

Realism And Utopia In The Romantic Picture Of The Himalayan Foothills In The Select Works Of Ruskin Bond

Shovan Dhibar

Research Scholar

Visva Bharati University

Birbhum, West Bengal

Abstract

The beautiful mountain regions of northern India are shadowed by the vast peaks of the Himalayas and carpeted with lush blankets of dense green forests. In Ruskin Bond's works we find almost a Wordsworthian view of nature and simple common people of these Himalayan Foothills. Ruskin Bond, "Our resident Wordsworth in prose" (India Today), develops such a truthful majestic picture of the Himalayan Foothills such as Dehradun, Mussoorie, Shimla and its surroundings that one could easily identify himself or herself with the grief and joy, simple lifestyle and hardship and can go through an adventure through the mysterious world of the hills, woods and its various types of animals. The serenity of the place brings a peaceful calm nature in the inside and outside of the people. Hence, Bond's true love for nature has been portrayed. A main feature of Bond's stories is his acute responsiveness to nature, the great affinity between trees and man. A minute detailing makes these pictures vivid and colorful with a genuine feeling for the natural world which has somewhat of a Wordsworthian quality about it. A mystic, a mysterious nature is waiting to engulf with a strong subjective perception of the author. Being close to nature the people are fresh and stainless though in some places a rude reality comes and interrupts the normalcy. The characters are taken from the all spheres of contemporary life. Under the utopian setting some happenings call up the duty of the real life.

Therefore the aim lies in discovering how the reality and romance go hand in hand through the lives of the people and through the mystic nature of these hill areas and how Bond wants to create his own world of utopia with all good, all simple, all beneficial and all divine.

Keywords: Romanticism, realism, utopia, eco-criticism, society in northern India etc.

Introduction

Ruskin Bond was born on May 19, 1934 at Kasauli, Punjab State Agency in British India. His father was Aubrey Alexander Bond who was an English tutor at the Ram Vilas Palace in Jamnagar until Bond was five or six. There was actually not any easy relationship with his mother Edith Clarke Bond. Little Bond did not go to England for his study and attended Bishop

Cotton School at Shimla. Here he met Lord Mountbatten. At the age of ten he lost his father. It was unfortunate for him but he continued his education there at Shimla until 1950. Then at the age of 16 he left this school and went to his mother's elder sister Emily in England. Now while he was staying here in England he realized how much love he bore in him for India. At the age of seventeen he penned down his first novel *The Room on the Roof* to earn money with the intention to return India, his wonderland. It was a grand success and Bond returned India with that money and placed himself at Dehradun in 1953 when he was twenty one years old. He set out his journey as a writer keeping in mind his literary mentors such as Emily Bronte, Rudyard Kipling and Rabindranath Tagore. The span of his literary career was more than 50 years and on the process he produced over hundreds of short stories, few novels, autobiographies, essays and many more which enriched the children literature. Many collections of short stories are there among which *The Night Train at Deoli*, *Dust on the Mountain*, *A Face in the Dark and other Hauntings*, *Time Stops at Shamli* are noteworthy. He has written two autobiographies—*Scenes from a Writer's Life* (1998) and *The Lamp is Lit* (1999).

Now he lives with his adopted family in Landour, Mussoorie, India. He received the Sahitya Academy Award in 1992 for his collection of short stories *Our Trees Still Grow in Dehra* and for his other published works in English. He was awarded the Padma Shri in 1999 and Padma Bhushan in 2014.

The following discussion will be on the topic mentioned above in the abstract. While I venture to discuss the romantic view of the literature and life of the eminent author, I have to show how reality and utopian life view will be there in the author's frame of writing at the same time. Under the utopian setting some happenings call up the duty of the real life. In "A Job Well Done" the narrator says, 'My mother seemed just a little bit afraid of the major. How can we be afraid of those we love? It was a question that puzzled me then and puzzles me still.' A sense of the realistic rude society gradually grips the narrator's psyche. Bansi, a tongawallah, declares the coming of the new age in "The Wish" when he says, 'Times are changing, memsahib. Do you know that there is now a taxi—a motor car—competing with the tongas of Dehra?' A wonderful nature is there also in "Most Beautiful" with a slow unfoldment of the harsh reality that deformity is a sin in our society. But there are a few like the narrator with whom the society moves from the darkness to light, ignorance to bliss and from cruelty to kindness. Ruskin Bond is at his best in evoking a mood of nostalgia for the past sights and scenes of boyhood, of the pangs and pathos of the unforgiving time, as in "Coming Home to Dehra" and "My Father's Trees in Dehra". Now I intend to name two stories on which the detailed description will be made. They are "All Creatures Great and Small" and "Coming Home to Dehra" and those stories are the platform of my argument.

