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RUSKIN BOND AS A SHORT STORY WRITER : A CRITICAL STUDY

A THESIS SUBMITTED TO
SAURASHTRA UNIVERSITY, RAJKOT
FOR
THE DEGREE
OF
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY
IN
ENGLISH

BY
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(Registration No. 3049, 08TH December, 2003)

DECEMBER – 2005.

PH.D.
THESIS

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M. D. BHATT

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CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that work embodied in this thesis entitled "RUSKIN BOND AS A SHORT WRITER : A CRITICAL STUDY" has been carried out by SHRI MANISH D. BHATT under my direct guidance and supervision. I further declare that the work done and presented in this thesis is original and independent.

I further certify that the work has not been submitted either partly or fully to any other University or Institute for the award of any Degree.

Date : 09 : 12 : 2005.

Place : RAJKOT

Signature of Guide

Dr. K. H. MEHTA

Dr. A. K. SINGH
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Rajkot

DECLARATION

I hereby declare that the research work presented in this thesis is prepared by me after studying various references. The description and narrations found therein are entirely original. Therefore, I declare them authentically as original. Moreover, I am responsible for the opinions and the and other details found in this thesis.

I declare that this thesis is my original work and has not been submitted to any University or Institute for the award of any Degree.

Date : 09.12.2005.

Place : Rajkot.

Signature of Candidate

MANISH D. BHATT

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When I thought of undertaking doctoral research work, the initial problems, as happens in case of research scholars, was to find a relevant, if not an absolutely untrodden, subject for it. I felt that I would do some work on short stories by RUSKIN BOND. I discussed this idea with my Guide Prof. K. H. Mehta, who also encouraged me to work on RUSKIN BOND. Thus, I decided to work on Short Stories by RUSKIN BOND. I registered myself as a Ph.D. student in 2003. Though it took more than what I had initially thought of in completing the work, yet the present work as it is, could be a reality because of unstinted support, guidance and co-operation of quite a few people around me. It is my duty to express my sense of sincere gratitude to all of them.

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- Manish D. Bhatt

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CHAPTER - I

INTRODUCTION

Part-A

ORIGIN AND DEVELOPMENT OF THE SHORT STORY

The short story, as it is considered technically today, has been a very challenging form of literature, as it is a highly complex form of literature. Though it is one of the oldest forms of literature and has remained the most popular form since its beginning, it is still a highly misunderstood form of literature. Secondly, though the form has been very popular among the common readers, it has remained a critically neglected form of writing so far. Even today, it awaits serious critical attention.

Stories are as old as humanity. They have been a perennial source of delight and instruction to humanity since the time immemorial. As a form, it has evolved in the course of a long period and passed through the early forms like tale, myth, fairy tale, fable, parable, legend, ballad and so on. However, the short story, as it is formally and technically known today, came to be accepted as an independent genre of literature in 1933 only.

The OED supplement of 1933 defined the term 'short story' as designating a particular kind of literary product, then it gained formal admittance into the English vocabulary. (Reid : 1977 : 1).

Literature is traditionally classified as prose and verse, lyric and epic being the principal forms of literature in verse, while prose literature includes forms like, essay, novel and short story among others. All these forms of literature have some elements in common. Literature aims at giving delight and teaching. Its chief function is to please. It deals with human feelings, as man is at its centre.

A short story is a kind of prose fiction, which has grown up beside the novel, and it has its own important and recognized place in literature today. It

may be defined as a prose narrative, requiring from half an hour to one hour for its perusal. In other words, brevity is something central to a short story. It is possible to read at one sitting. But it must not be supposed that the short story is a novel on a reduced scale. It has a definite technique of its own and has its own specific requirements of matter and treatment.

H.G. Wells, himself a master of the short story, observes regarding it in these words,

A short story is, or should be a simple thing; it aims at producing one single vivid effect; it has to seize the attention at the outset, and never relaxing, gather it together more and more until the climax is reached. The limits of the human capacity to attend closely therefore set a limit to it; it must explode and finish before interruption occurs on fatigue sets in. (Rees : 1995 : 203).

1. DEFINITION OF SHORT STORY

The short story has never been adequately defined. It has 'something of the indefinite and infinitely variable nature of a cloud' or as Ellery Sedgewick points out, it has become all sorts of things, situation, episode, characterization or narrative in effect a vehicle for every man's talent. And, therefore, opinions are sharply divided on the nature and characteristics of the short story.

It is difficult to arrive at an unanimous definition of short story because of various reasons. It is, first of all, very popular and thus a most widely read form of literature. Secondly, the number of writers employing this form is also very large. Therefore the variety of experiments with the form and content is also beyond imagination. Every author uses its elements to provide a concrete shape to his / her themes. Nevertheless, attempts have been made to define it and it is possible to make use of these definitions for its analysis.

Like all forms of art, it takes the material of everyday life and uses it to raise our consciousness of life to higher levels. Walter Allen defines short

story in these words; "a short story is the fruit of a single moment of time, of a single incident, a single perception". (1981:7).

Tutun Mukherjee defines it thus;

The short story, offering varieties and contingencies of situations, zeroes in on the moment of crises, which never fail to convey a degree of mystery, elision, or the uncertainty of the unexpected. (2000: 94).

H.G. Wells comments on the purpose and art of the short story in these words;

The Jolly art, of making something very bright and moving; it may be horrible or pathetic or funny or profoundly illuminating, having only this essential, that it should take from fifteen to fifty minutes to read aloud. (Mundra & Sahni : 1965 : 139).

But how is that 'something very bright and moving' to be achieved in a small place and in a short time ? Somerset Maugham thinks that the desired effect can be achieved by a strict adherence to form.

The short story must have a definite design, which includes a point of departure, a climax and a point of test; in other words, it must have a plot. The plot pins down and presents a piece of life within the confines of its own construction; in so doing it exhibits life to us, as it were under a microscope and enables us to view it more clearly than we can do in the raw (Mundra & Sahni : 1965 : 139).

Hugh Wolpole supports this view stating;

A story should be story; a record of things happening full of incident and accident, swift movement, unexpected development, leading

through suspense to a climax and a satisfying denouement. (Mundra & Sahni : 1965 : 139).

Edger Allen Poe emphasized that the short story should have a unity of impression and singleness of purpose and stated thus, in the whole composition.

There should be no word written of which the tendency, direct or indirect, is not to the one pre-established design. (Mundra & Sahni : 1965 : 139).

This conception of the short story as a finished product of art is, however, opposed by Chekhov according to whom the story should have neither beginning nor end. It should be only a 'Slice of life' presented suggestively. Chekhov does not round off his stories; he leaves their ends hanging in the air for the readers to draw out their own conclusions.

He suggests a situation, and by the time we turn to him to know the conclusion he is going to arrive at, we find that the narrative disappears. (Mundra & Sahni : 1965 : 139).

2. THE CHIEF ELEMENTS OF A SHORT STORY

The short story is a very popular form of prose fiction. Its popularity rests on its unity, brevity, variety of themes and singleness of effect. It is an independent art form and has all the elements that are found in a novel and a drama i.e. plot, characters, themes, point of view, setting, dialogues, etc.

The primary aim of a short story is to entertain. Hence a short story must be interesting above everything else. It may convey some moral lessons; it may ridicule human follies, but it must do all this in an interesting manner. It must absorb the reader and make him forget the worries of his life for the time being. If it does not do so, it cannot be regarded as a good short story in spite of all the other excellent qualities that it may have.

Aristotle has stated that plot is the soul of the drama. For the short story plot means the arrangement of the incidents that make up the story.

The writer develops his theme by such an arrangement. The story is simple and straightforward and short and so, it has a limited number of incidents. Hence plot construction in a short story is not a difficult task. Nevertheless, there can be a short story without the element of plot. Such a story is symbolic or impressionistic. As Hudson has said;

The plot should move naturally and it should be free from the appearance of artifice. The means to further the plot should be credible. Great masters of the short story manipulate their plots so as to bring about a surprising twist at the end. (1991 : 149).

All good fiction is founded upon characterization. In a short story, writer cannot portray a character in full. He can only exhibit one aspect or at the most a few salient features of a character and it is thrown into prominent relief. Men and women are placed in such situations as are sufficient to develop the prominent traits of their characters. Here the novelist has an advantage over the short story writer. He has ample space at his disposal and so can place his characters in as many situations as he likes and display different qualities of his characters. He can gradually develop the characters of his men and women and can lay their very souls bare before us.

All this is not possible in the short story. Besides, a short story writer cannot introduce a dozen or even half a dozen characters in the story, as it would result in over crowding. None of the characters would then be effectively developed. This limitation has given rise to the one-man story. The plot hinges on the actions of one man. All our attention is concentrated upon him or her and this results in a powerful impression and the story gains much in effect.

A short story is usually a story that can be read at a single sitting. Men, matter and milieu these three are at the heart of all good prose fiction. It adds reality and vividness to the story. It makes the story life-like. Setting or atmosphere has a significant impact on both plot and characters. It gives a

local colour to the story. It gives the idea about the location, time and society amidst which the characters move and the incidents take place.

Brevity is another important characteristic of the short story. Absolute economy of means is used and everything superfluous is strictly avoided. There is no word written of which the tendency direct or indirect is not to further the action of the story. The art of the short story writer is, therefore, a difficult one. It requires a long training and practice to master the art and become a successful short story writer.

As in the novel and the drama, in the short story also the dialogues occupy a very prominent place. In characterization, the dialogue counts for much. Every word of it is made to tell something further. We know much about the character of an individual by what he says and by what others say about him. Of course the dialogues in a short story are brief and to the point. Long speeches are out of place and are considered a serious defect.

As mentioned above, the short story has only a single purpose. It has the singleness of effect. All the events, all the incidents, all the characters of the story are invented to create that preconceived effect. The story must have one pivot of interest and by focusing the attention on the one point a powerful effect is created on the reader. The satisfaction of the reader is the real test of its success.

A suitable atmosphere is necessary for a short story. The atmosphere may be one of tragic gloom or of love and laughter or of suspense. But there should be consistency in the creation of this atmosphere. If for example, the story is a detective story, it has the atmosphere of horror and mystery throughout. In a tragic story, the atmosphere is one of gloom and humour and if comic, the atmosphere is out of place.

A short story writer has limited space, so he uses extreme economy of words. Every word and sentence takes the action of the story a step further. Every superfluous word or sentence is considered a defect. Moreover, the language used is easy and simple. Long and involved sentences hardly occur in a good short story.

Every writer has something to say when he sits down to write. This is his point of view, his philosophy or criticism of life. He presents life as he visualizes it. He interprets it according to his ability. He gives a commentary upon life. He expresses his point in his story. This moral may not always be direct but it always exists between the lines. It is woven into the fabric of the story. It cannot be easily identified. It is the total meaning of the story, whether implied or not stated.

Thus, the short story is an artistic sum total of plot, character, setting, theme and the author's interpretation of life. It is a unique reflection of a flash of lightning; it illuminates the dark interiors of the human mind and the warm recesses of the human heart.

3. THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE SHORT STORY

The short story has not evolved in its present form all of a sudden. It has taken a long period to develop in the form that exists today. The short story in its present form has passed through different stages. Some important early forms of fiction are given below. They are responsible for the shaping of the modern short story.

3.1 Myth

The short story, before evolving in its modern form, passed through different stages at different times, according to the purpose and time of its composition, though their differentiations are rather loose. It is difficult to classify the numerous forms of story as sometimes their classification changes with the passage of time. It is considered to be the opinion of many a scholar that a myth, when degenerated with the passage of time, becomes more of a legend and thus loses most of its mythical complexion. Time is a very important factor, and has a determining hand in the evolution of literary forms. Discussing the difference between the folk tale and the myth Franz Boas states that this difficulty cannot be met by assuming that the folktale originated from a myth and must be considered a degenerated myth or by the hypothesis that conversely the myth originated from a folktale. But Boas's

objection that the same tale is classed at one time as myth and at another time as a folk tale, is not such as cannot be answered since the object of myth changes with the social standard of possibility, it follows that a particular tale may at one time be considered as myth and at another as folktale. It only depends upon the degree of credence attached to it by a particular society. But one thing is clear that a myth may be a folktale, but a folktale not necessarily a myth, some of its forms have lived for centuries and are still popular and very much in use. For example, myth is as old as religion. It is said that fear is the main cause for religious feelings in man and myth is a form, which provides sufficient illustrative material for infusing that impression permanently.

The main function of religion has been to help mankind in understanding the complexities of life and nature and in the long run to elevate him to such a nobler and godly state of living that he feels one with God, the Creator of the Universe.

Myth is also motivated by the quest for an understanding of the signification of life and nature. That is why myths are considered to be having 'religious seriousness' in them, either as historic facts or as mystic truths. Myth and religion are so near to each other that to some, myths are essentially a religious term. But as a product of the poetic faculty, myth is a thing, in itself, single, whole, complete, and without ulterior purpose. The use to which it may be put is secondary. It means that myth is an independent literary form, which has mostly been put to use for the propagation of religion. Most of the Indian myths have their origin in *Puranas* and are generally used for illustrative purposes to explain some religious point.

Different scholars in many ways have defined the term used for myth by Plato in the third book of *Republic*. According to Gayley, myths are, stories of anonymous origin, prevalent among primitive peoples and by them accepted as true, concerning supernatural beings and events, or natural beings and events influenced by supernatural agencies. Stories, which account for the origin of the world and accepted as having happened in a mythical period, are myths. In the opinion of Boas, tales, which concern with

the personification of natural phenomena and refer to some prehistoric epoch, are myths. They explain the universe and provide a basic understanding of rituals and beliefs.

With the passage of time, this old form of expression has been assigned different duties to perform, the result being that new scholars have discovered new ideas out of the myth. For example, Malinowski was one of the first who viewed that myths were an attempt to explain abstract ideas.

There is a highly imaginative character of myths. Incidents, which form the substance of the myths, are generally not from everyday life. Another factor is the exaggeration of experiences such as the enormous size of the dreadful giants for causing fear, the power to have a step of miles etc. In one word, we may say that supernaturalism is the backbone of myths. According to the observation of Wundt, there has been an evolution of myth corresponding to the main stages of cultural development. In the Totemic Age *Marchen* myth was much popular. It is a sort of narrative, which resembles fairy tales and has magical agencies like gods and demons as its characters. In the Heroic Age such myths flourished which mainly mentioned the exploits of cultural heroes. No doubt those heroes were aided by supernatural agencies, but their success was mainly due to their own efforts. In the age of reason, man developed a sort of rational attitude and cosmopolitan perspective, which enabled him to transcend the limitations of the mythical mentality.

The literary treatment of myths can be considered in three classes. Firstly, there is the written recording of the oral story by persons who have full faith in it, such as the early *Ramayana* by Valmiki. Secondly, by elaborating the original myth by a later poet such as *Shri Ramcharitmanas* by Tulsī Das. And thirdly, by making use of the story as the material for a work of art, as Guru Gobind Singh has done in *Chundi Di Var*, one of his immortal compositions in Punjabi. Thus we find that mythology has influenced the Indian literature considerably as is obvious in the *Ramayan* and the *Mahabharata*.

In Greek literature, we find that certain dramatists have given artistic expression to the traditional myths of Gods and heroes. Philosophers do not accept the folk myths as they are in their traditional form. They reinterpreted them so as to provide them with a more rational meaning.

New myths are not generated; only the old myths keep on getting refashioned for the purpose of fresh illustrations. The development of scientific spirit is the major factor, subtracting from the value and significance of myths. There are certain facts, which are fully believed in a myth, but the scientific and rational attitude guides us to reject them as completely untrue. For example, in some myths the cause of certain diseases is believed to be the evil spirit, which cannot be accepted as true from the scientific viewpoint. That is one of the reasons why scientists regret myth making. Some scientists went to the extent of assuming that the growth of scientific attitude in modern days will help in routing out the myth completely. But it has not happened so far and the future shape of things is still uncertain. And in fact, it should not happen even, as myth has a role to play even in the modern civilized world.

3.2 Legend

Legend is another popular phase in the development of the short story. Since it is generally considered to be a degenerated form of myth, its mention after the myth is natural. According to *Encyclopedia Britannica*, popular stories fall into three main categories; myths, legends and stories which are told primarily to provide entertainment. In other words, myth and legend are the two main and old forms of story, having much in common. One factor, which is obviously common to these two forms of folk expression is the belief and respect that their believers attach to them for their being true and historical.

This does not mean that facts mentioned in myths and legends are historical truths for everybody. They are true for their believers only, while real historical facts are accepted as truths by every body. The legend in due course came to include any unauthentic or non-historical or partly historical

story. It is folk embroidered from historical material for taking it near to the common man. Historical aspects is an essential factor for the legend. For giving an impression of historical element not only the legendary hero, chosen for the purpose, is widely known and accepted as historical character but, certain places connected with some of their life incidents, serve as a proof for their being historical.

Another factor common to myths and legends is the supernatural element. This is an essential element in both of them, though more in myth and legend. A. Brown in Cassell's *Encyclopedia of Literature* advances a historical reason for finding this element from the beginning in the legends. According to him the word 'legend' is derived from the Medieval Latin 'legenda', 'something to be read' and was originally referred to be the story of the life of a Saint, which could be read either at divine service or during meals in the refectory of a monastery. Since the main purpose of the reading of a Saint's life was the edification of the hearer, it was perhaps inevitable that the emphasis should be placed not so much upon historical facts as upon the miraculous and marvellous events, which came to be associated with a particular Saint. By attributing certain supernatural powers to the hero, the idea seems to be to gain more respect for him as in olden days the respect that a hero commanded depended upon the degrees of supernatural powers he possessed.

Legend is a product of a later stage, which came into existence independently, as well as with the degeneration of certain myths. It has remained very much popular with mankind since ever. Even in *Mahabharata* old legends about kings and sages are found in abundance. It is in a way, more popular and nearer to the ordinary man than the myth, as it is mainly connected with such characters as are made of flesh and blood like us, whereas the myth is mainly connected with extraordinary characters for explaining the secrets of natural phenomena. Another factor, which has made legends more popular among the common man, is that, whereas the myths are primarily used for the illustration of certain religious as spiritual purpose, legends are generally narrated for recreational and social motives.

There are certain other characteristics of the legend, which deserve mention. The hero of the legend is generally a man belonging to the upper class. Subordinate characters accompanying him or assisting him, may be of the lower classes as we find in the legend of Raja Rasalu. His companions are a goldsmith's son, a carpenter's son, a horse and a parrot. It is in the stage of folk tale only that we find members of the lower class treated as heroes in addition to the traditional heroes belonging to the rich class. But one thing is definite; the hero may belong to any class, but he has extra ordinary virtues such as ability, bravery and adventurous spirit and these qualities he exhibits in a dramatic manner and thus is able to win our sympathy and admiration.

In the list of characters of the legend are found human as well as animal characters such as dogs, serpents and birds etc. But whether they are human or not, every character has the power to speak and do the things like the human characters.

Secondly, a large section of our society worships serpents as gods. Birds are also commonly mentioned as companions as Indians are traditionally known as bird-lovers. The doings of saints and Holy personages also occupy a considerable place in legends. Generally, they bless the heroes with their supernatural powers and forewarn them of the dangers they are to encounter on their way to adventure. For the success of the heroes, they generally hand over to them some articles, which are capable of performing miracles.

In addition to the virtuous characters, sometimes evil characters, such as witches, also figures in the legends. They always act as the enemies of the hero and heroine. Through their association, the story gains in interest and complexity.

The female characters are also there and generally no legend is considered as complete and interesting in which the female characters do not participate. Some of the female characters play very important part in the development of the plot. Sometimes the hero falls in love with a princess in

the dream and then he starts searching for her. Another occasion being a stepmother trying to entice her son and finding him stubbornly resisting her advances, manages to get him exterminated as is done in the case of *Puran Bhagat*.

