside these connotative suggestiveness mountains exude deep emotive influence upon the psychology of man. Once a person lives with mountains for any length of time he develops a sense of belongingness with them. The writer hero of the *novella Delhi is Not Far* experiencing the great translucent force of the mountains. He says:

“I don’t think that a man can be complete until he has lived in hills... There is something about a mountain that adds new dimension to life”.

A person feels change in air and altitude in the mountain that inspire him to act and think differently. They are not meant as the favourite resorts for heat oppressed urbanites, rather, they pour tranquillity and spiritual bliss into innocent hearts. The mountain serves as a powerful background in many of his stories and plots. They act as mother symbol too. They are the great reservoirs of primeval innocence, a peculiar feature of Bond’s character. The mountain is free from the superficiality of the mechanized society. Therefore, people of the mountain are as fresh as red earth, as pure as the snow and as pretty as the flower. The protagonist of *The Sensualist* forfeits his ego in the mountain when a hill woman completely disarms him. He realizes:

“Hers was the overpowering innocence of the mountains... We who have grown the innocence of mountain people, because we cannot understand the innocence of mountains.”

On the other hand, they nurture a belief, a quality of mind, which has given birth to some fears and superstitions among hill folk. But on the other hand, they teach them the art of living and adaptability another important feature, landscape, which is generally carved out for scenic background, appears in a prominent role in his stories. The vivid description are not without functional value. They land to the plot a proper understanding of the terrain, which helps in making it meaningful as we see in the novel *The Room on the Roof*. Mr. Mohanty points out:

“Rusty’s room always remains incomplete Without a description of surroundings or somi’s house without a proper Description of path and terrain, this also comes in sharp contrast to the house in which Rusty lived With his guardian.”

Mr. Harrison’s house has plotted palm symbolic captivity and a feeling of discomfort, which Rusty find unbearable. On the contrary somi’s houses is:

*“A small flat house covered completely by a crimson bougainvillea creeper
The garden was a mass of marigolds, which had spring up everywhere,
Even in the cracks at the sides Of verandah steps.”*

The cool and spacious rooms having very little furniture reflect the hospitality of the owner. One room has been decorated with many pictures on the wall and the large picture of Guru Nanak in the centre. The serenity of Nana’s face can be discerned in the room and also on the face of Somi. The description of maiden on the night Rusty rebelled against his Guardian and felt to the city is highly

symbolic. The dark and desolate Maiden reveals Rusty's own sense of loneliness. The reference to beggars and dogs further intensifies his miserable predicament. The narrator says:

*“Those who sleep late wake first. Hunger and pain lengthen the night
and so beggars and dogs are the last to see the stars; hunger and pain hasten the awakening, and
beggars and dogs are the first to see the sun.”*

In the novel *The Sensualist* Bond creates an atmosphere intensely charged with awe and suspense. The very opening scene settles down the tone of the plot. Dreary rocks with steep hills, short and almost colourless Grass, an eagle circling high overhead and the burning sun – constitute a weird landscape where the traveller narrator is driven by some unseen force. His thirst and exhaustion deeply suggest the insatiable sensualist and virility of the protagonist. Sensualist's cave devoid of any streak of light reveals his internal darkness:

*“The pine forest is a purple blanket on the mountain... I must have
Taken the luring path.”*

The barren landscape powerfully assumes the role of chorus. It connotes the wrong choice of sensualist. Sudden appearance of a patch of emerald grass at the traveller's feet and a silver line of fresh water trickling through it reveals the truth that life springs out of rocks. Feverish nightlife of casino and pubs added a little fun and romance to this large bouquet of nature. Dehra of fifties and sixties as celebrated by the author is altogether different from the present hectic one. Mussoorie, the queen of Garhwal Himalayas, in a place of serenity and divine splendour and of interaction with God. Both places act as mother symbols. They stand for the sharp contrast to the hectic life of densely populated cities and towns. An apparent distrust of urban life is a major theme of Bond's stories. The only city that figures in his fiction is Delhi and it associates inauspicious forebodings and happenings. The fatal car crash in which Meena Kapoor were travelling down from Dehra to Delhi. Mr Lal an admirer of Bond points out a comparison between Hardy's Wessex and Delhi, he says:

*“Delhi looms in the distance like the Industrial cities in Thomas Hardy's Wessex, never entering
the arena of activities, yet foreboding no good Oppressive in Hardy's later work... Delhi is
instrumental in snatching her away from the narrator.”*

Shamli, a small station at the foot of Shivalik will exude a weird loneliness. Shamli is a place where time appears to have stopped moving. When the hero gets down at Shamli station, he feels strange as there was no one to collect his ticket. In the sensualist Bond describes about the divine importance of the trees and bad spirits too. In the folklore of India, Mango is the wish fulfilling tree, Deodar in Himalayas is a sacred tree Bond personally feels that its beauty and majesty represent creation in its noblest form. Oak symbolizes roughness and sturdiness. Pines become musical when the wind softly passes through them. Bush holds earth tightly and prevents soil erosion; hence it stands for togetherness – weeds, notwithstanding their ragged looks and sharp pricks signify victory of mind over sensual pleasure, the protagonist in *The Sensualist* asserts:

*“And yet this weed which grows all about me, has made Life tolerable. It has so soothed me that in
My fantasies, I can experience all those Sensual pleasure without my miserable Body having to do
anything!”*

Sensualist's predicament converts weeds into sensual delights. It does not symbolize his victory over sensory impulses, it does not fulfil his renunciation; it is simply another form of placing his ego. The protagonist of *The Sensualist* says:

*"Perhaps, perhaps. But nothing else, Human or divine, could help me.
I had only one talent, you know Misuse a gift and you destroy it.
And when I lost mine. I turned my back on the world and it stood for.
But the world isn't exclusively a place For the pursuit of sensual pleasure."*

II. CONCLUSION

Besides objects and places, Ruskin Bond's characters also transport profounder meaning than their appearance and by their exquisite charm of personality they keep on persistent in the mind of reader. The stranger lady in *The Woman on Platform No. 8* is a mother icon and her simplicity and understanding of a boy's psychology is highly evocative and symbolic. While talking, the frequent references of snake, mongoose, ghost and lizard, gave her a bizarre touch. Furthermore, the use of dark colours in her rooms with the bright reflection of red, yellow, green glass windows also brings the eerie feeling. Inclusive, Ruskin Bond's world is full of simplicity and innocence, with very little urban influence. To a great extent his characters symbolize perfect communion with nature and her creatures. In Bond's writings, colours also signify diverse moods and tones: the colour red invokes passion. It also signifies the elements of life like the rain and red earth. In several stories the ponytails of the young girls tied up in bright red ribbon indicates freshness and cleanliness. In many of Ruskin Bond's stories, accidents happen and are symbolically important indicating something extreme in life. In the novel *Whether* deliberately or automatically, symbols are part of Ruskin Bond's entire literary corpus. He has extensively used nature and worldly symbols and has tried to convey a evocative message in his writings. In literary terms, Ruskin Bond is a symbolist by virtue. In *The sensualist* the portrayal of the protagonist self-destruction, Gripping, erotic, even brutal, explores the demon that lies in every human being. The book encounters the powerful and bold account of the pleasures and perils that attend a young man's coming age. Ruskin Bond displays his Felicity in exploring the dark aspects of the human psyche.

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