“All Creatures Great and Small”

“All Creatures Great and Small” is a wonderful story by Ruskin bond. The story is set in two towns—Dehra and Saharanpur. It is a first person narrative and therefore very touchy. The narrator is a boy who is living there with his grandfather in Dehra. They have a menagerie of a monkey, a tortoise, and a python, a Great Indian Hornbill, Toto-a monkey, a ticket collector, Aunt Mabel and cowherd boys. A cinema hall is there in the town. This wonderful story declares the first touch of romanticism of the author. The forest, the ropeway, the carriage and the river adjoining Dehra have been described with ease and simple lucid manner.

“During the rains, when the river flowed strong and deep, it was impossible to get across except on a hand-operated ropeway; but in the dry months, the horse went splashing through, the carriage wheels churning through clear mountain water. If the horse found the going difficult, we removed our shoes, rolled up our skirts or trousers, and waded across.”

The characters are growing with a kind of intimacy with the natural objects. The monkey Toto, tortoise, python and other make a significant mark in our heart. The natural habitat of these animals is decreasing day by day and so the numbers of the animals are. The matter is serious. As a result of the grandfather has made a habit of bringing new animals whenever he goes outside. He cannot bear the pain of those animals in almost starving homeless condition. So he brings them in his own house. In a plain sentence we may conclude that the earth will no longer be the suitable place for the animal kingdom as well as for the human. Human beings are responsible for this. They ignore the forest and the animals. Now-a-days we can see the major climactic change around the globe. The ice has started to melt in arctic zones; the earth is getting warmer day by day; many unknown diseases spread in full swing; death by cancer, heart problem, lungs problem, kidney failure etc. is increasing. All these are the result of deforestation. It disturbs the whole eco-system. With a delicate touch of romantic narration of the story the author intends to open up our mind so that our conscience will wake up and we start to respect the forest, animal and other major component of the earth. This is the reality which Bond underlies in this story. With this the nature lover author voices a dream of his own of a beautiful India where peace takes the upper hand; normalcy is seen everywhere; love of nature would come once again in man; various social diseases are vanished. This is actually a kind of Ramarajya (the kingdom of Rama, the epic hero) Bond wants. He validates this thought in presenting the minute detailing of the relation between the boy and the animals, between the grandfather and the animals and between the boy and the group of cowherd boys. The story concludes with:

“Ramu and I spent many long summer afternoons at the pond. I still remember him with affection, though we never saw each other again after I left Dehra. He would not read or write, so we were unable to keep in touch. And neither his people, nor mine, knew of our friendship. The buffaloes and frogs had been our only confidants. They had

accepted us as part of their own world, their muddy but comfortable pond. And when I left Dehra, both they and Ramu must have assumed that I would return again like the birds.”

“Coming Home to Dehra”

Another wonderful story “Coming Home to Dehra” is set in three cities—Dehra, Shimla and Delhi. Here once again the narration is done in the first person resulting in the attractive weaving of the plot in such a small boundary of short story. Major characters are the narrator, narrator’s father and mother, headmaster at Shimla boarding school, step-father, step-brother, a tonga-wallah (the man who drive the horse-drawn carriages) and the teacher who informed the narrator of his father’s death. It is train journey from Shimla to Dehra. On its way the narrator is nostalgic and with a series of pictures presents his dear loving father. His father was working in Delhi and sometimes later transferred to Kolkata. He got malaria and jaundice there. He remembered how the boarding school teacher informed him the sad news of his father’s demise and how he hated the headmaster for the first time in his life for not returning his father’s letters to him and how he lived a utopian life with his father. Now the train stops at Dehra. The narrator steps down from the train but no one is there to attend him at the station. So he takes a tonga (a horse drawn carriage) and goes straight to his grandmother’s house. His grandfather was dead and the grandfather has been living there alone. She loves the boy (the narrator) very much and accompanies him to the narrator’s mother’s house. He finds no one in the house except his six month old brother and a male housekeeper.