3.3 Fable and Animal Tale

Fables, in spite of being very old, are still popular. Here, the main characters are animals or birds. A fable gives some moral and social lessons. The real value of the fable is in what is hidden in it and this fact enhances its literary value as compared to the animal tale. The fable is an allegorical representation of life. The motive of the fable is to make human beings understand some moral, social or political point through non-human creatures behaving like human beings. Here the animal or bird characters are made to guide the human beings by talking, acting and sometimes satirizing certain human weaknesses in such a way that the real idea behind it, is made home to the readers or the listeners. The virtues he esteems, the follies he ridicules, the vices he condemns, all are these to be seen in the animal characters of the fable.

The advantage to the human beings is more or less psychological, as they resist any advice, howsoever valuable it may be, given to them directly. But advice given indirectly through the medium of fables does not affront their ego in any way. That is the reason why fables have been put in the service of mankind from time immemorial and are still doing the same. The stories, found in *Panchtantra* were in fact, meant for teaching diplomacy to the princes, as they were, otherwise not much interested in studies.

In addition to the moral value of the fables, they have a historical importance also, as they reflect the human culture of the time in which they are composed. Sir Alfred C. Lyall ascribing to this view states that, among unlettered people in all ages and countries, fables have given the poetical and fanciful rendering of great events; it is the popular and pictorial edition of their annals, the primitive form of a biographical series.

Fable in India is one of the oldest and most popular forms of folk story. *Panchtantra* is full of fables, which are written in prose interspersed with illustrative aphoristic verse. *Panchtantra* must be very popular in the sixth century A. D. that a foreign king Khosry Anushirvan (531-579) could think of ordering its translation in Pehlevi, which was the literary language of Persia at that time. Another popular collection of Indian fables is *Hitopadesa*. It is mainly based on the *Panchtantra*; as many as twenty-five fables are found in both the works.

3.4 Fairy Tale

The fairy tale is another popular form of folk story. Since fairy tales are told for amusement rather than for edification or instruction, they have a greater appeal to children. Supernaturalism, strange adventures undertaken by the heroes, romanticism and life mostly of an unreal world and imaginary characters are some of its characteristics, which may have much fancy for the children and very little for the grown ups. But there are other forms of the story which have an equal rather greater appeal, for grown ups than children. One of these other forms, the fable generally conforms more to reality, and has thus an equal appeal to older people. Comparing the two, Joseph T. Shipley remarks that the fairy tale's miracles occur on the material plane . . . In the fable, a shrewd or practical realism reigns. Fairyland is the happy hunting ground of children, the fable warns them that must grow in the real world. But they have something in common too. The abundant introduction of ethical reflections and proverbial philosophy are the common characteristics of both the forms.

Edwin Sidney Hartland has presented a systematic study of the fairy tales. He has defined fairy tales as narratives not in their present form relating to beings held to be divine, nor to cosmological or national events, but in which the supernatural plays an essential part. He has divided fairy tales into two classes – Sagas and Marchen. Sagas are those stories of natural beings, in which instructions are developed. But Marchen consists of such tales as are told simply for amusement, imagination being their principal character.

The word 'fairy' seems to have been derived from 'fata' the Fates; in Late Latin the word came to mean "goddess". Another thing, very much common about fairies is that they are averse to religious symbols and they generally disappear, the moment the name of God is uttered or some religious symbol is displayed in front of them. Mothers generally instruct their children to utter the name of God or to show a religious symbol if they are confronted with a fairy or any other evil spirit. According to Henry Bett, fairies belong to the Stone Age and almost all uncanny creatures are afraid of iron. Since the ancestors of fairies had only stone weapons, they lost against a people who were of larger stature and had new weapons of iron. Since then, fairies have a terror for the iron. In fairy tales, we find that the characters are fairies as well as human beings. Their relationship is expressed in so many ways such as fairies assisting mortals, harming mortals, abducting mortals for special purposes, challenging mortals visiting fairyland and fairy mistress or lover.

The following are certain other characteristics of the fairy tale, which deserve mention.

- ✓ The unquestionable virtue of hero or heroine, as opposed to the equally unrelieved villainy of their opponents.
- ✓ It is generally seen in the folk story that a great deal of stress is laid on the physical prowess of the hero and physical charm of the heroine.
- ✓ The power of the fairies to transform themselves into some other shapes at their will.
- ✓ Other characters with the supernatural powers.

We find poetic justice in fairy tales for preaching moral values. At the end, each character is treated strictly according to what he deserves. The hero succeeds in the end and is rewarded in the form of getting his sweetheart. Every fairy tale ends with virtuous characters prospering and evil characters punished for their evil deeds. This element is also found in other forms of the story.

3.5 Ballad

The word 'Ballad' is derived from the Latin and Italian 'Ballare', meaning to dance, which speaks of its earliest connection with the musical and systematic movement of physical limbs at a particular occasion under particular feelings. This fact brings forth the basic characteristics of the ballad i.e. music and dance, qualities which man got with his birth. A ballad is lyrical in character and belongs to the folk in style, content and designation. It is a narrative poem lyrical in form or a short and simple narrative told lyrically.

A ballad narrates a story comprised of one incident or more, but the main incident is always one and the remaining, if any, may be mentioned as its sub-incidents. Moreover, it is generally in verse. The author narrates a story in verse form; though it is not essential that it must possess high poetic qualities. Since the earliest form of literature was poetry and that too narrative poetry, it is generally said that it was ballad that took birth as the first and most universal form of poetry.

Another factor, to be found in the ballad, is its simplicity. It is a story narrated in simple musical diction. Even to build suspense, the story is not made much complicated; rather it is presented in a simple, elegant style. However, this should not be taken to mean that a ballad is devoid of suspense. It has it though it is not of that degree as we find in a novel.

Shortness is another characteristic of ballad. It is generally brief, direct and dramatic. No doubt the plot is constituted of an unstable situation and the resolution the ballad generally concentrates on the resolution leaving for the audience to add details and other necessary material. Keeping in view the above facts, it can be said that the ballad is quite near our short story, as in selecting a single main incident, like the short story, it presents that into sharp and economic focus.

The themes of the ballads relate to love, supernaturalism, adventure and war. Whereas the themes of love and supernaturalism are generally treated lightly and gaily with romantic attitude, (sometimes with a seriousness of tragedy as well), the themes concerning adventure, and war are presented

heroically and spiritedly. But the ballads are different in kind from the heroic poems, though the stress on action is found common in both.

The ballads were primarily composed for the purpose of entertainment the earliest function of literature that man conceived of and expected of it. Tired of the day's labour, a community or its few individuals got together to refresh themselves with dance one of the earliest modes of expressing one's feelings and ballad was a popular form with them as its story element could captivate their attention by singing and sometimes repeating its refrain.

So the ballad has immensely helped the short story to evolve in its modern shape as most of their characteristics-a very small number of characters, single plot, suspense, quick action, artistic climax, oneness of impression, crisp but short dialogue, befitting atmosphere etc. are common. Only the modern short story writer presents those very characteristics in prose in a more artistic way by mentioning the minute complexities and problems of the modern world.

3.6 The Love Story

Love is an essential ingredient of human life. The readers generally like the love story, because there is an appeal to our emotions and our passions in a love story. The plot of the love story is generally the same. A man meets a woman. He is attracted to her enchanting and ravishing beauty. She is also gradually attracted towards him. But the course of true love does not run smoothly. Their parents or social conventions oppose the lovers. There is a conflict. Ultimately, the opponents are forced to agree to their wishes and they are happily married.

Sometimes there is a rival to the lover, who is the hero of the story. Of ultimately the rival is defeated and punished, and the hero succeeds to marry the woman he loves, it is a comedy pure and simple. If, in the bitter clash, the hero is overcome and falls, the end is tragic. With a little change in details, names and setting, nearly all love stories follows this pattern.

3.7 The Adventure Story

In the adventure story, there are heroic exploits and risky adventures. The stories of Kipling, Walter De La Mare etc., are adventure stories. These writers take us to impregnable jungles, deserts, islands, invincible mountains, treasure hunts, queer birds, beasts and thrilling discoveries at the bottom of the ocean and beyond the world of men.

3.8 The Detective Story

The detective story deals with crimes and the unraveling of the crimes. In detective stories some crime is committed and the police pursues the criminals. The criminals evade the police, but they cannot evade the police, but they cannot evade the penetrating eyes of the shrewd investigators, like Sherlock Holmes. The interest lies in the unraveling of the mystery and the handling of the matter by the chief investigator of the crime. There is constant suspense and animation. The stories of Arthur Conan Doyle, Ronald Standish, Edgar Wallace etc wrote detective stories. The heroes of the stories, says Sherlock Holmes in Arthur Conan Doyle's stories, succeed in training even the craftiest of the culprits.

3.9 The Psychological Story

Psychology is the study of the mental processes of the human beings. It helps us in understanding how, under certain circumstances and situations, a normal man acts. In psychological stories the interest is mainly on the motives of the chief characters, and the conflict through which they have to pass in their minds. The psychological story is mainly concerned with the soul of the hero. Its appeal is internal and not owing to the external circumstances. The stories of Meredith, Stevenson, and Katherine Mansfield are psychological in character. "Markheim" is one of the finest psychological stories of R. L. Stevenson.

3.10 The Scientific Story

The scientific story deals with the facts of science in an interesting, imaginative manner. The varied branches of science provide the subject

matter of the story, but the treatment of the dull scientific matter is carried on imaginatively. The stories of H.G. Wells are scientific in character. He deals with the facts which are scientific by their very nature but do not have yet a scientific basis of truth. Wells is the most important writer of scientific stories.

3.11 The Social Story

Stories have been written on social problems. There are a number of social problems, which plague every society, and stories are written on these subjects. The aim of the social story is to focus on the intricate social problems in an interesting manner. The stories of John Galsworthy are social stories. In them we find the conflict between society and the individual. The writer questions the validity of the prevailing customs and conventions of the society. He discusses subjects like social equality, the distribution of wealth and the righteousness of social laws etc. These social stories are very interesting and can serve the useful purpose of reforming the evils of our social life.

3.12 The Tale

Tale is a complete story deeply rooted in human life, focusing on the things that moved people immediately. Its themes used to be love, money and social positions. It produced emotional reaction among the readers. It often had ironic dimension, satire and ridicule too.

4. THE MODERN SHORT STORY

The modern short story differs from the older tales and fables in conception of form, technique and style. They used to be largely episodic in nature and most of the time carried a moral. It is apparently, less singularly devoted to the imaginary excesses of its forbears. It draws upon the writer's creative experience of life communicated not in its fullness but in highly suggestive bits and patches that illumine a point of view, a mood, an atmosphere, a sentiment or a feeling as neatly as does a lyric.

Modern short story cultivates the art of the miniature; its strength comes to a great deal from what has been left unsaid or said only partially.

The narrative is only scaffolding, a means to an end and not an end in itself. An artistic vision that derives from an understanding of life, as it is lived and communicable only through a narrative projection is the subject matter of modern short story. The ultimate end of the artist is the communication of this artistic vision and the various components of the short story are meant to subserve this end.

4.1 A Work of Art

These tales of adventure and moral tales of the past have no resemblance with the modern short story. Short story in the hands of the modern masters is a perfect work of art. As an artistic form, it has undergone a gradual evolution and has developed into a popular form of modern literature. The modern short story writer is an artist, who is a close observer of life, a keen student of characters, and a master of style. Every subject, between heaven and earth, is now regarded fit for the short story and it can be told in any manner, which may please the artist.

The modern short story as a work of art originated in the second quarter of the 19th century in America. It's furtherer had been Edgar Allen Poe, who came into fame with the publication of his "An Ms Found in a Bottle" in 1933. He holds his reader's attention with the skill of his narration and the atmosphere that he creates. His influence on the modern short story writers cannot be underestimated. From America the short story passed on to Europe and England. In Europe, Maupassant, Balzac, Anton Chekhov, Leo Tolstoy etc., are its acknowledged masters. They are perhaps the greatest continental short storywriters, standing alone in grace, wit and charm. Arthur Conan Doyle, Galsworthy, Kipling, H.G. Wells, Somerset Maugham, are a few of the many masters of this art in Great Britain. If we really want to appreciate the short story as a form of art, we must not limit ourselves to any one country but must try to study the great masters of this art in many countries.

Mulk Raj Anand and Iqbal Singh have rightly stated that the short story is one of the oldest literary forms of India and the youngest. So, to understand and enjoy its dazzling beauty and its evolved precious shape, namely the modern short story, we must look back to its original seed.

4.2 The Causes of Its Immense Popularity

It is now generally recognized that the short story is one of the most popular, if not the most popular, form of literary composition. The immense popularity is the result of many causes. First, there is the hurry and hustle of modern life. The modern readers have no time or inclination to read the "large still books" over which people liked to linger in the past, when life passed on in a leisurely fashion. He can no longer find time to read novels like *Tom Jones*, *Amelia* and others, which required much patience and must be continued day after day. He wants something, which he can read in a short time and at one sitting, whenever he finds time. The short story comes in handy for the purpose. It entertains him after a hard day's work without wasting much of his precious time. Secondly, the spread of education and the enormous development of journalism are other factors, which have contributed to its popularity. With the universal extension of education the demand for reading matter has increased. It is obvious that all cannot read higher literature, which is meant for deep meditative study and not for recreation. The public wants light works and this demand is satisfied by the short story. A large number of magazines and journals, which came into being simultaneously with the spread of education, did much to increase the popularity of the short story. Long novels and dramas could not be published at one time. If they were published in serial installments, by missing a single issue the continuity broke, and the readers felt them to be unentertaining. Hence they published short stories, complete in one issue and provided the reader with the kind of entertainment he wanted. Hence it is true to say, as H. E. Bates has said; "The evolution of the short story has something to do with the evolution of the general reader". (1941:13).

5. INDIAN SHORT STORY IN ENGLISH

The story is as old as humanity and older than even poetry and music. H.E. Bates has very rightly remarked that;

It is not asking too much to believe that story telling began before poetry, in the days when some primitive 'tribe' gathered round a fire in a forest clearing, watching its evening meal cook and some one told of his days adventures. (1941: 17).

The genesis of Indian tales trace back to the *Vedas* and *Upanishads*, the *Puranas* and the *Panchtantra*, *Hitopadesh* and *Jatak Kathas*. The great Indian epics of *Ramayana* and *Mahabharata* have been inexhaustible storehouses of tales and they have continued to inspire and provide materials to the writers of all the ages. M. Rama Rao, observes, while assessing the role of the short story in modern Indian literature;

We have had in India stories which lie embedded in the hymns of the *Rigveda*, or scattered in the *Upanishads* and the epics, the stories which constitute the *Panchtantra*, the *Hitopadesha*, the *Sukasaptati*, the *Dasakumaracharita* and the *Vetalapanchvimsati* in Sanskrit, the Buddhist *Jatak Katha* in Pali and a host of similar stories in modern Indian languages. (Rao : 1967 : 216).

In India, the *Jatak Kathas*, the *Hitopadesh*, the *Panchtantra*, the *Katha Sarit Sagar*, are some of the early collections of stories. It is said regarding Egypt that the sons of Cheop had narrated stories to their father for his delight some 4000 B.C. Scheherezade was the lovely girl, who told the stories of *The Arabian Nights* to the king Shehriar, as she wanted to save her as well as other women's life. John Lyman Bishop refers to the discovery of a walled up cave at Tun-huang (North West frontier of China) filled with about 20,000 pictures and manuscripts. They cover roughly a period from 400 to 1000 A.D. Among the Tun-huang manuscripts we find a type of narration entitled pien-wen (meaning popularization), which places the origin of colloquial fiction in the Tuang dynasty some 4 to 5 centuries earlier.

Indian English prose writing is about 170 years old. Initially, English was being used for purposes like translation, political agitation, social reform, propaganda, law and education among others. Gradually emerged a new literature called Indian Writing in English. Today, it has become one of the most significant literatures in English.

Indian writers in English have been using almost all the major forms of literature. Particularly, in the post-Independence era, they have drawn attention and appreciation from all over the world. These writers have, especially, excelled themselves in fiction writing because of their perception, vision, articulation, depth, variety and their universality of appeal.

These writers have made many innovative experiments with the form and the narrative techniques. Many among others who have got the world recognition are R.K. Narayan, Mulk Raj Anand, Raja Rao, Manjeri Iswaran, Manohar Malgonkar, Nayantara Sahgal, Chaman Nohal, Khushwant Singh, Bhayani Bhattacharya, Salman Rushdie, Anita Desai, Saros Cowasjee, Arun Joshi, Shiv K. Kumar, Kwaja Ahmed Abbas, Dina Mehta, Farrukh Dhondi, Ruth P. Jhabwala, Shashi Deshpande, Indu Suryanarayanan, G. B. Desani, Amitav Ghosh, Ruskin Bond, Manoj Das and so on.

The short stories written by these and other writers amounts to a good bulk. They are equally rich in depth of perception, subtle expression of the complex experiences, style, variety and innovativeness. Yet, somehow, these short stories have so far remained neglected not only outside India but also within it. Of course, they have not missed the attention of the readers all over the globe. Critical attention is what it deserves the most even today.

There are at least three distinct stages in the growth of the short story as a modern literary form. All these stages are autonomous and self-sufficient but interrelated. (Das : 1991 : 302).

These three stages, referred to by S.K. Das, are those of anecdotes, tales and fables, and short fiction. The third stage, according to him, emerged

during the 19th century with the arrival of journals and periodicals. These periodicals encouraged the writings like character sketches and also the reportage of incidents. As a result, short fiction came into existence; S.K. Das further makes a very insightful observation;

The short story distinct from anecdotes, tales, sketches, reportage and novellas came at the last stage of the evolution of narratives. As a form, it shares some features of these four but it developed its own distinctiveness identified by the presence of a conscious narrative, foregrounding a particular incident, or a situation, or a moment of emotional intensity. (Das : 1991 : 302).

Since India had very rich treasure of tales, fables and parables, when printing press came into existence, these stories were the first to appear in the printed form with modifications. The short story as a literary genre came into existence in almost all the Indian languages, in particular, when the mythological, adventurous and marvelous stories had exhausted their possibilities and the novel had got established. In different regions it came to be described as *Katha*, *Akhyan*, *Upakhyan*, *Afsana* and *Dastan* among others. They reveal the varied distinctiveness of form and its perception on the part of the authors as well as readers. Yet, what was very clear was that the author had strong desires to distinguish his stories from the old ones.

Tagore seems to be showing first signs of maturity in Indian short story. It can be said so because;

For the first time in modern Indian literature, the life of ordinary men and women received such sympathetic understanding and was depicted with such love and feeling. (Das : 1991 : 307).

The entry of the common man played a very vital role in the development of the short story in India. The short story, unlike the novel of the time, portrays

the common man with his worldly problems. It is thus, in certain ways, "acted as a balance between the historical novels and the novels dealing with social problems by identifying a new zone of experience" (Das : 1991 : 307). The short story showed affinity with the novel in the early stage, but soon in the course of time, it established its relationship with the lyric and revealed its true nature. It learnt from the lyric 'the art of compactness of form' and the 'unity of emotion' and gave new meaning and value to the ordinary things in life and nature.

The first Indian to give a short story in the modern sense is Fakir Mohan Senapati, his story being 'Lachmania' (1868). The public taste for a complete story in one installment, instead of the part of a serialized novel increased the demand of the short story in journals and periodicals. Thus, as elsewhere in India too, the periodicals and journals played a crucial role in popularizing it.

Indian short story writer took to this form not because he was very much interested in it, but because he found the form to be simplest. Further he found it to be the most popular means of conveying the India and the life in it as he had understood. Hence, the writer was primarily concerned with conveying an idea or he wanted to disseminate eternal values and truths as perceived by Indians.

Shoshee Chunder Dutt in London Published the earliest collection of short stories entitled as *Realities of Indian Life : Stories Collected from Criminal Reports of India* (1885). In the same year, S. C. Dutt and Sourindra Mohan Tagore Published *The Times of Yore : Tales from Indian History*. P. V. Ramaswami Raju brought out two collections, *The Tales of Sixty Mandarins* (1886) and *Indian Fables* (1887), from London. The 19th century saw two more writers of anthologies Kshetrapal Chakravarty who published *Sarala and Hingara: Tales Descriptive of Indian Life* (Kolkata, 1895) and Kamla Sattianandhan, who published *Stories of Indian Christian Life* (Madras, 1898). It is true that B. R. Rajam Iyer's stories appeared in *The Prabuddha Bharata* during 1896-98, but they appeared in the anthology entitled as

Rambles in the Vedanta (1905). There was no considerable output of short stories before the beginning of the 20th century.

Comella Sorabji, who was an advocate in Kolkata, was the first Indian short story writer with impressive work to her credit. She produced four short story collections : *Love and Life Behind the Purdah* (1901), *Sandbabies: Studies in the Child Life of India* (1904), *Between the Twilights : Being Studies of Indian Women by One of Themselves* (1908) and *Indian Tales of the Great Ones among Men, Women and Bird-people* (1916). Other significant short story anthologies of the period are : S. M. Nateshaa Sastri's *Indian Folk Tales* (1908); Dwijendra Nath Neogi's *Sacred Tales of India* (1916); *A Madhaviah's Short Stories* by Kusika (1916) and Sunity Devee's *Bengal Decoits and Tigers* (1916), *The Beautiful Mughal Princesses* (1918) and *The Rajput Princesses*.

Most of the short stories of the late 19th and early 20th century are sorts of retelling of the folktales, legends and parables. They are simple in art, as they tend to be anecdotal, sentimental and didactic. It is a fact that the Indian short story writer sought inspiration from ancient Indian classics; nevertheless, one cannot deny the fact that the western short story writers considerably influenced him. Several European writers reached Indian readership through translation. They left powerful impact on the Indian writers.

The early Indian writer was facing several serious problems so far as his creative art in English was concerned. He was to adept English language to his requirements. It was not possible for him to make experiments with the techniques. His main concern was to give a convincing picture of the then contemporary India to his readers. Hence, he was not occupied with the individual and his personal predicament either. The characters also tended to be types rather than individuals. These characters represented their classes.

English education was spreading, due to which Western writers gave the Indian writers a model to portray social scenes realistically. The advent of periodicals shaped their prose style. And therefore, after 1920, Indian short story in English reached its maturity. Shankar Ram wrote *The Children of Kaveri* (1926) and *Creatures All* (1933). His later stories present rural reality

of India. He uses literal translations of the rustic utterances like "Barrelnose Grandpa". He presents the superstitions, the caste system, the poverty and other rural problems. Social reform happens to be one of the major concerns of the writers of this age called Gandhian Era. A. S. P. Ayyar's *Sense in Sex and Other Stories* (1932), K.S. Venkataramani's *Jatadharan* (1937), K. Nagarajan's *Cold Rice* (1945) among others deal with the social reforms in the society. The writers often seem to be ambivalent in their attitude to the tension resulting out of the conflict between traditionalism and modernity. At the same time, they do uphold categorically the ancient Indian values of service, sacrifice, non-attachment and dedication to a moral cause.

It is during this period that the Indian creative mind starts examining the Indian traditions and some of them start asserting the Indian ethos in their works. In some of the stories of Mulk Raj Anand, Raja Rao, R.K. Narayan and others, the cultural encounter, which was going on, comes to be closely examined in their creative works. S. K. Chettur concerns himself with rural reality, superstitions, feuds and the supernatural among other things in his collections of short stories : *The Cobras of Dharmashevi and Other Stories* (1937) and *The Spell of Aphrodite and Other Stories* (1957).

The most noteworthy short story writers of this period are Mulk Raj Anand, R.K. Narayan and Raja Rao. The collections by Anand are : *The Lost Child and Other Stories* (1934), *The Barbers' Trade Union and Other Stories* (1944), *Reflections on the Golden Bed and Other Stories* (1944), *The Tractor and the Corn Goddess and Others Stories* (1947), *The Power of Darkness and Other Stories* (1959), *Lajwanti and Other Stories* (1966) and *Between Tears and Laughter* (1973). Anand employs a variety of narrative modes. His stories have various moods, persons, social surroundings and colours of life. Even his style varies remarkably. His stories are like fables, parables and folk tales. They also reveal Anand's reformative zeal and psychological enquiry.

Narayan's collections include : *Dodu and Other Stories* (1943), *Malgudi Days* (1943), *An Astrologer's Day and Other Stories* (1947), *Lawly Road and Other Stories* (1956) and *A Horse and Two Goats* (1970).

In its initial stage, the short story was mainly the occasional diversion of a novelist. Hence it was neither numerically nor literarily very significant. The divergence in the attempts to define the short story make us aware that it is safer to examine its possibilities and limitations than to try to define it in precise terms.

Manjeri Iswaran is an important short story writer as well as a critic or theorist on the form of the short story. He has expressed his views in this regard in the "By Way of Preface" to *A Madras Admiral* (1959). He states;

A short story can be a fable, or a parable, real or fantasy, a true presentation or a parody, sentimental or satirical, serious in intent, or a light-hearted diversion. (Iswarn : 1957 : 537).

The short story came to India as a genre through its contact with the West, Primarily through the Western masterpieces available in English translation. Mulk Raj Anand comments on the significance of this genre in these words;

And when the history of Indian culture comes to be written in the next century, it may, appear that the inmost longings, thwartings and desire urges, of the many peoples of our country, as expressed in the short stories, are more authentic evidence of the life of our time than the slogans of politics and the very obvious outer events (Anand : 1985 : 726).

The Indian English short story, in spite of the flexibility of its form and opportunities of publication, has failed to achieve its distinct identity. A. N. Dwivedi rightly mentions that the critics have treated it casually so far. It has always been considered a by-product of the novel.

Rabindra Nath Tagore wrote his short stories mostly in Bengali, but they are available to us in English translations made by others or often by the writer himself.

The formative phase of Indian short story is by and large deficient in originality of conception and also in craftsmanship. Dwivedi states;

Their propensity for social amelioration and moral instruction blinds them to the inherent charms of the art of story-telling. There is a general lack of vision and artistic sense (1997 : 137).

Anand attacks on the hypocrisy of the people. He sympathizes with the under dogs of the society and reveals their predicament due to social injustice and the strong prejudices of the privileged communities to them. He satirizes the irrational and often inhuman customs of the feudal society. He also attacks on the evils like the child marriage, patriarchy, untouchability, insanitation and cruelty in the field of education among others.

R. K. Narayan presents the reality in a lighter vein. His stories end happily. He comically reveals the life and yet does not allow the cynicism or mockery to enter the world of his creation. He reveals the ironies of life impressively.

Raja Rao depicts philosophically the Indian reality with focus on social and political aspects of it. He makes profound use of the folktales, myths and legends. He has profound vision of life and is deeply rooted in Indianness. Rao is highly symbolic and philosophical.

Manjeri Iswaran is a prolific short story writer with nine collections to his credit. He focuses on the lower and middle class people in the south India in general and Tamilnadu in particular. He concerns himself with the war, the Indian freedom struggle, the innocence of the children, problems of women and other social evils. Iswaran's depiction of women is commendable. He shows families caught between traditionalism and modernity and the resulting predicament.

After Independence, there came a change in the vision and perception of the writers. They were facing new situation now. Making new India was the principle concern of the nation as a whole. Hence, dreams, promises and plans for a better India form the main concerns of the creative writers.

Khuswant Singh's four short story collections are *The Mark of Vishnu* (1950), *The Voice of God* (1957), *A Bridge for the Sahib* (1967) and *Black Jasmine* (1971). He too attacks on hypocrisy.

K. A. Abbas has published four short story collections; *Blood and Stones and Other Stories* (1947), *Rice and Other Stories* (1947), *Cages of Freedom and Other Stories* (1952), *One Thousand Nights on a Bed of Stones and Other Stories* (1957) and *The Black Sun* (1963). He is primarily concerned with the social problems. Unemployment, hypocrisy, ignorance and selfishness disturb him. So disturbed the partition of India. His stories are often sentimental and melodramatic. He shows strong liking for the visual effects and therefore, we come across a series of memorable images of events.

G. D. Kholsa shows Indian life with a historian's perception. He produced four volumes : *The Price of a Wife* (1958), *The Horoscope Cannot Lie and Other Stories* (1961), *Grim Fairy Tales and Other Facts and Fancies* (1966) and *A Way of Loving and Other Stories* (1973). He too concerns himself with social evils, disparities in family and social life and so on.

R. P. Jhabvala, a daughter of Polish parents was born in Germany and educated in England. Married to an Indian, she lived in India for more than two decades. Apart from eight novels, she has published these short story collections: *Like Birds, Like Fishes* (1963); *An Experience of India* (1966), *A Stronger Climate* (1968) and *How I became a Holy Mother* (1976). She is a keen observer of Indian life and its social mannerism. She writes on the follies and foibles of the modern Indian life. She often seems to be cynical in her vision of life.

Manohar Malgonkar, novelist and short story writer, has published three collections of short stories: *A Toast in Warm Wind* (1947); *Bombay Boware* (1975) and *Rumble – Tumble* (1977). His stories deal with the army life and hunting. He likes to reveal the outdoor life. He gives some unforgettable characters in his short stories.

Ruskin Bond and Manoj Das are among the prominent contemporary Indian short story writers in English. Ruskin Bond (b. 1934) has brought out a number of collections of short stories : *The Neighbour's Wife and Other Stories* (1966), *My First Love and Other Stories* (1968), *The Night Train At Deoli and Other Stories* (1988). *Time Stops At Shamli and Other Stories* (1989), *Collected Fiction*(1999), *Friends in Small Places* (2000) and *When Darkness Falls and Other Stories* (2001). He has also written several books for children.

Manoj Das has written four collections of short stories. *Song for Sunday and Other Stories* (1967), *Short Stories* (1969), *The Crocodile's Lady* (1975) and *The Submerged Valley and Other Stories* (1986). Das is different from other writers. The dreamy quality and the ethereality of atmosphere are the distinguishing qualities of Manoj Das.

Anita Desai has written *Games at Twilight and Other Stories* (1978). She handles the subjects like temperamental differences in the marital life, various psychological complexes and the social sensibilities.

The other writers are Sasthi Brata, Margaret Chatterjee, K.N. Daruwalla, Jayant Mahapatra and Shiv K. Kumar. Sasthi Brata in her *Encounter* (1978) deals with the themes of alienation, loneliness and existential anguish. Sex happens to be his obsession and the quest for identity is the major concern of his protagonists.

Shashi Deshpande is a major short story writer today. She has five volumes of short stories to her credit. *The Legacy and Other Stories* (1978), *It was the Nightingale* (1986), *It was Dark* (1986) and *The Miracle* (1986) She deals with the housewives and their problems like marital discord, separation, and depression in love, boredom and lack of understanding in the marital life among others. Nevertheless, her female protagonists are not feminists. They still seem to be giving importance to reconciliation, stoicism and self-denial as the guiding principles. The concerns of the writers shift from society and community to individuals.

Many more names can be added to prepare an index of short story writers of today. They deal with contemporary life in India and of Indians living abroad. In other words, they are primarily concerned with Indians and their concerns wherever they may be residing. It is possible to state two categories of prominent Indian short story writers: women writers and expatriate writers, as they are very significant voices in the contemporary time. They are concerned with feminist issues and the life of non-resident Indians respectively. Both of them form groups of powerful voices. They are significant because they are highly educated, intellectually strong and powerfully vocal and expressive of their vision. Further, they are adventurous and experimental. Hence, they are very innovative as far as their art and craft are concerned. In addition to R.P. Jhabvala, Anita Desai, and Shashi Deshpande, the other noteworthy women writers are Vera Sharma, Gauri Deshpande, Nisha da Cunha, Anjana Appachana, Indira Aikath – Gyaltzen, Bulbul Sharma, Githa hariharan, Neelum Sharma Gaur, Manjula Padmanabham, Manju Kak, Rukun Advani, Kalpana Swaminathan, Subhadra Sen Gupta, Reeta Dutta Gupta, Shourie Danaiels, Nina Sibal, Deepa Shah, Manorama Mathai, Anita Nair, Shobha De, Esher David, IKamala Das and Lakshmi Kannan among others.

6. SUMMING UP

The Short Story has assumed the importance of a literary symbol of the modern time. Social conditions of modern age and individualistic tendency of the modern man have proved very congenial to its development. Busy life of the industrial age, life spent in bits and moments, additional importance attached to the otherwise ordinary incidents of life, short span of leisure at our disposal, impatience of the modern man, preference for shorter forms etc. are some of the factors which have given a tremendous push to this form of fiction. Moreover, short story has certain advantages over other forms of literature. No form of literature has more immediate appeal than the short story. A poem may be more deeply suggestive, but it calls for careful reading and re-reading to be fully apprehended. A novel may sustain a reader's

interest for hours or days, but its total effect is massive and general rather than sharp and direct. In the short story the reader can experience a situation both briefly and intensely. A poem insinuates, a novel pushes, but a short story hits. To read and enjoy a short story requires neither the effort that poetry demands nor the time that is required by a novel.

Besides, the short story has a variety, which certain other forms lack. It has the potentiality of satisfying multifarious tastes of the readers. So much so that certain critics apprehend the danger of its replacing novel. But it seems to be a big hope, which the modern short story may not and should not fulfill, as the scope of the two-short story and novel is entirely different.

A short story is neither a summary nor a part of a novel. It has a separate and independent entity. It may be defined as that modern and dramatic form of fiction in which the incidents are arranged in such a way that with its one dominant incident or character it is able to achieve brevity. Singleness of purpose and oneness of impression. It presents a slice of life, which has beauty and truth – qualities stressed by Keats as, "All that we know on earth and all that we need to know" (Uppal : 1966 : 323).

That way, the short story has a splendid vogue in modern times. It is growing more and more popular both with the readers and writers. It caters to all interests psychological, sociological and scientific, humanitarian, regional and exotic. It is specially suited to modern life. For minds that have little time and less inclination for spacious indulgences, the concentrated form of the short story is a boon. Literary history is a warning against prophecies, but it can be safely asserted that the short story has an immensely rich future. Its variety and vividness shall continue to grant to it a recognized place and position.

Part-B

RUSKIN BOND : LIFE, WORKS & INFLUENCES

Ruskin Bond occupies an outstanding position among the contemporary Indian English writers. He is not content to describe the things as they happened. He probes deep into how they happened and why they happened. He examines his characters from the inside and analyses how their minds work. His short stories are well-finished and integrated works of art. His plots are not well constructed but his characters appear to be the living men and women. Most of his stories depend upon characters i.e. they are the short-stories of characters.

When Ruskin Bond started writing short-stories, his mind was preoccupied by the memories of the rustic life in the hilly region and the landscapes and human beings who he came in touch with. The result is that his short-stories are full of the charm of the countryside and the rustic atmosphere. There is a lot of philosophical description and depiction of social environment. He thought very deeply about life and expressed his ideas very forcefully. His short-stories, therefore, become highly moral, ethical and they touch the reader's heart.

Bond was born on May 19, 1934 at Kasauli, Himachal Pradesh. He is the eldest son of late Aubrey Alexander Bond, a British officer in Royal Air Force in India. His sister Ellen was a little handicapped child with defective vision and initial signs of epilepsy. Ellen lived with Granny (Grandmother) and brother William at Calcutta, but Bond grew-up in Jamnagar (Gujarat), Dehradun and Simla.

He had his primary education in the boarding schools of Mussoorie and Simla. His father as a part of his Air Force duties moved from one station to another, and so did Ruskin Bond. When he was hardly eight, his mother Agnet Clark left him under the guardianship of his father A.A. Bond and had new settlement with Mr. Hari, a garage owner, at Dehradun. His caring and affectionate father also left him orphan when he was only ten. His untimely death made him unspeakably helpless and lonely.

An adolescent Bond decided to be a writer and left for England to fulfil his ambition. He took up his first job in Jersey, a Channel Island, as a junior clerk in a Solicitor's office. Soon, he left this firm to work for a travel agency. Being totally inexperienced in this line of work, he made a complete mess and switched over to third job of carrying pay packets down to workers in the Island. Meanwhile, he wrote the first draft of his first novel *The Room on the Roof*. Diana Athill and Andre Deutsch, literary critics, who later became his great admirers, published the book. Though his forays in Channel Island were in search of literary establishment, though, he had grown up with love for English literature, even though his forefathers were British, he missed India and his friends at Dehra. As such, without enjoying his maiden success (his book in print and subsequent award) he returned to India. He could not wait for the moment of receiving prestigious John Liewellyn Rhys Memorial Prize (1957), the highest award for the young writers in Britain.

On his return to India, he preferred to settle down in the small sleepy town, Dehra, and said good-bye to the rush and tumult of Delhi. He decided to eke his living from freelance writing but soon it proved a very tough task in the mercenary world. He recollects :

From my small flat in Dehradun, I began bombarding every newspaper and magazine editor in the land with articles, stories, essays and even poems (Bond : 1993 : VIII)

It was a time when hardly any publisher was around to encourage the budding writers, and hence, he had to concentrate on journalism. There were, of course, *The Statesman*, *The Illustrated Weekly*, *The Tribune*, *The Telegraph*, *The Pioneer*, *The Deccan Herald*, *The Leader*, *The Times of India*, Shankar's *Weekly*, Baburao Patel's *Mother India*, *The Independent and Financial Express*, which actually published his fiction and Ruskin Bond sailed modestly as a freelancer. Things got better in the seventies as he found *The Christian Monitor* in Boston, *Blackwood's* in Edinburgh and *The Asia Magazine* in Hong Kong, to pay satisfactorily for his stories and poems. His children's books began to be published in different parts of the world. The novellas *Vagrants in the Valley*, *Delhi is Not Far* and *A Flight of Pigeons* were

written during his struggle for a comfortable living. *A Flight of Pigeons* has been put on celluloid under the title *Junoon*, a classic movie on the theme of India's first War of Independence in 1857. *The Sensualist* was written in the mid seventies and first appeared in a Bombay magazine *Debonair* in which it was serialized over four issues. Just after a few months the novel was banned as Bond was charged with obscenity. Eminent Indian writers like Nissim Ezekiel and Vijay Tendulkar made a fervent appeal against ban and the judge gave an honourable acquittal. Penguin India came forward in eighties with the project of publishing all his works. Hundreds of his stories, sketches, poems, essays and novellas were collected and published.

Bond got the Sahitya Akademy Award (1992) for the book *Our Trees Still Grow in Dehra*. Two of his novels *The Room on The Roof* and *Vagrants in the Valley* were published in one volume in 1993. The novella *A Handful of Nuts* was written 1995 over a period of three months and half, when icy winds and snowstorms kept him confined to his small cottage in the hills. In the novel he has tried to capture the warmth of his youth and romance of Dehra in the sixties. He has also edited several anthologies-*Classical Indian Love Stories and Lyrics*, *Indian Railway Stories*, *Indian Ghost Stories*, and *Rupa Book of Ghost Stories*. A serial based on the autobiographical stories was recently telecast under the title *Ek Tha Rusty*. Ruskin Bond's *Complete Stories and Novels* were published by Penguin India in 1996 in the Omnibus volume during their 10th anniversary celebrations. The publication covers almost thirty books of Ruskin Bond including essays, articles, Ghost stories, reminiscences, documentaries and lyrics along with fifteen other Bond titles for children. Many of his storybooks have become a part of school curriculum. He has also published his autobiography *Scenes from a Writer's Life*, which describes his formative years of growing up in Anglo India. *Rain in the Mountains* and *The Lamp is Lit*, comprise a collection of essays and articles from various journals published long ago. *Rain in the Mountains* is literally, like inhaling a lungful of fresh mountain air. The B.B.C. broadcast the abridged version of the chapter "The Playing Fields of Simla," from *Scenes from a Writer's Life* during its India 1997 season. Honoured with the prestigious Padamshree in 1999 for his lifetime contribution to Indian English

Literature, he has cast an indelible imprint on the contemporary literary scene. On the occasion of his sixty-seventh birthday, May 19, 2001, he gifted two of his books *Friends in Small Places* and *When Darkness Falls* to his avid readers. Just when one may think that the veteran writer has run out of stock, he is back with great intensity and freshness of narration.