“I wasn’t prepared for a baby brother, least of all a baby half-brother.”

The grandmother goes back her home keeping the boy there. He is informed of the step father with amazement. Next day his mother and new father arrive at the house from their hunting trip. The new father’s attitude towards him seems cordial at first but soon it changes into a machine like manner.

“My stepfather barely noticed me. The first thing he did on coming into the house was to pour himself a whisky and soda”

The step father keeps himself away from the boy so that any conversation will be there. The boy narrator is doing exactly the same thing.

“My stepfather, a local businessman, was ready to put up with me provided I did not get in the way. And, in a different way, I was ready to put up with him, provided he left me alone.”

Here the boy has been provided a single room of his own which he finds a good thing among all the hazards. While staying there alone in his allotted room he recollects the golden memory of his father once again. Tears roll down of his cheeks as feels really sorry for him and missing him

very much. The real grief and the real picture of the narrator's circle are presented with a sympathetic touch. The theme of the second marriage and the result of it are also critically projected. Here we may feel touch of the little boy Pip in *David Copperfield*. Within this little span of short story Bond successfully captures the self-centered world of a step father and the pathetic condition of a mother at the same time. The world is very much pragmatic, mundane and thereby insipid. But during all this, the beautiful northern India with its natural beauty has been captured with almost Wordsworthian serenity. The following passage from the story will justify this:

“Dehra was always a good place for trees. The Valley soil is very fertile, the rainfall fairly heavy; almost everything grows there, if given the chance, The roads were lined with neem and mango trees, eucalyptus, Persian lilac, jacaranda, amaltas (laburnum) and many others. In the gardens of the bungalows were mangoes, litchis and guavas; sometimes jackfruit and papaya. I did not notice all these trees at once; I came to know as the time passed.”

The description of the trees with their colors and shapes is so live that we almost reach there; we can touch them, feel them and breathe the fresh cold air. Once again the juxtaposition of romance and reality has happened. But here in this story the presentation of the real life is more than the portrayal of the romantic world. Once again there is a wish to have kind of world where the step fathers are behaving well as real father to their boys. Everything must be happening in proportionate manner.

Conclusion

Thus Ruskin Bond has proved as an artist who can manage to create a situation in which romanticism and reality go hand in hand. Throughout the stories he evokes the mood of nostalgia keeping well in mind the abstract unconscious efforts of the readers to make his or her own world of utopia where everything is good, just and in proper order. As an inhabitant of the great Himalayan foothills Bond finds it easier to mix up with the characters in the stories and therefore the presentation is seems almost visible, felt and understood. The natural beauty naturally nurtures a simplistic attitude towards the life in him. It is obvious that staying in England creates a pragmatic sense in him which actually pains him and he misses more the serene atmosphere of Dehra, Shimla and Saharanpur—the cities of the northern India. He has felt a kind of dilemma between being a pragmatic human or a romantic one. He has been actually searching for the glorious past where he was happy with his father. And it underlies in most of his works where he is continually seeking the utopian world through romantic nature and real world of man.

References

- Albert, Edward. *History of English Literature*. 1923. Calcutta: Oxford University Press, 2000. Print.

- Bond, Ruskin. “Coming Home to Dehra.” *Our Trees Still Grow in Dehra*. New Delhi: Penguin Books India, 1991. Print.
- ... “All Creatures Great and Small.” *Our Trees Still Grow in Dehra*. New Delhi: Penguin Books India, 1991. Print.
- https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ruskin_Bond
- Earnshaw, Steven. *Beginning Realism*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2010. Print.
- Iyappan, V. and Dr. V. Ganaprakasam. “The Denizens and Inseparable Relationship of Nature in the Works of Ruskin Bond.” *APJR* VOL:1 Issue: XIV November 2014 pp. 184-188