In fact, Ruskin Bond is a living legend who has been ceaselessly portraying life and experiences through various genres of literature. Settled down in Mussoorie, 'the honeymoon capital' of northern India, as he calls it, he has been clicking his typewriter for the last forty-six years. The family of his adopted son, Prem, has been an integral part of his personal life for more than thirty-five years. It gives him the warmth and emotional security of a happy-home without virtually going through marital experience. Three generations of the family have been his companion ever since, to prove that sometime man-made relations last longer than the natural ones.

An artist's mental make-up is basically governed by two factors viz, his experiences, particularly, in childhood and early youth and the spirit of his age. No writer can create a world outside the nature of his own experience. So subjectivity is the natural feature of any literary piece of work. Ruskin Bond is not an exception to this fact. He is basically a subjective writer and loves to recreate his boyhood and youth through fictional counterparts. Diana Athill, his friend and admirer, writes in a letter to him dated March 23, 1964;

Your snag is surely, that you are a writer who works best from very close to your own experience-which means that one is terribly dependent on the nature of one's experience. . . I still like best the kind of writing, which goes inwards rather than outwards. (Bond : 1997 : I).

Critics may charge him of subjectivity, but his subjectivity is not deceptive. Other writers like Dickens, Chekhov and Samuel Beckett have practised it. Tillyard emphatically pointed out that the hero of the poem, *Paradise Lost*, is neither Adam, nor Satan, but Milton himself.

There are writers who cover a larger canvas of life through inventive skill, but the charm of subjective writing is unsurpassable. A whole life along with numerous others speaks to us, enralls us and sometime motivates us. In fact, Bond's subjectivity emerges as his great potential driving his readers into the world of verisimilitude.

First twenty years of Ruskin Bond's life are very significant, although they are not of great achievement, they are, in fact, formative years. There are struggles, setbacks, failures, tragedies but hope never deserts him. It was his optimism and love for life that kept him energetic and animated. He has talked about some prominent impressions that shaped his short stories profile. He recollects those early years;

I was still a pimply, adolescent when I decided I wanted to be a writer. I read Dickens' *David Copperfield* and Hugh Walpole's *Fortitude* and decided that I wanted to be like the writer is heroes of both books. Before that my father had brought me up on a diet of children classics . . . The ensuing lonely period with my mother and step-father only cemented my attachment to the world of books . . . I began to love the country that I had till then taken for granted to love it through the friends and forests, which had made on indelible impression on my mind. (Bond : 1997 : XV)

It would be proper to go into the details of these early impressions, which played a decisive role in shaping the personality of Bond as a man and writer as well. His father named him Ruskin, after the famous Victorian man of letters and master of art and architecture. It may be a chance, but later developments proved it a pioneering step. Bond says;

Had my father been an admirer of Ruskin ? I did not ask him . . . and years later my mother was to confirm that my father had indeed named me after the Victorian writer. (Bond : 1997 : 19).

Bond's other Christian name, *Owen*, was hardly used, perhaps because he was destined to follow the line of Victorian Ruskin. And accordingly he was brought up on a diet of letters. The seeds of *literati* were sown at a very early age by developing in him a taste for short stories reading and diary writing. Mr. Bond's gift for the boy Ruskin were those of children classics by well-known writers, picture, postcards and diaries.

Bond's relationship with his father is a mixture of love and adulation. He was proud of him and his being in the RAF was a matter of hero-worship, as he always loved to see him in uniform. His father profusely compensated the vacuum caused by mother's 'un-motherly' step. Senior Bond gave to young Ruskin all that is expected from loving parents. He recalls fondly those early days of cantonment area in Delhi when the father and the son explored old tombs and monuments during holidays. They liked going to cinema and purchasing new gramophone records. These little homely-pastimes strengthened their relationship and gave a sense of normal childhood to the sensitive boy to some extent. They shared their loneliness and hobbies together.

Helping my father with his stamp collection, accompanying him to the pictures, dropping in at Wagner's for tea and muffins, bringing home a book or record-what more could a small boy of eight have asked for ? (Bond :1997 : 22).

When senior Bond was away on duty, the boy kept himself busy in plenty occupations and waited eagerly for his 'sir's' return. Books, stamps, album, gramophone, hundreds of picture postcards and his little adventures in the jungle behind the cantonment hut kept him immersed for hours and hours. Those were the days of dating father. So, Bond says;

If in writing this memoir, I appear to be taking my father's side, I suppose it is only human nature for a boy to be loyal to the parent who stands by him, no matter how difficult the circumstance . . . he did his best for me, dear man. He gave his time, his

companionship, and his complete attention. (Bond: 1997 : 23).

It is quite natural for a child like Bond to get awfully attached to his father, his single parent who bestowed his sole love and consideration to him. When Bond was in a boarding at Simla, he regularly got his letters and cards. The last letter, which he received at the school, reveals how much they shared each other and how meticulous senior Bond was about the development of his son's personality. He writes in his letter to Bond;

I wanted to write before about your writing, Ruskin, but forgot . . .you have written in very small handwriting, as if you wanted to squeeze a lot of news into one sheet of letter-paper. It is not good for you or for your eyes. . . I know your handwriting is good and that you come first in class for handwriting, but try and form a longer style of writing. (Bond : 2000 : 59).

The letter is the only treasured legacy of A. A. Bond, as his other letters are lost owing to the blundering carelessness of Mr. Priestly, the Violin teacher at Simla Boarding School. Dr. Howard Gotlieb now cares this letter and his dozens of picture postcards in his archives at Boston University's Mugar Memorial Library. Bond's deep attachment to them is quite natural;

I preserved them for fifty years and now they are being looked after by Dr. Howard Gotlieb. . .My own letters can perish, but not these postcards. (Bond : 1997 : 8)

Senior Bond's love for Philately contributed a lot in enriching young Ruskin. He found it an interesting source of information about countries, people and wildlife. He could easily learn about the geography and political history of various places through illustrations. Bond was primarily introduced with the world of fiction when his father told him the stories of phantom rickshaw pullers, enchanted forests and hills, sorts of stories, which now he writes for his young readers. Ruskin Bond had not read Kipling at the time but

through his father's retellings he was already familiar with many of his characters and settings. Besides, the fact that Bishop Cotton, founder of his boarding school had been a young master at Rugby under the famous writer Dr. Arnold instilled in him a sense of belonging to literary tradition.

Senior Bond tried his best to dissipate young Ruskin's sense of loneliness. In spite of his frequent bouts of malaria and his personal sense of agony he always stood by his son. But Ruskin could not reconcile with the cruel truth that his family was a broken one. He was a mute witness of the family brawl as he was too young to understand such matters. Actually, Mrs. Bond could never adjust with her husband. She was a lady with her own hard compulsions, stubborn by temperament and fond of outdoor life. She was married to Mr. Bond who was fifteen years her senior. It was a marriage of two heterogeneous minds put together. Bond writes in his memories;

She and her sisters had been a fun-loving set, they enjoyed going to dances, picnics and parties. She must have found my father too serious, too much of a stay at home, happy making morning butter or sorting through his stamps in the evenings. (Bond:1997 :23).

Young Ruskin could not comprehend the complexities of relations. Later, Mrs. Bond told him that Mr. Bond was a possessive husband and did not approve her mixing with other men. She was of course, young, vivacious and as Bond observed, everyone looked twice at her. This unhappy married life was bound to be doomed and eight years old Ruskin was forced to resent his mother's liaison with another man. He could never recover from the nightmare of separation. The reason of his remaining bachelor is quite explicit in the light of such experience. Bond firmly believes that most of young couples fail to conceive the true spirit behind their union. Their 'body chemistry' may be right but the harmony of two minds is that makes relationship endure. Senior Bond tried to resume their relationship, but could not succeed. They were incompatible and Ruskin Bond feels that they should never have married. The scars carved by this unhappy relationship made him sceptic in personal life too. On one occasion answering the curiosity of a boy at St. Xavier School Mussoorie, on his unmarried status, he replied genially;

"He really never felt 'confident' enough to decide that he wanted to share his life with someone else". (Bond : Hindustan Times).

Lack of wholesome parentage filled his tender mind with an intense sense of insecurity, which still haunts him;

A feeling of insecurity began to creep over me – a feeling that was to recur from time-to-time and which was to become part of my mental luggage for the rest of my life. (Bond : 1997 : 32).

Unnatural childhood gave way to an introvert child, rather a premature adult, striving to understand the intricacies of love and relationship. Bond's obsession for children is obviously, a reflection of that stress and his relative sensitivity with the cause of innocents. His yearning for the cuddles of a fond mother is visible in many of his short stories, "The Woman On Platform No.8" is the manifestation of his vision of an ideal mother who understands her kids, who patiently bears their tantrums and exerts lovingly for their healthy development. The same things in "A Guardian Angel". In fact, Bond achieves in short stories what he could not get in real life. He frankly admits;

I don't suppose I would have written so much about childhood or even about other children, if my own childhood had been all happiness and light. (Bond : 1997 : 4)

Not only home life, Bond does not cherish the memories of his school days too. He recalls in his memories how uneasy he felt in the cool mechanized sort of attitude of schoolteachers. Haunting sense of insecurity kept him alienated from other fun loving boys as well, Bond can never forget the fateful day at Bishop Cotton School when Mr. Murtough, his schoolteacher, clumsily broke the news of his father's death;

He mumbled something about God needing my father more than I did and of course, I knew what had happened . . . It never made any sense to me why God should have needed my father more than I did. If

God was love, why did he have to break up the only loving relationship I'd known so far. (Bond :1997 : 30).

The story "The Funeral" is a moving account of his father's death though he did not virtually witness it. Through the factious child he articulates his own sorrow, his own prayer to get his dear father revived in some or the other way. Though after his father's tragic demise, he returned to Dehra to live with his mother and stepfather, he could never feel comfortable. In spite of his mother, stepfather and other relatives, he now became unspeakably lonely and helpless. Mother's priorities were jungle expeditions and dance parties and stepfather, Mr. Hari was indifferent towards him. In such conditions he missed the care and attention that a boy of his age badly needs. The only thing he enjoyed, amidst wants was having his own room. This state of emotional vacuum would have been disastrous, had he not escaped to the world of books. Though father introduced him to the wondrous world of books, it was his own sense of loneliness, which brought him nearer to them, till he realized 'reading was his religion'. He transhaped his loneliness as a vital part of his personality. The works of other writers so firmly got hold of him that he devoted most of his time with them. He had already devoured children classics at Simla. He says;

The School Library – the Anderson Library was fairly well stocked and it was something of a heaven for me over the next three years. There were always writers, past or present, to discover and I still have a tendency to ferret out writers, who have been ignored or forgotten. (Bond : 1997 : 64).

Bond claims to have read about fifteen thousand books so far and much of them were done during Boarding School at Simla. He stuffed his mind with all types of writers known or unknown such as – Rudyard Kipling, Somerset Mugham, H.G. Wells, William Wordsworth, Charles Dickens, Louis Carol, A. G. Gardiner, Mark Twain, John Masters, Walter De La Mare, Robert Lynd and even Tagore, Mulk Raj Anand, R.K. Narayan. The book preferred most was Charles Dickens' *David Copperfield*. Obviously, he felt in David's story his own tale narrated. He established a close affinity with the triumphs

and tribulations of *David Copperfield* – loss of parents, sense of insecurity and struggle for a meaningful life. Accordingly Bond's ambition of being a writer was flared up by and large.

Intellectual nourishment and stimulation are important for a writer in embryo and fortunately Bond was profusely supplied with them. In an interview to *The Times of India*, he reveals;

Most of his education came from second hand bookshops and not from school and colleges. Books have always been a great stand by. (Bond : Times of India).

Bond now admits that his fondness for books was somewhat unusual for the boys of his age. So he felt himself a bit different, rather superior to his peers. When other schoolmates loved sports, picnics, comics and gossips, Bond could always discover a shelf stuffed with dustful of books waiting for him. The boy did not feel ashamed of being called a sissy introvert. Even at Dehra when other family members had gone out for hunting expeditions, he loved to be left alone in the guesthouse occupied by some old editions. There are numerous biographical stories in which the boy (BOND) prefers rummaging through some volume of P.G. Woodehouse instead of chasing a deer. Bond admits that he was not selective about his reading, anything – cheap, classic or even erotic that had tone, style and substance sufficed to keep him emersed. This random reading probably reflects his confused state of mind. He says;

I began to read whatever books came in my way. . . it provided me an escape from the reality of my situation and it was during those first winter holidays in Dehra that I became a book warm and ultimately a book lover and writer in embryo. (Bond : 1997 : 38).

His first fictional forays titled *Nine Months* were written in the dreary environs of Boarding at Simla. It was an account of school life. 'Eulogies to my friends' as he calls it. But unfortunately, it was confiscated by a teacher and never came into light. In spite of this nipping in the bud, Bond continued

to practice writing in a busy classroom, noisy dormitory and quiet corners of the playing fields. All he needed was pen and paper and there was no shortage of that empty paper bags, wrappers, pages torn from exercise books, the back of calendars and school circular were ready at hand. Writing under such diverse conditions later proved a good training as now he can write even in the busy compartment of a moving train or on the bench of a noisy platform. Though he believes that ;

Writing was a lonely personal art and not an exercise in public relations. But of course these were influences and childhood influences are strongest. (Bond : 1997 : 38).

Enormous reading helped him to discover his soul and to develop his mode of writing as well. Bond was deeply impressed by the style of Dickens, Charles Lamb, J.B. Priestley and some writers like Mark Twain, William Goldsmith, Stephen Leacock, Woodehouse and George. Bond's early reading was strictly English even in content; it was in his twenties that he explored charm in Mulk Raj Anand, Rudyard Kipling and R. K. Narayan. He found the books of a neglected autobiographical writer, Sudhir Goshe, very interesting. The American short story writer, William Saroyan also strongly influenced him when he set out to sail as a writer. Poetry of Walter De La Mare flared up his poetic bent. Bond is proud of his taste though one may term it old fashioned. Those writers are never out of date for him. He still occasionally goes through them to recharge himself. He admits that; "all have influenced me in their own way". (Aggarwal : 1998).

Autobiographical mode of writing and nostalgic punctuations in his fiction is in the manner of Dickens and Lamb. "Bond is, no doubt, a personal writer and has aptly called himself 'an Indian Charles Lamb'." (Bond:1997: 75)

Humorous, sad and nostalgic his stories drive his readers down the memory lane when life was simpler and there was space for the small errors of young and eccentric old. R. K. Narayan's impact is visible in the comic stance of life. Simplicity of narration and empathetic characterization are the hallmarks of both the writers. If Malgudi, the imaginary town has been the

place of action in the world of Narayan, Dehra and Mussoorie serve as the favourite backdrops in Bond's short stories. Local colour is the distinguished feature of both the writers.

Ruskin Bond found the short stories of H.E. Bates, Saroyan, and A.E. Coppard, chiefly, akin to his temperament. It was like snatching at life and recording its impressions and sensations rather than trying to digest its whole. In Bond's stories too, fleeting moments are cased up exquisitely by the force of vision and skill of condensed narration. His penchant for shorter fiction is strictly personal. Joseph Conrad served as a model writer of novellas. Bond appreciated its compositional economy and unity of conception as demonstrated in *Heart of Darkness*, *The shadow Line* and *The Nigger of Narcissus* by Conrad. Though Bond does not aspire to become another Conrad, some of his stylistic traits are similar to those of Conrad. John Masters' influence on him can be traced in the brooding quality and pessimism in the novel *The Sensualist*. However, it will not be out of place to mention that pessimism is not a part of his mental make-up; therefore, it is not visible in any other piece of work.

Bond is a famous writer of Nature. His response to nature is instinctive. The person who intimated him to this lasting relationship was his father. Bond recapitulates those planting excursions by the slopes of Dehra in many of his stories when father introduced him to the vastness of nature. Later, Thoreau and Richard Jeffries transhaped his attitude to nature. He specially enjoys the books of Jeffries, as he says;

My attitudes have also been influenced by Thoreau's *Walden* and Richard Jeffries' *The Story of My Heart*. *Jeffries'* book is not simply a description of nature lore; it is a work of poetic and mystic vision. . . I can certainly say that hundred years after Jeffries wrote. . . there was at least one reader, myself who enjoyed many hours of delight in 'physical emotion' as a result of reading the work of one who was more a pagan than a gentle naturalist. (Bond : 1993 : 246).

Bond has truly imbibed the spirit of a pagan; nature to him is the only deity and entire universe is the manifestation of her force. Bond was deeply impressed by Rudyard Kipling, chiefly, by his passionate adherence to the great Himalayas. Kipling's words still resound in his ears;

This is the true smell of the Himalayas and if once it creeps into the blood of man that man will at last forgetting all else return to the hills to die (Bond : 1999 : 481)

Bond can never part with the "smell" of pines and so, he has settled down in the heart of Garhwal Himalayas to portray each passing hue on the snow – covered peaks and dew dappled lawns. The soul of Kipling's Mawgli can be traced in the flying heels of Bisnu and Ramu.

Bond is grateful to some of his teachers who helped him in shaping his mode of writing. He expressed his gratitude for those generous souls. Some of his teachers also encouraged him and helped him to develop his writing. Mr Whitmarsh Knight, my English teacher, helped me in grammar. I learnt clarity of expression and choice of right words by Mr. Jones. A writer may learn a few tit-bits of his art through such seemingly organized chain of influences, but the sign of originality springs from within. Writing is not a forced exercise, but a spontaneous overflow of emotions. Seeds of literati germinate in fertile soil only. Bond has aptly said;

We don't become writers in schools of creative writing. We become writers before we learn to write. The rest is simply learning how to put it all together. (Bond : 1997 : 4).

In some of Bond's stories he writes about fun loving grandfathers and doting grandmothers, but they are just his dream incarnations. However his unusual love for birds and beasts is imbibed from his grandfather, as he says;

According to my mother, my grandfather did keep a number of interesting pets and I have described them and their activities in some of my tales. (Bond:1997: XIV).

Other person who frequently passes down his memory lane is Dukhi, the gardener. Boy Ruskin was fond of Dukhi, granny's gardener, who emerges as the spindle – legged moving encyclopedia Botanica in some of his stories. Bond pays special tribute to 'E. Sims', an unidentified signature in his memoir. During his Dehra days, Bond found a stock of books at Granny's house, signed as 'E. Sims.' He could never know the mysterious lady who signed her books so neatly and Bond could only appreciate her exclusive taste for books;

I never could find out much about 'E. Sims'. . . but she certainly played a formative role in my development as a reader and possibly as a writer. (Bond :1997 : 40).

One cannot deny the impact of Prem's family with whom he has been sharing his day-to-day life for the last thirty-five years at Mussoorie. His age long sense of loneliness is overcome to a large extent in the warm environs of a joint family. Prattles of Siddharth and Shrishti (grand children) erase that boredom which generally envelops a man of his age; simultaneously, he enjoys a blissful solitude, which is essential to concentrate his creative gusto. Without passing through the excitement of domestic mess, his vision would have lacked the virtual spirit of life. The touch of verisimilitude is undoubtedly, by virtue of his being the head of a loving family. He fondly says;

If it were not the family that has grown up around me, a prisoner of love, I doubt, if I would have remained rooted to one place for so long . . . I have become a family man by virtue of remaining a bachelor . . . this is the ideal situation for a writer. All the noise, merriment and bedlam of a large family living together has become an integral part of life . . . joy to my heart and music to my ears. (Bond : 1997 : XVI).

Not only people and individualistic traits affect the creative vision of a writer, the place and environs in which he breathes, cast a lingering impact on him. Bond is a celebrated writer of hills. Early impressions of childhood

spent in Mussoorie, Simla and Dehradun culminated in life long settlement in the hills. Mountains flow in his blood. Most of his stories originate from the familiar parts of the hills. Widely known as the generous soul of the hills, he has become a living legend. His early romance with Dehra is metamorphosed in hundreds of his stories, essays, poems and sketches. The mysterious silence of star-lit night and fresh hues of dappled dawn, all are captured in the network of his plots. He recollects pre-independence Dehra.

When I was a boy in Dehra in 1940, the place looked like a fairyland. It has been the inspiration for all my stories and my love for it will make me alive here and keep writing about the town. (The creative contours:23).

The town helped him to recover the loss of dear father and odds of forced relationship with mother and stepfather. Its heavenly landscape compensated the emotional vacuum and drove him out of his gloom. Bond developed the habit of tramping along the slopes with hands thrust in his pocket. Till today, his tramping has been a great source of creative impetus. He says; "I was really a walking person and was to remain so all my life". (Bond : 1997 : 73).

Apparently, it seems an aimless tramping as he loves to gaze at the film posters, look at the train arriving and departing from the station, watch a bluejaya or hoopoe or admire a lonely flower on the garden wall. In spite of an extensive analysis of direct and indirect impressions on Bond's mental make-up journey of life is not so simple as to classify in sections. No influence stands in isolation. One impression gives way to another and so on. Therefore, a write-up is the product of combined traits. Bond grew up as a young rebel, squirmish to his own sense of isolation, partly because of personal loss and partly because of ambition. His conception of his own self is very candid;

Of personality I had none; not then not ever. But I was very much my own person – strong in my likes

and dislikes, very stubborn . . . my own room, my own privacy; old fashioned enough to believe in loyalty to friends; scorning money for money's sake, sensual nature . . . to see my name in print. To love and be loved, to be free. (Bond : 1997 : 78-9).

Herein lies the paradox of life; the young rebel loves life, people and everything that is cherished carefully. Though he resented against the set standards of school for the boys, he proved himself an accomplished soccer goalkeeper, rather than an aggressive goal scorer or go-getter. In his own words he is "A stout defender rather than a dashing, flashy center forward". (Bond : 1993 : 46).

Bond is still a goalkeeper, protecting and defending whatever is good and delightful in life. He strives to hold strongly the values of life from getting smoldered. The remarkable softness of his tone springs out of his deep belongingness to life and things. His integrity to life and vocation is unquestionable.

Ruskin Bond is being awarded the N. D. Mehra Memorial Award for 2003 for his contribution to children's literature at the New Delhi World Book Fair. He has been nominated for Astrid Lindgren Memorial Award 2005. He is the only Indian author to figure among the 87 nominees from 33 countries.

Though, Ruskin Bond introduces a few aristocrats in his short stories his main interest lies in the lives of the common people of his beloved Hill station. His heart went out to the poor rustics, farmers and labourers whom he had observed as a young boy. No human being was too weak or too sinful for his compassion. He represents the democratic movement in English literature.

Bond made the short story simple but lofty. The short story ceased to be merely a means of common entertainment. It became a study of the inner working of the minds and hearts of characters. He believed that every work of art should have a moral significance. He regards not religion but the moral law as the basis of human society. Persons who do not maintain a high standard of morality are ruined.

Dickens takes us to the streets of London; Thackeray shows us the panorama of the Drawing rooms. Ruskin Bond takes us to the bus stop and railway platform, the farms and the fields of rural hill station and showed us the panorama of nature.

The major objectives of the present research are to assess Ruskin Bond's art of employing the literary form of the short story place him in the overall spectrum of short story writers in Indian English: this aims at exploiting critically Bond's thematic concerns, his art of characterization, his craftsmanship and his reason of life. Separate chapters are devoted to each aspect for critical analysis. These analyses are followed by the assessment of Ruskin Bond as a short-storywriter.

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CHAPTER - II

RUSKIN BOND'S THEMATIC CONCERNS

Of all the essential and vitally inter-related ingredients of a story the theme is, perhaps, the most difficult to define. Nevertheless, attempts have been made to define it. Wilfred Stone, Nancy Huddleton Packer and Robert Hoopes write;

After pleasure or pain, excitement or perplexity caused by the story had receded, the reader is left with a residue, a distillation, that we call theme. (Stone & others : 23).

Thus, the theme is something that emerges from the obscure system the writer provides. In a broad sense, a theme “may simply be a characteristic view of life that pervades a story”. (Lynn and Lewis : 78). It is the general vision or life of the more explicit proposition about human experience that literature conveys. Harry Shaw maintains that the theme tells “Some truth about life or human behaviour”. (Shaw : 13).

These concepts of theme in short fiction suggest that short story, like other fictional forms, expresses the values of a writer and his understanding of the human condition. The story in its entirety thus expands the theme. A story not a mere narration of events or the depiction of a situation. The event or situation in some may echo that in the lives of the readers. This is caused by shaping the events in such a way as to extract a meaning out of it. This meaning is sometimes a moral or a philosophical idea or something that illumines life. As Lynn Alterbernd and Leslie L. Lewis remark;

Not all stories are profoundly philosophic, but they either add to our knowledge of life or else give us a fresh, or subtly qualified, or vividly dramatized idea. (Lewis & Alterbernd : 79).

Thus, theme involves the controlling idea or philosophical subject, which largely determines the selection and organization of the material in a

story. This vision or idea is an ideal situation sprouts from the soil of the writer's experience. The view of Henry James on how the themes of a storyteller evolve from his experiences illustrates this point. He writes;

Experience is never limited, and it is never complete; it is an immense sensibility a kind of huge spider web of the finest silken threads suspended in the chamber of consciousness and catching every air-borne particles in its tissue, it is the very atmosphere of the mind, and when the mind is imaginative, much more when it happens to be that of a man of genius – it takes to itself the faintest hints of life, it converts the very pulses of the air into revelations. (Davis : 550).

A good story is seldom the illustration of an idea. It creates an image of life by which significance emerges from experience. This is driven home to us as Cleanth Brooks and Robert Penn Warren observe;

It is the idea, the significance, the interpretation of persons and events, the pervasive and unifying view of life, which is embodied in the total narrative. It is. . . what we are to make of human experience rendered in the story. And what we make of such human experience always involves, directly or indirectly, some comment on values in human nature and human conduct on the good and bad, on the true and the false, some conception of what the human place is in the world. (Brooks and Warren : 229).

A study of the themes of short stories have a direct bearing on the personal experiences of the artist, for every writer is shaped by the social, political, economic, religious, moral and cultural forces as well as by his sense of tradition and history. His themes, forms, assumptions and even his rhetorical style are determined and shaped by these forces that make up the environment in which he lives and to which he responds, so, the close relation

between creative effort and the historical situation from which it emerges has become a vital clue to any serious attempt at literary evaluation.

Bond's themes are of a surprising and pleasant variety. His creative word has been built around plots drawn from love, pets, animals, orphans & abnormal children, Indianness, nature and contemporary life. It is a world as simple as art and as easy as life. Each story is an experiment in theme and technique. Consequently, it has been found that the classification of his tales into certain groups on the basis of themes is an easy task. In fact, the key to the understanding of his fictional themes lies in an objective assessment of his varied experiences in relation to the materials that goes into the making up of his stories.

Bond's thematic base is the landscape and socio-scape of the region that he frequented in his early years or his own vision moulded by his personal experiences. His descriptions comprise an admirable admixture of landscapes, or more rapid, but always vivid sketches, all vibrant with life. The landscapes depicted by Bond are seen to be inseparably related to the lives of his characters. Isolated from the characters, they have no significance. He establishes a correlation between the nature and the humans. The topographical description introduces the reader to a scene unique in landscape and atmosphere.

The locale chosen for the stories is recognizably Indian. Local colour is demonstrably the life of Bond's stories, which transcend the purely regional. He has portrayed with great fidelity the north Indian (Mussoorie, Dehra & Garhwal Himalayas) scene in its manifold variety. With photographic accuracy he records the local topography, architecture, manners, customs, rituals, superstitions and character types. Bond's local colour-stories present a type of realism, if realism can be defined as a graphic delineation of actual life. In "Introduction' of *The Night Train At Deoli and Other Stories*, Bond himself says; "I am happier being a short-story writer..." (Bond : 1988 : I).

He is essentially a realist in his approach to the art of the short story. He has a keen eye for detail and he depicts everything as he sees it through

the wonderful colour camera of his mind – the beauty of a rural landscape, the squalor of a street, the orphans & abnormal children, a scene in the city, the cosiness of the bedroom in a happy middle class home or the crowded discomforts of a third class railway compartment. He is perhaps closer in his realism to D.H. Lawrence, Dickens, Tagore, Narayan and Mulk Raj Anand. His realism is concerned with epitomizing the ordinary activities of the middle class and lower class people by closely observing and recording their most typical behaviour. He in fact, expresses a sense of truth embodied in a personal vision of certain aspects of human behaviour.

Bond's fictional world is peopled with persons of all ages belonging to the middle and lower classes of the north India. These characters are presented in different social and family relationships. Like the world of Bond's contemporaries, Bond's society too is male-dominated but his sympathy is always with children and women characters. He does not treat them as inferior-they are virtuous, graceful and generous. His most familiar type of women characters are doting mothers, loving aunts and girls, devoted, pious, and loving grandmothers. They are given full realization in his stories as ideal characters.

Bond's theme invariably centers round human relationships and whatever they may symbolize. He places his characters in milieus that demand multi-faceted relationships. To him family relationship, however, is the fundamental part of life. He does not, of course, limit his treatment of the family to his own personal experiences. His wide observation and equally wide sympathies preclude any such exclusiveness. His stories show the depth of understanding of human situations. He does not deal with life in its length and breath. His outlook is fragmentary; it does not reflect the vision and imagination of total life.

The variety of characters and the situations in which they are made to reveal themselves in Bond's stories are really amazing. His characters range from children to old men and women and are presented in the context of different domestic relationships. Even the characters in Fancy Tales and other fable-like stories take on traits that are essentially human.

In tracing the interaction between the physical environment and man's inner world, Bond shows a rare grasp of the urges that motivate the human being. He is at his best while depicting the reality of human emotion and of the shifts in individual consciousness as it struggles towards identity and meaning. He introduces states of consciousness that are very significant in plumbing the depths of human mind and interpreting their life, and the deeper principles and forces that lie behind their apparently superficial behaviour. This inevitably makes it necessary to penetrate beyond surface impressions and reach the realms of a deeper truth by means of the great complexities of events and surface data. Bond thinks that a story is great only when it reveals the inner reality.

The major characters in Bond's serious stories are endowed with sincere feelings and mutual good-will, but life remains tragic, not because of the presence of any adversary, but because of the complex circumstances which seem to lie beyond the control of human beings. This happens as a result of accident or chance caused by a force acting independently and capriciously outside human will. Bond believes that everything that happens in nature and in human life that is a part of nature has reason. He recognizes that man's deeds; his 'guilt' or 'sin' bears the responsibility for his future. Despite an undertone of melancholy in most of his stories, he is optimistic about the final outcome.

Bond's stories cannot be considered mere description of events or delineation of a situation. The event or situation in some way illumines the lives of the readers. This is achieved by shaping the events in such a way as to extract a meaning out of it. Bond seems to follow the principle of the modern short story,

They either add to our knowledge of life or else give us a fresh or sweetly qualified or vividly dramatized idea. (Lynn and Lewis : 79).

Traditionally the story has been considered the body and the moral, its soul.

The tone of Bond's stories is moral and didactic. Whether the matrix of the story is traditional or modern the didactic element predominates. The stories in the collection *Fancy Tales* are set in a world of magic and enchantment.

Ruskin Bond's favourite subjects or themes are pets, animals and a variety of the have-nots, including waifs, orphans, abnormal children, restless adolescents and frustrated old men whom he portrays with genuine compassion.

✓ **Theme of Nature & Animals**

Nature is a major thematic occupation in Bond's short stories. He shows the great affinity between trees and men. It is not simply a matter of nature description as a narrative technique, but a genuine feeling for the natural world, which has it somewhat of a Wordsworth in quality about it.

There is a great affinity between trees and men. We grow at much the same pace, if we are not hurt or starved or cut down. In our youth we are resplendent creatures, and in our declining years we stoop a little, we remember, we stretch our brittle limbs in the sun, and then, with a sigh, we shed our last leaves. (Bond : 1988 : 103-104).

Mahmood Ali, the kitemaker, in the story "The Kitemaker" speaks of the inseparable relationship between man and nature. The analogy of man and tree gives the total essence of Ruskin Bond's treatment of nature, which is very familiar to all of us. From time immemorial, nature with all her mysteries and beauty has been a perennial source of inspiration for all writers in different languages of the world. It has consistently been a source of joy and faith in life. The writers have approached nature according to their mental make-up and the life around them. Some fall in love with her external beauty, whereas some are keen to learn from one impulse of vernal wood. Very few like Bond seek delight in running with the winds, smiling with the flowers and conversing with the trees.

In short, most of the writers are satisfied with mere description of nature, with a mere external view of her beauties. While Bond does not regard nature as a mere background but as a wonderful power that influences our souls. He allows the bird and the flowers the tree and the river to speak and convey their own messages. He possesses not only sight, but also insight. He not only sees things clearly and accurately, but also penetrates in to the hearts of things and always finds some meaning in them. Nothing is ugly or commonplace in this world. Everywhere he recognizes personality in nature. From his earliest childhood has a great regard for the streams and hills. The flowers and stars have been his companions. When his thoughts became mature, he believed that the nature is the reflection of the living God.

Bond perceives man and nature in his own way. He considers men and women as poor creatures because the world is too much with them. This theme of the influence of nature on man is the noblest part of Bond's creation. Most of Bond's titles and descriptions depend upon nature e.g. "The Coral Tree", "The Window", "The Prospect of Flowers", "The Cherry Tree", "My Father's Trees in Dehra", "Panther's Moon", "The Leopard", "Sita and the River", "When You Can't Climb Trees Any More", "Death of the Trees", "The Daffodil Case", "The Funeral", "From Small Beginnings", "It isn't Time That is Passing", "The Last Tonga Ride", "Dust on the Mountains", "Tiger, Tiger, Burning Bright" and "The Garden of Memories" etc. That way, like others, Bond's nature also includes hills and mountains, rivers and spring; lakes and seas, earth and sky, wind, rains, woods, trees, plants and flowers, the sun, the moon and stars etc. But his outlook is certainly different from the outlook of others.

Bond is an ardent lover of nature. He breathes through her and writes for her. It is an everlasting love affair, which knows no satiety, because it goes on renewing itself time and again through transient scenes and colours. His imagination is flared up by the quaint beauties of nature interwoven with the melodies of breeze, forming a unique world free from discordant notes. Far from the sickening view of sociopolitical humbug, his literary journey trails on a different path in search of a winter garden, a cherry tree in Maplewood, a

leopard or a panther, a hidden pool, a wayside teashop, a small railway platform, or village scenes. His earnestness to harmonize his own self with them brings him closer. While most of his contemporary writers are concentrating on social, psychological, political and cultural disintegration of man, Ruskin Bond seems to be consciously drifting away from the hydra-headed hurdles of mechanical world. He preferably enjoys the divine beauty of the hills and dales in Garhwal Himalayas. The entire corpus of his short stories is a magnificent document of his deep association with nature. It provides him endless impressions, which he moulds in the form of a moving story, novel, an article or essay. He approaches nature beyond any traditional or hackneyed trend. He says;

I doubt if I have ever written a story or essay or work-a-day article unless I have really wanted to write. And in this way I have probably suffered materially because I have never attempted a blockbuster of a novel, or a biography of a celebrity or a soap opera that goes on forever. The prospect of spinning out thousands of words of little or no consequence seems a dull and dreary way of earning a living. (Bond : T.T.I. : 20/06/1999).

Bond enjoys writing about an 'underrated flower' like petunia. For him not only the flower, but also the person, who grows it, is interesting enough to be the subject of his stories;

I might even write a story about someone who grows petunias because such a person must obviously have sterling qualities. I might even delve into the love life of a petunia grower because those who love flowers must by their very nature, be loving. (Bond : T.T.I. 20/06/1999).

The logic behind this preference is very simple. Flower is always a flower and nothing else, whereas it is very difficult to probe into the recesses

of the hearts and minds of people. Bond feels that in the modern complicated life one has to peel off layers of protective cosmetics to get hold of the right person. His short stories, therefore, are the celebration of nature in its fullest form. Being in perfect harmony with nature, he is replete with good emotions and feelings. He believes that nature is a pure bubbling life force, which quickens every object and creature to act, to respond, to grow and to die. Anything that vibrates with life is beautiful. He says;

If someone were to ask me to choose between writing an essay on Taj Mahal or on the last rose of the summer, I'd take the rose even if it were down to its last petal. (Bond : 1993 : 185).

Lovers of marble beauty of the Taj may be shocked at this craziness. But for Bond, a flower symbolizes life. He is afraid of the coldness that lies in marble. Lifeless beauty of a Venus in marble cannot hold the eyes back from "a yonder girl that fords the barn." Bond can be easily distracted by a caterpillar crawling on the ground or a bee humming around. To call Bond an escapist, who runs from harsh realities into the cozy lap of nature, is to misconstrue his genius. His search for life throbbing in each big or small object never slackens. This search is an expression of a passion that pines for truth. Bond develops logic. He feels that nature bares her bosom alike for all big and small, weak and strong. The difference lies in individual's sense of perception. One may approach nature to conquer her, the other may try to exploit her, but one who is filled with love for her, chooses to live with her in total harmony.

Motherless child, Ruskin Bond, found emotional compensation in the warm lap of nature. He felt nature always welcoming his steps. It was his father who introduced him to this everlasting relationship. He recalls through boy protagonists in many of his stories, planting excursions with his father in rainy season on the slopes of Dehra. Trees appeared to welcome their coming steps, it seemed that they were familiar with them. These excursions helped not only to keep the valley green, but also nurtured a great naturalist

and environmentalist in embryo. In the story "My Father's Trees in Dehra" the young boy fondly asks his father;

'But no one ever comes here,' I protested the first time. . . 'some day', he said, 'some one may come this way. . . 'one day the trees will move again. . . ' But they are always trying to move. (Bond :1994 : 43 - 44).

Senior Bond's faith in the living organism of nature got firmly established in his mind with the passages of time. Later, after his father's tragic demise, Bond found the hills kind enough to provide him a formidable sense of parental security. He could feel mountains flowing in his blood. The trees and plants around him also assumed the role of a guardian spirit. They appeared to be the shaping spirit of his dear father. Even after many decades, Bond feels their heartwarming supervision;

The trees stand watching over my day-to-day life.
They are the guardians of my conscience I do what I
think they would approve the most. (Bond : 1993 : 3).

In the stories like "My Father's Trees in Dehra", "When You Can't Climb Trees Any More". "A Job Well Done" and "Coming Home to Dehra" he imagines his father coming back to life through new shoots. The story "The Funeral" though completely imaginative, gives a moving account of his father's death. Mourners expressing stereotyped sympathy, priest's cold voice and the coffin going deep into the entrails of the earth and ghastly silence spread around, cast a depressing impact on the boy who could hardly understand it. Now nature emerges as a great healing force to dissipate his gloom and loneliness. The innocent boy imagines to elude death with the help of nature.

Perhaps he would grow into a tree and escape that way! 'If ever I am put away like this, ' thought the boy, 'I'll get into the root of a plant and then I'll become a flower and then, may be, a bird will come and carry my seed away. . . ' (Bond : 2002 : 188).

Here nature becomes a powerful means of defying death and redeeming his sense of loss. One cannot take it lightly as merely a child's fancy. It is an affirmation of bond between man and nature. Nature in a therapeutic style helps Bond to emerge out of his personal grievances. P.K. Singh finds a close affinity between Bond and famous Hindi poet, Sumitra Nandan Pant;

Their inner loneliness (Pantji & Bond) and despair get unpremeditated release in their tendency to perceive the perennial behind the ephemeral to explore the imperishable truths of life through transient realities. A condensed move of intellect, imagination and conscience is the hallmark of their rapport with nature. (Singh : 1995 : 61).

Nature acts as an emotional counterpart for both the sensitive souls. But one can mark a point of distinction too. Pant's approach is condensed in mysticism and the external charm of nature is figuratively transformed into deep mystical interpretations. Whereas, Ruskin Bond thrills at the touch of a little prig, dances with the prospect of a blooming bud and chases a butterfly like a small boy. His response to nature is instinctive as is visible in one of his verses; "Like the rain, I sing. Like the leaves, I dance. Like the earth, I am still And in this, Lord. I do thy will". (Bond : 1993 : 144).

Nature acts in dual role for him. It provides him new themes and background for his stories. At the same time it charges and refreshes his creative vigour. In the exhaustive process of writing short story, even a tiny bird, or a flower outside his window freshens him profusely. It recharges his creative spirit; "And I worked hard at it, pausing to eat and sleep and take note of the leaves turning a darker green." (Bond : 1999 : 482).

The clattering of raindrops, the warbling of birds, the rippling and gurgling of brooks, the whispering of plants and the dancing summer breeze radiates his stories with an exquisite softness. Even the occasional hurdles of writing process are removed by benign influence of nature. Bond affirms;

Whenever I am stuck in the middle of a story or an essay, I go into my tiny hillside garden and get down to the serious business of transplanting or weeding or pruning or just plucking off dead blooms, and in no time at all I am struck with a notion of how to proceed with the stalled story reluctant essay or unresolved poem. (Bond : 1993 : 225).

Maplewood cottage, where Bond settled first after giving up his job in Delhi, was situated between the shadows of Balahissar hills at the back and the paritibba (abode of fairies) in the front. It was also facing a prominent forest, which kept him in high spirits. Bond's adherence to the world of flora and fauna and of hills and dales is a result of his commitment to the place he was born in and settled afterwards. Detailed descriptions of ravines, slopes, valleys, brooks and forests with great geographical accuracy are due to his natural familiarity with the region. Celestial beauty of Garhwal Himalayan landscapes flows in his numerous stories and writer-ups. His most of stories seem a magic casement opening on a beautiful vast stretch of nature.

Bond's characters are also drawn from that section of society that lives in close association with nature. They are nomads, small farmers, villagers, shopkeepers, chawkidars, tonga drivers, gardeners, schoolteachers and retired persons etc.. To name a few among them, there is Binya who holding her blue umbrella, runs after her cow, Neelu. There is Dukhi weeding and pruning in the garden. Bisnu, who confronts the man-eater panther in the village Manjari, Sita, who devises her sports around the old banyan tree in her lonely island, Kishen Singh who drives out the wild beast from the tunnel, Somi's mother who nurtures her small garden of sweets peas and roses, etc. are some of his favourite characters. They are born in the hills and as such have fellow feeling for insects, animals, flowers and trees around them. There are some other memorable characters, though not born in the hills, have fallen in love with nature. They include Rusty, Mr. Pettigrew, Miss Mackenzie and the unnamed young protagonist of many stories. Their association with nature is not less instinctive. The distinctive mark of Bond's characters is their

primeval innocence and ardent faith in nature. They imbibe nature's attributes like innocence, simplicity and purity. They represent life's finest attribute, an ability to find happiness and contentment in everyday events. Bond's association with animals, birds and insects is like that of a naturalist. By his long association, he has acquired a unique understanding of their habits. He is perhaps the only writer who has woven wild life so earnestly and imaginatively in the texture of stories. Niranjan Mohanty makes an apt remark;

Bond has humanized the world of nature to consecrate his own joy in the living. Bond's love for the insects and animals that make their living under the fostering care of nature strengthens his tie with nature and his understanding of it. He realizes that these animals and insects form a part and parcel of nature. (Mohanty : 1995 : 51).

It is interesting to know how man and beast have adapted themselves according to each other's mode of existence. They survive against constant threat to their lives because they live in conformity with the laws of nature. Almost dozen of his stories render a fascinating account of human encounters with animals and birds. For examples, " Monkey Trouble", "The Tiger in the Tunnel", "The Monkeys", "Eyes of the Cat", "Grandpa Tickles a Tiger", "The Eye of the Eagle", "A Crow for all Seasons" etc, Leopard, 'the crouching terror', of hill folk acts as a central character in some of his unforgettable fables like "Panther's Moon", "The Leopard", "Tiger, Tiger Burning Bright", "Tiger in the House" etc. In the story "Panther's Moon" the beast becomes a man-eater and terrorises on an entire village. In another story "Tiger, Tiger Burning Bright" the dreaded beast denotes royal grace and its extinction is bound to affect the very soul of this country;

There was another thing that had gone with the tiger, another thing that had been lost, a thing that was being lost everywhere – something called nobility. (Bond : 1991: 127).

The charm of tiny creatures, like butterflies, caterpillars, beetles, squirrels, bluejaya, hoopoe etc is equally irresistible. Even snakes, lizards and leeches, objects of general repulsion, are closely observed. It seems that Bond's 'microscope' does not spare a single living creature around him. Like a biologist he records a photographic story of their ways and habits. But like a true artist he foresees an imaginative drama of feelings and responses in their seeming triviality. The story "Crow for all Seasons" is an interesting account of a crow, which thinks human beings are stupid and makes the best out of it. Crow's honest confession 'how much we depend on humans' reveals the law of interdependence in nature. The story "All Creatures Great and Small" is about a python that accidentally enters the bedroom and is enamoured of his own reflection in the mirror. Bond elevates these beasts and birds as heroes. He does not consider them inferior to man in any way because they also constitute a vital part of the life.

Ruskin Bond does not subscribe to the blind deification or adoration of nature. He considers nature as an integral part of human world. Nature's bounties make him realise her latent benevolence. He is not forgetful of the realities of autumn, flood, drought, heat and storm. His characters struggle consistently in order to survive. Life is another name of struggle and Bond ardently believes in the ultimate victory of man. He coins the image of a walnut tree to convey his opinion of nature;

The walnut tree is the first to lose its leaves. But at the same tree the fruit ripens, the skin splits; the hard shell of the nut stands revealed. (Bond : 1992 : 9).

It is the benevolent force of nature that pervades. Negative phase of nature is ephemeral and transient. Autumn is followed by spring and drought by rain. For Bond, "a flower is as good as a prayer", and he also knows that flowers grow between the graves too; this little stoicism imparts a realistic touch to his vision without which his spiteful flight in the bright realm of nature may prove only idyllic, Bond's characters are not lost in the wilderness, rather

they get strengthened in the company of nature. In the story “Sita and the River” Sita finds great consolation within herself;

She had always loved the river. Why was it threatening her now ? She remembered the doll and thought, ‘If I can be so careless with someone I have made, how can I expect the gods to notice me. . .’
(Bond : 1999 : 163-164).

The tree was taking her with it. She was not alone. It was thought one of the Gods had remembered her after all. (Bond : 1999 :165 -166).

The realisation that ‘we are a part of the river’ minimises her sense of suffering. Likewise, other characters too do not visualise nature acting as a villain and forcing them to endless miseries. It is the heart felt truth of his life that speaks through these portrayals. In one of his interviews Bond says;

I am close to nature for the last forty years. In my fiction there is struggle with nature, Those who go with nature always survive such as– the girl Sita in the story “Sita and The River”, Bisnu in “Panther’s Moon”. I believe that nature has both the faces – gentle and destructive, but it is the gentle face that dominates, I have shown as nature really is. (Aggarwal : 1998).

Nature emerges as a powerful background conveying the spirit of the story. Bond is skilled in painting verbal landscapes in accordance with the motif of the plot. For example, in the story, “Panther’s Moon” too various turns in the life of Bisnu are responded by nature. At times, nature herself dominates the course of life. As Egdown Heath in Hardy’s novel *The Return of the Native* emerges as a powerful character playing dominant role in the tragedy, the flooded river in the story “Sita and the River’ takes away her entire self in her currents. Nature highlights the character also.

Ruskin Bond avoids intellectualisation of nature. He is not avid to propound any theory of nature. He feels that too much application of cold logic distorts the reality. Even mystification sometimes estranges simple objects. In this regard, Bond comes close to D.H. Laurence who believed in the religion of blood. He yearned for the contact with earth and was filled with nostalgia for the bright sensory delight that, with the coming of 'white civilisation', was fast vanishing. Bond rejects the inconsistent material progress because it exhorts the vital sap of human sensibility and turns them into 'machine fuckings' lifelessly strutting in the streets. Details of his heroes bathing in a river, basking their exposed bodies in green grass and enjoying the presence of birds and insects around and even a leopard at the farthest bank, indicate his commitment to the primitive associations. He derides all sorts of hypocrisy and feels that one should be a child to rejoice with nature.

Tramping has been a favourite pastime for Bond as it gives him numerous sensations and impressions of life around. Each new stirring, each new passer by, each new sound thrills his nerves. He calls his tramping 'zigzag walk – deliberately invented to perceive sudden unfamiliar turnings, narrow alleyways.' Instead of following main roads he prefers to make his walk as cross – country as possible in order to receive impressions shooting from all sides. He defines his zigzag walk;

Here is a temple, than a mosque, now an old church, .
. . . here is a pond full of buffaloes, there a peacock preening itself under a tamarind tree; and now I am in a field of mustard, and soon I am walking along a canal bank. . . The adventure is not in arriving. It is on the way experience. It is not the expected; it is the surprise. . . it's like drawing lines from star to star in the night sky, not forgetting many dim shy out of the way stars which are full of possibilities. (Bond : 1993 :147).

Tramping like a meandering river introduces him to story sensations and experiences and gives an opportunity to know his own self. Stories hang

about Bond that his plots and characters pour out of his routine walks. He enjoys the sight of pebbles in the clear stream and portrays his joy in the writings. Such scenes have a perfect harmony, though transient, yet permanent; though sensory, yet spiritual. This association has been reflected in myriad forms. Bond's absolute perception is a part of his spiritual awakening, which he recalls in his memoir passionately. In one of his columns in *The Telegraph* he recapitulates the precious moment;

Late one evening, when I was feeling particularly depressed. I went out for a walk along the sea front. . . . I was alone in a wild wasteland of wind and water. And then something touched me, something from the elements took hold of my heart, and all the suffering went out of my head. I felt as free and virile as the wind. I said, "I will be a writer." (Bond : 1993 : 147).

The state of 'inner illumination' becomes a part of his consciousness. Gifted with the eye of a mystic, he observes the growth of plants as virtually moving, stretching their limbs to embrace each other. His faith in the living organism of trees and plants reminds Sri Aurobindo, who in his poem "The Trees" visualises branches of the trees as their hands raised towards heaven probably invoking the assistance of the divine in getting themselves released from the earthly bondage. For Bond the trees appear as archetypal fellow beings, the faceless multitude from time immemorial. He too reinforces the Vedantic Philosophy of 'Advaita' by perceiving the one and the only one undiminished flame in all things great and small. He feels the power of the sky, the earth and of a small cherry seed alike, seed is the microcosmic force of nature; its power to survive is invincible. He enjoys the mystical communion of trees and mountains by 'silent sympathy' ;

The trees and I know each other quite intimately and we have much to say to each other from time to time. They watch over me as I write. . . They are best critics. As long I am aware of their presence I can try to avoid the trivial and the banal. (Bond : 1993 : 3).

The story "Love is a Sad Song" was actually written under the cherry tree. The stories like "The Coral Tree", "My Father's Trees in Dehra", "When You Can't Climb Any More" are the manifestations of this association. The hero in "The Last Tonga Ride" returns to his old paternal house to revive his relationship with the tree. Its friendly touch, even after the lapse of many decades replenishes his heart;

As I climbed, it seemed as though someone was helping me. Invisible hands, the hands of the spirit in the tree, touched me and helped me climb. (Bond : 1999 : 449).

As a man he feels his own self being controlled by its gentle force. It comforts his agitated mind. "I try to feign anger, but it is a glorious fresh and spirited morning impossible to feel angry." (Bond : 1993 : 9). The creeper at his window, birds at the sill, fragrance of the earth at the touch of first shower, the clouds hanging over hills, the moon lit night, the stars overhead, absorb the weariness and fret of his life. Nature reveals her secret splendour through all such physical visions. It would be no exaggeration if we say that in Bond the unknown becomes familiar and the mysterious becomes apparent. Henry Vaughan aptly says;

Bonds nature mysticism is therefore, transparent because it makes the glimpse of the eternal perceptible through the temporal and spatial. The subtle link between the finite and infinite, between the world and beyond is appreciable on the planes of sublime thought and elevated feelings. A delicate atmosphere of serene beauty enables his readers to enjoy the rhythm of life and nature reverberating and recapitulating a heaven of freedom in his works. (Vaughan : 1983 : 69).

Closeness with the Himalayas has blessed him with divine insight. He realises that God unfolds His supreme powers through all big and small

objects and man can proceed towards Him by harmonising the finite and the infinite. With a child like innocence one can perceive the culmination of oneness. Following lines from The Tribune extract the essence of this perception;

He is near to the zen concept that if you observe and recognise the presence of every feeling about phenomena around you, it is likely in such recognition you become aware of your awareness, which is a form of transcendence above mundane experience.
(Bond : 1993 : 11).

Bond is a writer of extra ordinary organic sensibility. His senses are highly receptive even to the least vibration in nature around him. Keats could visualise in 'embalmed darkness / the grass, the thicket and the fruit tree wild / white hawthorn and the pastoral eglantine.' Here Bond listens;

The sound of dry and thirsty earth as it sucks at a sprinkling of water or the sound of child drinking thirstily the water running down his chin and throat.
(Bond : 1993 : 11).

The sound of falling petals, the drift of falling snow, water seeping through earth is invariably caught by his senses. He can distinguish easily between the 'sweet throated whistling thrush, and the shrill barbet, the mellow voiced doves' etc. Bond calls them sounds of winds because birds 'walketh upon the wings of wind.' His tremendous love for sounds enables him to enjoy such familiar sounds, as we hardly bother about. But a sense of vacancy envelops when they are gone; for example a 'kettle on the boil, a door that creaks, old sofa springs are such homely unromantic sounds.' Bond enjoys being in the romance of sounds especially of unidentified sounds. He says;

In an age when a scientific and rational explanation has been given for almost everything we see and hear, it is good to be left with one small mystery, a mystery, satisfying and entirely my own. (Bond :1993 : 111).

The state of being is prerequisite to ;

Listen to the night in the trees. Listen to the summer grass singing. Listen to the time that is tripping by; and the silence calling. (Bond : 1993 : 111).

The protagonist of the story “The Blue Umbrella” is surprised at the growing susceptibility of his own senses in the serenity of the hills. The individual sounds of Binya’s song, the jingle of cowbells, Binya’s mother pounding clothes on a stone slab and the sounds of cricket, birds, water, wind and leaves melt in one harmonious sound of nature. Though sound brings the remote very near, it is touch that performs miracles. Touch establishes an understanding between the two unknown entities instantly; Bond prefers a loving touch to any remote appreciation of nature. He says;

I was barefooted; not because I couldn’t afford shoes, but because I felt free with my feet bare because I liked the feel of warm stones and cool grass. (Bond : 1993 : 81).

In the same spirit the protagonist of the story “Bus Stop, Pipalnagar” enjoys sensuous touch of the earth. He gets rejuvenated after walking upon the dew-drenched grass. He loves the touch of the earth-soft-earth, stony earth, grass, mud. Then the feet are strained with juices and sap seems to pass into the body. Wet earth is soft and sensuous. He also inhales distant rare smells of variegated herbs and other living and non-living phenomena. He always finds nature in new colours and freshness and so enticing that he is inspired to woo her. He says ;

I lie on summer grass in the Himalayas, I am conscious of many good smells around me – the grass itself and many I shall never know the names of . . . And the earth itself. It smells differently in different places. But its loveliest fragrance is known only when it receives a shower of rain. And then the scent of wet earth rises as though it were giving something beautiful back to the clouds – a blend of all the fragrant things that grow in it. (Bond : 1993 : 129).

Bond does not believe in drawing-room love for nature – a few potted plants kept in highly sanitized rooms and verandas – a common scene in most of the cities in India. Whenever he leaves for the plains, a sense of loss overpowers him. He feels that majority of those who live in the cities miss out the mystique and freedom that nature offers in the hills. Therefore, he returns to feast his eyes on the rich foliage that springs up in tropical profusion, soft spongy moss and great stag fern on the trunks of trees, mysterious looking lilies and orchids. And he supplicates before the benevolent God with a grateful heart;

I would thank my God for leaves and grass and the smell of things and the smell of mint and myrtle and bruised cloves and the touch of things, the touch of grass and air and sky, the touch of the sky's blueness. (Bond : 1993 : 97).

Obviously, a man of mundane sensibility can hardly observe this great wealth of nature. Bond's shy and reclusive nature and the quietude of his life owe much to his sharpened senses. His admirer and friend Dilip Bobb says;

Silting at his desk in Ivy Cottage . . . precariously perched on a spur in the hills of Mussoorie, Ruskin Bond looks out from his window and sees and hears things we have blind and deaf to. (Bobb : 1995 : 249).

There are beautiful descriptions of transient seasons and their impact on living beings in his stories. Rains make his heroes or heroines crazy, they feel their nerves dancing with the pitter-patter of first shower. Binya in "The Blue Umbrella" gets frenzied, when rain washes away the monotony of heat. She embodies the euphoria of a rain-drenched soul. Rain has made everything smell fresh and good. It quickens a number of exquisite images in the mind of the narrator.

The scent from fallen pine needles rise from wet earth, the birds get refreshed and high spirited set up a terrific noise (Bond : 1991 : 42).

In the novel *A Flight of Pigeons* the narrator feels that nature has arranged an orchestra of crickets to welcome rain. In the story “The Last Tonga Ride” it appears that crickets and grasshoppers are telephoning each other from tree to bush on the arrival of rain. In other story “Binya Passes By”, the cicadas are singing in the forest after first rainfall. Such instances of rejuvenation of spirit highlight Bond's originality of expression and his belongingness with the phenomena.

Bond draws the divine radiance and scenic beauty of the great Shivaliks on his short stories canvas with consummate artistry. Mountains are his sole passion and through his heroes he articulates his first love. The protagonist in “Mother Hill” is overpowered by the magnetic charm of the hills. He exclaims;

That probably sums it all up. Time passes, and yet it doesn't pass; people come and go, the mountains remain. Mountains are permanent things. They are stubborn, they refuse to move. You can blast holes out of them for their mineral wealth, strip them of their trees and foliage, or dam their streams and divert their currents. You can make tunnels and roads and bridges; but no matter how hard they try, humans cannot actually get rid of the mountains. That's what I like about them; they are here to stay. (Bond : 2003:10).

Sages from time immemorial have been trying to unravel the loftiness of great Himalayas. Bond is no exception. He can only say;

In a thousand ages of the gods, I could not tell the glories of Himachal. So a poet confessed at the dawn of Indian history. No one since has been able to real justice to the Himalayas. We have climbed their high peaks, but still the mountains remain remote and primeval. (Bond : 1993 : 98).

His humble supplication to the vastness of eternal design is in the affirmation of the age-long faith of hill folk that mountains are the godheads. He feels that once they enter the blood of man, he can never forget them and always returns to be with them. It exactly happened while visiting London, he pined for the Himalayas; London air turned into the scent of rotting pinecones and Bond returned to belong them forever. The story "From Small Beginnings" reflects it thus;

The last puff of the day wind brought from the unseen villages, the scent of damp wood smoke, hot cakes, dipping underneath and rotting pinecones. That is the true smell of Himalayas and if once it creeps into the blood of man, that man will at last forgetting all else, returns to the hill to die. (Bond :1999 : 481).

Hills have not been an obsession for the literary writers so far. They have been portrayed as a background in so many stories and novels, but hills as a great divine force especially, kind to writers, are characteristic to Bond.

The sea has been celebrated by many great writers Conrad, Melville, Stevenson and Mansfield. But I can't think of anyone, comparable for whom the mountains have been a recurring theme. I must turn to the Taoist poets from old China to find a true feeling for mountains. Kipling does occasionally look to the hills but the Himalayas do not appear to give rise to any memorable Indian Literature. . .but to me as a writer the mountains have been kind. When you have received love from people and the freedom that only the mountain can give, then you have come very near the borders of heaven. (Bond : 1993 : 198).

It is an honest realization of a writer who always keeps his window open. One can easily discern that his purpose is to highlight the contrast of two lives. Hills preserve innocence and faith. Whereas, people of plains boast

of their intellect; they mock at the simple beliefs of hill folk, taking them to be a sign of backwardness and ignorance. *The Sensualist* highlights the hypocrisy of urbanites through the protagonist. His pride in sex skill evaporates when he confronts a simple woman in the hills.

Here was the overpowering innocence of the mountains – I was helpless before it, just a computer lover overpowered by natural grace.(Bond:1999:939).

The story serves to call us back to our natural living and to preserve the ecological balance. The mountains retain their magnitude and primitive force so long as they are not spoilt by the so-called 'white civilisation' with its polluting forces of greed and cunningness. Bond ingeniously focuses upon the distinctive features of the hills and the plains. Most of people from the plains turn to the hills for greed; whereas hill people migrate to big cities for livelihood. But the fear of the loss of identity is always written large on their face. The hero in the story "From Small Beginnings" finds himself lost in the sea of automatons.

I should have known that hill man don't disappear altogether. The spirit-haunted rocks don't let their people wander too far, lest they lose them forever. (Bond : 1999 : 485).

Hill people feel secure, as the spirit of hills is their natural safeguard. This sense of belongingness is crucial for their survival. Plains are insensitive not only towards their people but to nature also. Because of too much of their absorption in logic, they have unknowingly uprooted the faith, which binds man with nature and God. The casual remark of the sensualist is deeply connotative in this regard;

In the cities there are vehicles, and noise and lights to hold at bay that fear of the dark, which is the deep beginning of religion. (Bond :1999 : 939).

This darkness of fear springs out of primeval innocence. Therefore, religion still flows in their blood. The hero of the story “The Last Time I Saw Delhi” says good-bye to the capital. He shuns;

chaotic rush of traffic, the blare of horns even in the corridors of hospital, indifference of people to each other’s safety. . . feverish desire to be first to get anything. . . in Delhi to be second in the race is to be last. (Bond : 1999 : 464).

Bond in his approach to nature is quite different from that of other contemporary writers. Such as Anita Desai in *Fire on the Mountains* and Jhabvala in *Heat and Dust* employ nature as a backdrop to worldly worries, their characters who come under the therapeutic effect of nature for a short while, feel elevated and energised but they cannot overcome their agonies, they are chiefly from modern slums which are not only the heaps of garbage, but also the dens of vices. Som Bhasker’s quest for shares is irresistible, Jhabvala’s unnamed heroine bears the foetus of her city lover; Anita Desai’s Nanda Kaul fails to shake off her past, despite her physical escape from the scorching plains to the soothing hills. All of them are facility-ridden people unknown of the art of living. But Bond’s people live very close to nature. Unlike his well-known contemporaries who are especially concerned with social and political turmoil, he takes up the issue of ecology and environment through his stories in most conspicuous manner.

In response to question put by Amita Aggarwal about the lack of social concerns in his fiction Bond replied;

Problem of deforestation and pollution of environment and decay of wild life have been the subjects of my stories and essays. In this way I have touched social problems. (Aggarwal : 1998).

Without joining the band of known environmentalists like Sunder Lal Bahuguna and Baba Amte, Bond is constantly scribbling about the hazard of pollution of environment. The planned destruction of trees on mountain

slopes in the name of progress and development is the theme in many of his stories. Roads certainly help hill people, but they make the hills easily accessible to greedy urbanites; who damage quietude for their interest. The story "Dust on the Mountains" narrates how money mongers lure hill simpletons. The story unravels the sordid picture of 'green' massacre;

There were trees here once, but the contractors took the deodars for furniture. And the pines were trapped to death for resin and the oaks were stripped of their leaves to feed cattle. (Bond : 2001 : 135).

The narrator relates the death of trees to the painful death of his own brother in an accident.

It was just coming into its own this year, now cut down in its prime youth like my young brother on the road to Delhi last month: both victim of roads, the tree killed by P.W.D., my brother by a truck. (Bond :1999: 492).

The sight of ravaged hills is so pathetic that no bird comes to warble. Only the crow is seen because they have learnt to live with man. Thousand year old rocks are blown by dynamite. Their dust is stifling trees, grass, shrubs and flowers far and wide. Horn of the truck and dynamite explosions toll the knell of death and disaster in the hills.

One should not misconstrue Bond as being against development. He is not blind to grimace of life, but he is deadly against the thoughtless pursuit of materialism at the cost of environment. The conquering will of man like the famous brag of Caesar, Veni, Vedi, Vici (I came, I saw, I overcame) is responsible for distortion of life and nature. In many of his documentary stories, Bond focuses upon the extinction of tigers and leopards. He strongly opines that tiger and other animals are not so dangerous as man of the plain thinks of them. It is only when some bullet wounds them and they are unable to hunt their prey, they attack on the human beings. Thus, the problem of man-eater owes its existence to the unkind poachers and hunters. Bisnu says;

These hunters are the people who cause all the trouble. They think it is easy to shoot a panther. It would be better if they have missed altogether but they usually wound it. (Bond: 1991: 32-33).

In another story “The Leopard”, a village boy wanders alone in the forest without any protection. He develops a mute understanding with the beast. He likes the presence of the magnificent beast crouching at the bank of the river and in return beast too, seems to acknowledge his visit in a friendly way. Both are confident towards each other but the boy is scared of the man who may come other day with the gun to shoot it.

I thought no more of the man. My attitude towards them was similar to that of the denizens of the forest. These were men unpredictable, and to be avoided if possible. (Bond : 1988 : 175).

This mutual distrust of outside man is shared by the beast and the boy, who feels ashamed at the deceit and faithlessness of his own race. Though the leopard trusts the boy, he is scared of the possible breach of trust by some other member of his race.

But did the leopard trusting one man make the mistake of bestowing his trust on others ? Did I by casting out all fear my fear and the leopard’s protective fear – leave him defenseless ? (Bond : 1988 : 176).

Boy speaks of Bond’s own fear too. Kishen Singh in the story “The Tunnel” seems to assure the leopard by keeping this bond of trust, when asked about the safety in the jungle. Kishen Singh promptly replies,

It is safer in the jungle than in the towns. No rascal out here only last week when I went into the town I had my pocket picked. Leopards do not pick pockets. (Bond : 1998 :88).

The story "A Tiger in the House" is another moving account of trust between the grandfather and the cub called Timothy. The tiger cub saved by the grandfather from the bullets of a Shikari, is fed on love and sympathy. On growing up, the cub is sent to the zoo, where it dies. This simple story brings into contrast the essential goodness in animal world against the cunning world of man. The story "Tiger, Tiger Burning Bright" also reveals the cruelty of man who in search of 'trophies' has shot the royal beast. When the poachers gun down the last tiger, the villagers find themselves unprotected. The protagonist interprets its death,

It was as though a protector had gone, leaving the forest open and vulnerable easily distortable and once the forest was destroyed they too would be in danger.
(Bond : 1991 : 127).

Forest, tiger and man are interdependent. They are the part of the great chain of survival. By calling the endangered beast the soul of India, Bond has reinforced the principle of ecological balance. Each big and small creature in nature is indispensable to keep the earth beautiful and healthy. Bond has skillfully knit the message of 'save tiger, save wildlife' in the plots of his short stories. The distant roar of the tiger coupled with that of a tigress cheer villagers, who are erstwhile repenting for the loss of precious beast. The smell of tigers ensures them of more tigers in future. In this context it is important to note that Bond is firmly against the concept of artificial residues of 'royal beast'. A tiger needs jungle as much as man needs land. Natural climate and natural breeding is the right of every creature and nobody can be allowed to usurp it. Bond's candid opinion is that wild animals are not an object of exhibition or entertainment. They deserve equal right of graceful and unperturbed life as human beings do.

Beside wildlife, Bond earnestly pleads to save the green layer of the earth. The relationship of man and tree is revealed through the ancient belief, "A blessing rests on the house where falls the shadow of the tree." (Bond : 1988: 238).

Trees are the manifestation of god's benediction. For youngsters they are their playmate and for elders the sharer of their joys and sorrows. They preserve the lost gems of childhood and youth. In "The Blue Umbrella" Biju feels a sense of security and confidence while perching on the top of oak;

The higher he is in the tree the more confident he becomes. It is only when he is down on the ground that he becomes shy and speechless. (Bond:1986: 6).

Trees are the archetypes of friendship. This relationship is completely free from the stylistic ways of other worldly relationship. Bond conceives an analogy between children and trees that they like children grow rapidly and achieve stateliness if someone strokes them fondly. In one of his stories there is an aunt who watered her plants every morning. Even in rain she did not miss her routine because she thought that plants expected her that time. Likewise, Dr. Taylor in the story "Panther's Moon" attended her patients only after attending to her plants. She said; "There was a lot between people ailing plants and ailing." (Bond : 1991 : 34).

Thus Bond's attitude to nature begins from simple sensory delights and culminates into humanism, his short stories gently bring us back to nature in order to regain our original innocence and faith.

✓ **Theme Of Love**

Love emerges as a prominent theme in Ruskin Bond's short stories. Love as defined by *Encyclopedia Britannica* is a very wide concept relating to all sorts of relationships;

Love (libido) is the term used to describe such diverse manifestations of behaviour and experience as the parent- child relationship protecting reactions and appreciation of protective friendship, attachment between sexes, attachment to places, to occurrence or to food. (Encyclopedia Britanica V.8 : 399).

Bond's concept of love is encompassing all creatures – men and beasts alike. Love is essential for life. Human beings, beasts and birds along with flowers and trees too, respond to love. Man-woman relationship is just a part of this universal life force. He is in constant search of love characters like Rusty in *The Room on the Roof*, the sensualist in *The Sensualist*, the writer in *Delhi is Not Far*, the narrator in "The Night Train At Deoli", Sushila in "Love is Sad Song" & "Time Stops at Sharni" Ula, in "The Girl From Copenhagen", and Sunil in "Death of a Familiar" represent different stages of love. It seems that love is an enigma and each individual is trying to resolve it in his own way. The hero of *Delhi is Not Far* says;

Few things, reassure me. . . The desire to love and be loved, the beauty and ugliness of the human body, the intricacy of its design. . . Sometime I make love as a sort of exploration of all that is physical. Falling in love becomes an exploration of the mind. (Bond :1999 : 778).

For Sunil life is flirtation and girls are, 'sugar and spice with everything nice'. The idea of being in love sounds so sweet for the overwrought lover of Sushila in the story "Love is a Sad Song", that even after failure in love, he vows; "I may stop loving you, Sushila, but I will never stop loving the days I loved you." (Bond : 1988 : 237).

Rusty's infatuation for Mrs. Kapoor in *The Room on the Roof* is most strange in its type. A boy who is hardly sixteen, falls in love with a married woman who is also the mother of his friend, Kishen. Both are deprived of love in their personal lives and chance puts them together. Their meeting in the forest awakes the long suppressed desire of love. For Bond life is a longing for what is lost and this longing is characterized in the depiction of love in his stories. Old passionate memories grow sweeter and sweeter with the passing of time. Hence, tragic intensity is absent in this longing, but a calm acceptance of fate ennobles his heroes' and heroines. Most of Bond's lovers are in their teens, they display a peculiar softness and grace in their longing. The eighteen-year-old boy in the story "The Night Train At Deoli"

waits for the basket girl whom he first saw at the platform of Deoli. He never meets her again and never dares to find out the reason of her not being at the platform, but he always longs to see her at the same spot; "I prefer to keep hoping and dreaming and looking out of the window up and the girl with the basket." (Bond : 1988 : 56).

The whole story is narrated as a beautiful dream, which the narrator would not like to shatter at any cost. In most of Bond's stories love is presented as a sad song or a passing fancy. Those who love the feeling of being in love are, of course, great individuals, they renew their spirits and live gracefully. But there are some like Sunil, the proud seducer and the sensualist, the rude pleasure seeker, who absolutely fail as lovers. Both take love superficially as a pleasure hunt and ultimately they end as nothing. The narrator says truly; "you find love when you least expect to and lose it when you are sure that it is in your grasp" (Bond : 1988 : 100).

Likewise, the desperate lover of the story "Love is a Sad Song" fails to discern the fate of his love. He is a matured writer of thirty-two, just double the age of his beloved Sushila who is still a school girl. Like an impatient lover, he speaks of his love and like an innocent girl of her age, she responds to it waywardly. Resultantly the lover cannot materialize his passion into matrimony. He is left bewildered, as he says;

Oh ! How absolutely ignorant I am of woman ! (Bond : 1988 :221).

I wallowed in self pity, And self-pity, I realised, is a sign of failure; especially of failure in love. . .(Bond : 1988 :224)

But what is love, how can I recognise it ! (Bond : 1988 : 232).

Sometime sheer physical attraction is misunderstood as love. Such attraction cannot abide by time. Therefore, Sushila chooses security instead of love and lover surrenders despondently. She prefers to marry a rich widower who showers costly gifts, to a struggling writer. The story depicts

both-romantic and realistic – phases of love. Materialistic considerations in real life play an important role in the matrimonial alliances. Marriage without love and love without marriage is a general theme of man-woman relationship. Bond has not created a single couple enjoying happy conjugal life in his stories. Perhaps the trauma of his parents separation does not allow him to conceive of a pair of lovers living in blissful matrimony. Here marriages are supported by compromises. The wife in the story “A Job Well Done” is afraid of her husband and her little son cannot understand; “How can we be afraid of those we love ? It was a question that puzzled me then, and puzzles me still.” (Bond : 1988 : 125).

Bond has focused his vision on the complex mechanism of this relationship. He has pointed out that some sort of understanding or sacrifice is essential to make the relationship enduring. In the story “Time Stops at Shamli” Sushila is the wife of an hotel owner, Mr. Satish Dayal. He is an aged widower and remains absorbed in his business all the time. Where as, she is young, beautiful and gifted with a frolic spirit. Mistaking her miseries as a result of this mismatch her former lover proposes her to elope with him. But Sushila rejects the idea as solely foolish. She being a wife and daughter of respectable men cannot stoop to any action, which will bring disgrace to the family. Now, Sushila gives a curious explanation that her marriage is successful though, she does not love her husband. Here Sushila voices the hypocrisy of most of such couples who live like strangers under one roof. Despite the absence of matrimonial happiness, she does not wish to create miseries in husband’s life. Beside this, Sushila as married woman is in a better position to entertain her lover. As it is clear by her proposal, which is daring as well as safe;

I am always here and you can come to see me, and nobody will be made unhappy by it. But take me away and we will only have regrets. (Bond: 1989: 57).

Through Sushila, Bond highlights the ‘truth’ of married life. It is not love, but individual and traditional boundations, that keep matrimony in tact. The narrator calls Sushila ‘a practical wife’. He attitude may raise moral

issues such as – betrayal of matrimonial pledges, sanctity in married life and so on. Aizaz Haider, a critic, says in this connection; “Bond thereby presents the liberated woman, free from taboos and compunctions.” (Haider: 195:129).

In “A Love of Long Ago” the narrator meets Kamala and spends some days with her. But end of this story the narrator lost Kamala. Because Kamala marries with another person and she lived in Delhi.

In short, In Bond’s love stories, love affairs are unfulfilled in all cases but he never forgets them. In ‘Introduction’ of *The Night Train At Deoli And Other Stories*, Bond says; “Well that’s it. I am fifty-four now. No more love stories, and no more falling in love.” (Bond : 1988 : III).

✓ **Theme of Childhood**

Ruskin Bond’s most favorite themes are childhood and boyhood also. He has written stories on childhood and boyhood. He is at his best in evoking a mood of nostalgia for the vanished sights and scenes of boyhood and childhood of the pathos of the inexorable march of time.

I have the temper of a child, and a tendency to be mischievous. And I still retain a childlike trust in grown-ups,. . . I think I have remained young because I have always had children around me. . .I love to watch them grow. Adolescence is a fascinating period and I keep going back to it in my fiction. (Bond : 1993 : 251).

Bond is primarily known for his children's stories. He is, in fact, the pioneer of modern children literature in India. The rise of new children’s literature is partly due to the breakdown of the traditional family set-up, when kids often, listened, to oral “Dada Dadi ki Kahani” or “Nana Nani Ki Kahani.” The rise of media entertainment and telecommunications also has contributed to the popularity of children’s literature. Bond has captivated his young readers by the charm and freshness of his narration, which is traditional as well as modern. Based on his vivid memories of childhood in pre-

independence India he has adapted his stories to the ancient tradition of bedtime tales. The tradition of fables is very ancient in India. The stories of *Panchtantra* are a part of rich legacy of tales. Bond's children stories are also type of fables, though their delineation is modern. His observation of two generations of his adopted family of Prem that live with him has helped him to comprehend the spirit of Indian family. Before the emergence of Bond's children stories, young minds in India were generally driven into the exciting but alien world of Billy Bunter, Nancy Drew, Famous Five or Secret Seven. When Ruskin Bond wrote about the familiar atmosphere and Indian life for native children, he became, unquestionably, the best living writer of children stories and books in Indian English literature. Bond specifically caters to the needs of 'Young adults'. Mr. K.K. rightly says in Foreword of *The Ruskin Bond Children's Omnibus*,

During the last twenty years, Ruskin Bond probably spent more time writing for children than for adults. Those who have grown up on his stories read them again as adults, and find that they are as fresh and enjoyable as ever. They then give his books to their own children. Ruskin Bond has long since broken the age barrier. (Bond : 2001 : I).

His sensibility and observation of the young world is amazing. Hence, Bond is the most favourite writer of that reading class which has so far been neglected by the English writers in India and kept half-fed owing to the paucity of good contemporary literature.

No doubt, there are autobiographical reasons for his deep attachment with the children. His own sense of loneliness and insecurity in the early childhood haunted his consciousness time and again and consequent upon this, he became a premature introvert. Even after growing up he could not make himself free from those early impressions and the child in him remained transfixed to that very stage. Bond can associate himself easily with the

children because the child in him is always ready to leap forward to share their world. Bond feels;

I don't suppose I would have written so much about childhood or even about other children if my own childhood had been all happiness and light. I find that those who have contended, normal childhood, seldom remember much about them; nor do they have much insight into the world of childhood. (Bond : 1997 : 4).

Fortunately, his trauma was channelised towards children classics, which helped him to come out of his personal agonies. Bond found himself very close to David Copperfield who was also left to survive on his own in this harsh world. The realization that children are hardly taken seriously by their elders, made him more and more sensitive towards them.

Bond began to write children stories in his late thirties; though his first prize-winning novella *The Room on the Roof* was written when he was only seventeen. He recalls;

My early stories, written when I was in my 20's were about my own childhood in India and some of the people I knew as I grew up. They were written for adults. Then in my 30's, I began writing for children. By then, I probably had a better perspective on my own childhood and more insight into the lives of other Indian children. (Bond : 1990:115).

Boys and girls of nearby villages; their every day experiences, have provided the themes of his stories. Bond always feels rejuvenated in their company. He finds them unassuming and easy-going. For him they are the little wonders of God full of relentless spirit of adventure and innocence. He crafts his stories around such themes as – discovery, adventure, nature, orphan, pets and ghosts – all that may hold a child's imagination. Robert Marquand, the writer of "The Christian Monitor" says;

Bond's own stories, reprinted in school texts throughout India, are always of discovery; adventures, exploring train tunnels, climbing guava tree, making a zoo of rabbits and lizards, learning to get along. Yes there is a shrewdness and innocence in his work. (Marquand : 2000).

Just when one may think the story is too sentimental or imaginative, he introduces a streak of realism in his plot, Bond's children stories can be divided into two categories viz; personal and impersonal. Personal stories are autobiographical or semiautobiographical in tone, in which he speaks of his own reflections, unfulfilled passions and little adventures. It includes stories like "My Father's Trees in Dehra", "The Funeral", "When I Can't Climb Any More", "The Tiger in the House", "The playing Fields of Simla", "Life with Uncle Ken", "The Cherry Tree", "The Last Tonga Ride", "Coming Home to Dehra", "All Creatures Great and Small", "The Tree Lover". These stories depict young Bond's friendship with the tree and pets and his love for the town, Dehra. His emotional relationship with the place, where he spent his childhood, makes these stories nostalgic and vivid, bringing alive the quaint charming little places, colonial bungalows and fruit-laden orchards where he wandered as a boy. The Story "The Funeral" is a pathetic narration, though an imaginary one, of his father's death and his miserable loneliness. "Life with Uncle Ken" is a humorous account of Uncle Ken who shifted from one job to another and lived happily on the mercy of his doting sisters. The story "Untouchable" brings about young Bond's remarkable sensibility who sleeps with an untouchable boy on the stormy night. The story "Animals on the Track" presents hilarious adventures of a family travelling in a train with their unusual pets; a tiger, a squirrel, a parrot and a mischievous python. The python stealthily enters the tiffin basket and gulps down all the food. Then the squirrel shares its nuts with the young protagonist who thanks it for its little act of endearment: "Thanks, I said If you keep bringing me peanuts all night, I might last until morning." (Bond : 2000 : 14).

The story “The Last Tonga Ride” revives the romance of tonga ride on the steep roads of Dehra, fringed by lush green plantation on both sides. The boy loved the thrill of tonga ride especially of Bansi Lal. It was not only the excitement of galloping pony, but the tantalizing charm of Bansi’s tales for which he escaped from the clutches of the nodding ‘aya’.

Bond’s other stories, which may be termed as regional stories too, spring up like cosmos from the very Himalayan soil. He is a keen and perceptive observer of children in rural, peculiarly, Himalayan India; their capacity for hard work, their innate spirit of adventure, and most of all their intimacy with nature. The children of nearby villages, of hills, middle-class children working in the fields or going to school inspired him to peep into their ordinary shells. Bond’s greatness as a writer lies in the fact that he very easily visualizes something special, or heroic in their day-to-day life. The stories like “Sita and the River”, “The Blue Umbrella”. “Panther’s Moon”, “The Fight”, “The Thief” reveal the struggle of youngsters to survive in the world. “Sita and the River” has all the ingredients of classic adventure story; vivid descriptions, the gathering of tension, a touch of fear, a bit of fantasy and finally a happy ending. The river around the island is surging, the lonely girl who looks after her hens and small vegetable patch, faces the fury of flood all on her own. In “Panther’s Moon”, the presence of a man-eater in the forest becomes a battle for survival for twelve-year-old Bisnu. The panther emerges as his personal adversary because he is unable to attend the school and is confronted with the possibility of failing in the final exams. Bisnu is determined to continue his schooling and ultimately succeeds in forcing the animal to change the territory. Bond skillfully handles the issue of man’s harmony with his environment including animals. Children get enamoured of Bisnu’s heroic aptitude.

“The Blue Umbrella” is a less exciting but a more moving story. Bond weaves the story of basic human instincts desire, possession, envy, greed and compassion-around a tiny object. Binya who is a simple Garhwali girl, gets a pretty blue Umbrella from the rich picnickers. Children admire her Umbrella and its touch thrills them. Binya enjoys her raised status in the

village, but she also feels herself responsible for the miseries of Ram Bharosa, who craves to grab it. The story is a tribute to the basic goodness of man. It reveals the truth that human vices are not inborn. Man is conditioned by the circumstances and children possess better understanding and broader view of life. As a child writer Bond is not least bit didactic or pedantic. He simply lays bare the psychology of his characters and circumstances, which stimulate them for a particular response. The story "The Thief" depicts the conversion of a thief who, being compelled by his habitual instinct of theft, robs his friend, Arun. But to his great disappointment, Arun hardly bothers about it. In that case, he finds himself being robbed of his own trust and confidence in Arun.

Bond's child heroes have about them a completeness and independence. Unlike their elders, they have an openness of mind. They are eager to cross the barriers as laid down by their elders. In the story "The Flute Player" Kamla, who lives in England with her parents, comes to meet her grandmother in Jaipur. Amidst the vast stretch of cornfield, she meets Romi, an innocent village boy, who swims in the canal, feels overjoyed on getting stained in mud and plays melodies upon his flute. Kamla though accustomed to live in antiseptic confines, is thrilled by these new found pleasures. She feels it akin to her soul. A curious vision of 'home' troubles her little mind. She ponders;

Was England home ? wondered Kamla, or was this Indian city home ? Or was her true home in that other India, across the busy trunk road ? Perhaps, she would find out one day. (Bond : 2000 : 63).

Some of Bond's children stories are the tales of little adventures and the discovery of new vistas of life. The story "Four Boys on a Glacier" imparts a vivid picture of snow-capped-peaks of the Himalayas. The boys visualize divine beauty of nature during their adventurous expedition. The story "how far is the River ?" is also filled with the spirit of reckless enthusiasm peculiar to the adolescents. The gurgling sound of the water in deep forest arouses curiosity in them and they march through the bushes on steep hills and

valley in order to trace it out. The story “Riding Through Flames” presents a different type of adventure in the forest. The boys in the story are shocked to see the dreadful forest fire, which imperils the life of thousand beasts and birds along with numerous types of vegetation.

Fables are very popular among children. In India the tradition of fables is quite ancient. The best examples are the tales of *Panchtantra* and *Betal Pachisi*. Bond’s fables are slightly different from the traditional mode of narration. He seems closer to the spirit of Kipling’s *Mowgli*, who lives in perfect harmony with nature and animals, which is essential for their survival. The stories like “The Tunnel”, “Tiger, Tiger Burning Bright”, “Tiger in the House”, “A Crow for All Seasons”, “The Leopard” are based upon his conviction that animals should be treated as ‘Timothy’ a composite dialogue of love and trust. It suggests a better relationship among creatures of this earth. Reminiscing his boyhood, Bond talks about the Shikar party of his step father that could find no target in the forest to shoot at, where as Bond who had preferred to rummage through children classics in the rest house, was gifted with the sight of deer and leopard in the verandah of the house;

It was ten o’clock in the morning, when I heard a sudden yelp. . .looking up, I saw a large, full grown leopard making off with one of dogs. . . the leopard and its victim soon disappeared I returned to *David Copperfield*. (Bond : 2000 : XIV).

The narration explicitly indicates Bond’s attitude of love and understanding towards other creatures.

In some of his children stories, Bond talks about doting grandmothers and fun loving grandfathers. When parents are immersed in domestic chores grandparents share their age-long experience with grandchildren. This relationship survives on the basis of give and take. Children share their loneliness and give them an opportunity to revive their childhood. The stories like “The Photograph”, “The Kitemaker”, “A Long Walk with Granny”, “The Cherry Tree”. “Animals on the Track” render an interesting account of mutual

sharing between the young and the old. Children draw a sort of mischievous delight in the company of their grandparents. As in “The Photograph” the boy enjoys a streak of blush in the wrinkles of Granny’s visage when she looks at her old photograph. The pigtailed girl in the photograph reminds her of those good old days when she bathed in the village pool along with other village boys and sat on the back of buffaloes. In “A Long Walk with Granny” the boy takes her old granny to the town to buy a new pair of spectacles for her. The story gives a vivid and realistic description of the hardships of hill-life. They have to walk many miles on foot to reach a road-head for a bus to the town. All these difficulties become meaningless when the grandmother on getting new spectacles, sees her grandson, Mani, ‘Much better’ :

‘Mani’ ! She exclaimed, clapping her hands with joy.
‘How nice you look ! What a fine boy I’ve brought up !
But you need a haircut. And a wash. And buttons on
your shirt. And a new pair of shoes. Come along to
the bazaar ! (Bond : 2000 : 10).

New spectacles have opened new vistas of life. They have infused a new vigour in her frail frame. She takes a seat by the window in the bus and carols like a little girl at the colourful spectrum of the world outside.

As the bus moved off, Granny looked eagerly out of the window. Each bend in the road opened up new vistas for her and she could see many things that she had not seen for a long time – distant villages, people working, in the field. . . ‘what a large cow! She remarked, ‘It is not a cow, Granny’, said Mani, ‘It’s buffalo. . . Any way, I saw it, she insisted. (Bond : 2000:10).

Granny’s insistence strengthens Bond’s viewpoint that every grown up has a child in him. It is another matter that it remains docile most of the times, Saaz, Kothare comments;

One Indian writer whose work indicates that he too writes not for children as future adults but instead considers adults to be grown-up children is Ruskin Bond (Kothare : 1995 :234).

Bond's stories help him to revive, all sweet sour memories of his boyhood. This is how, at least for sometime man returns to his primeval innocence. It is then, that each new object fills him with pleasant surprise, a little stream invites him to splash water and there is a rainbow in the sky to exhilarate him to dance.

Bond aims to spread love and understanding among all creatures of the world and children are the most active recipients of his vision. They are very quick in making friends. Small objects like a flower, a marble stone, a flute, a coin or some beads may serve to initiate their friendship. In the story. "A Rupee Goes a Long Way" Ranji gives a pretty necklace of bright coloured stones to Koki and becomes her friend. In "The Fight" two boys of same age group fight for the right to bathe first in the river. But they realize that they can be good friends. They evolve a formula of compromise Ranji who is a good diver would teach his rival Suraj,, some tricks of diving and in return, Suraj would train his opponent in martial art. They display more common sense than any grown up by reconciling their respective egos;

Be my friend, I will make you a *Pahelwan* like me !
I know if you teach me to dive and swim under water,
I will make you *Pahelwan* ! That's fair isn't it ? . . They
looked at each other with honest, unflinching eyes,
and in that moment love and understanding were
born. (Bond : 1999 : 309).

In some of his stories Bond creates purely humorous accounts of children's little cunning, which is also a part of their innocent world. In the story. "The Window", Koki imitates her elders while persuading her innovative ideas – sowing pumpkins and making flower – beds on the roof. In "Chachi's

Funeral”, Madhu devises the fake murder and cremation of Chachi whom Sunil dislikes. The story gives an insight into child psychology. It shows that there is a constant ebb and flow of emotions in his mind. A positive diversion of his mind is very essential for his healthy development.

Bond as a master storyteller is well aware of human psychology. He portrays the magic of supernatural element in the tales. Though in an age of science one finds it difficult to digest his fictional encounters with the ghosts and *jins*, none can deny that they do exist in the psychology of each society either in the East or in the modern West. Stories of mysterious agents can be found in every literature. Bond too, has scribbled fantastic tales of ghosts and spirits. He takes up the issue of credibility of these stories thus;

Sir, do you believe in ghosts ? Asked a young student from New Delhi School. . . I answered in all honesty, “Well, I don’t believe in them. But I keep seeing them.” Seeing, they say, is believing, but I am not so sure. You can see a magician or conjurer. . . cut a man in half, but you will believe what you see only if he fails to put the two halves together again. (Bond : 1999 : VII).

In his early boyhood, the stories of phantom rickshaw puller told by his father charmed his tender mind. Further, the stories of M.R. James read in a lonely forest bungalow and the supernatural tales of Black Wood, Hugh Walpole, H.G. Wells, Walter De La Mare, Sheridan Le Fanu, Kipling and Satyajit Ray inspired him to conjure up ghosts, witches and demons in his tales. It is a make-believe world of unearthly creatures, which have been a part of this earth from time immemorial. Bond with a freshness of tone and intensity of narration has created their charm. Interestingly he has also fused a comic vision to the somber atmosphere. A ghost can create a hilarious mess all around through a broomstick or a bicycle. In the story “Whistling in the Dark” the spirit appears in the form of a whistling boy racing on his bicycle. It saves the hero from falling onto the rocks hundred feet below. These spirits

appear in diverse roles in different stories. It may be gentle like the well-dressed diver of "The Prize", or tragic like haunting Gulabi in "Wilson's Bridge" or the enormous succubus who sucks dry many swimmers in the story "Something in the Water." "The Rakshas" revives tantalizing charm of traditional hill-spirits who are both mischievous and kind for the natives of the place. These stories are the testimony of Bond's enticing powers of narration and intense perception of life. He believes that supernatural springs out of natural phenomena. The restless rustling of leaves, the creaking of branches, moving shadows of the trees in bright moonlight, are likely to create an uncanny fear in the heart of a lonely traveller late at night. According to Bond one should cultivate the capacity to view miracle in most ordinary stirring of the day. Bond's vision is steeped in such numerous perceptions and glimpses, which generally remain unobserved.

The dichotomy of the didactic and the imaginative has always been present in children's literature-its ratio indicating. . . the child's constantly shifting position in society. In our viciously competitive world. . . well intentioned parents invest in books of facts to the exclusion of others. (Kothare : 1995 : 234).

Bond ardently believes that books play a formative role in shaping the life and character of a child. His own life is a fine illustration of the fact. Books are like windows to the world, and quite often children are so absorbed in their books that they appear in trance. They are endowed with their won parameters to derive the meaning from a book and at times it is absolutely different from their elders. Children love Bond's stories for his humour and fantastic illustration; they feel very close to the characters and events as depicted in the story. Though Bond is widely known as the writer of hills, his children are not different from the children of other places or countries. He says;

In some ways the lives of Indian children aren't very different from anywhere else. . . their aspirations, what gives pleasure or sorrow are universal. Jumpping in a pool of water, playing games, making friends, losing friends, making friends again are common to children anywhere. (Aggarwal :1998).

The young admired Bond on the occasion of Bond's special in the Penguin stall at World Book Fair 2000. On being asked why do they feel so enamoured of his stories, they replied;

I like Ruskin Bond because he writes about nature, people, relationship. When other contemporary writers are writing fiction he writes about life, which we truly live. (Priyanka Deep, Mother's International School, Delhi).

Bond is very explicitly about nature descriptions, human relations and precise about what he says, we easily relate ourselves with his fiction. He does not sock our sensibility. (Ritu Kohli, APG School, Saket, Delhi).

There are many others like them who in spite of belonging to the most booming city of India feel closeness with Bond's vision. They are the modern cyber-kids, but they relate very easily with the seemingly static life of his heroes. They find Bond's stories more gripping and tantalizing than that of other writers, because he has delved deep into the recesses of man and has worked upon a universal predicament with the purpose of harmonizing all individuals. Bond feels extreme oneness with the children when he says, "I am just a sixty year old boy without any pretensions to being a sage." He celebrated his sixty seventh birthday in the midst of thousands of school children wishing him happy birthday. The fear of being branded as a writer of children only hardly torments him, rather he enjoys this aspect of his work. Talking about his passion for children, Bond says;

In writing about children one has to adopt a less subjective approach; things must happen, for boys and girls have no time for mood pieces. So this kind of writing helps me to get away from myself. At the same time because I have so strong an empathy with children I can enter into their minds. As children we are individual; it is only as we grow older that we acquire a certain grey similarity. (Bond : 1988 : IX).

Bond tries to retain the liveliness of all individuals through his innocent world of children. Far from the hectic tenor of mechanized society where violence, eroticism and competition kill a child in us his children stories take us to soothing environs of hills which reflect the bright disarming smile of children.

In short, in all these stories the middle-aged narrator visits a scene of his boyhood and childhood and other children and feels the impact of the change both in the setting and him.

✓ **Theme of Indianness**

India is where I was born and went to school and grew to manhood. India was where my father was born and went to school and worked and died. India is where my grandfather lived and died. for India is more than a land. India is an atmosphere. Over thousands of years, the races and religions of the world have mingled here and produced that unique, indefinable phenomenon, the Indian: . . I'm one too. I know that I'm as Indian as the postman or the *paanwala*. Race did not make me an Indian. Religion did not make me an Indian. But history did. And in the long run, it's history that counts. (Bond: 1994 : 172-3).

Love for this country cannot be better expressed. Different writers have made different approaches to discern the true spirit of India, and have drawn different, almost contradictory facets of Indian phenomena. Jane Richardson, for instance, found the Indians as the 'sweetest people in the world', and India as 'heaven's neighbouring state', while V.S. Naipul found India world's largest slum with ever receding degrees of degradation. Ruth Pravar Jhabvala's India is made of heat and dust and is full of flies and mosquitoes. Such perceptions are bound to remain superficial. This country is such a curious land of contradictory elements that one is likely to oversimplify it. When some foreign writer specially, puts these impressions into some mould, they are likely to get transformed or deformed. English novelists, despite their best efforts, have failed to comprehend fully the true Indian sensibilities. During colonial period many British writers wrote about the myths and mystery of India but their efforts remained only peripheral. They seldom went beyond the 'civil lines' to the 'native towns', to Indian homes and bazaars etc. Their understanding of Indian life was limited to the baby, the bearer, the *dhobi*, the chaprasi and others in the servants' quarters of their bungalows. Mulk Raj Anand writes in this regard;

A few of them had shaken hands with the *Raja* or *Nawab*. But seldom had they met the men, the women and children in the families and groups of villages, small towns or walled cities. (Anand :1995 : 35).

Among fair major foreign novelists, Kipling, Forster, Myres and John Masters scribbled about India; Kipling tried his best to know this country. He was at home among native children, language and customs and manners. Though charm of the Himalayan hills replenished his blood, he failed to catch the true spirit of India. For Kipling India was a land of *faqirs*, *sadhus*, *sanyasins* and *mullahs* of different faiths with lots of raggedness. They appeared as so many sycophants, cheats and parasites living on the bread and butter of the common people:

All India is full of holy men stammering gospels in strange tongues; Shaken and consumed in the fires of their own zeal; dreamers, babblers and visionaries as it has been from the beginning and will continue to the end. (Kipling : 1965 : 40).

With all his verbal and visual craftsmanship; his novel leaves behind a sense of muted hostility against the Indians.

E.M. Forster in *A Passage to India* has highlighted some important facets of Indian reality in a suggestive way, but he fails to solve the riddle and mystery of India. In John Musters' novels, the Englishman is everywhere the hero, trying to establish order, peace and justice in the state of anarchy and lawlessness. For L.H. Myers also, India appeared as a muddle. The problem with all these writers was that they tried to discover India through the coloured spectacle of a foreigner; they could not accept it as it was. Ruskin Bond's case is different from all these writers. As Mulk Raj Anand has written in response to the suggestion of P.K. Singh's critiques about Bond's evocative writings :

It is possible that as you are the youngest of the British writers and have matured after India became free, you have no sense of superiority over the Indians around you, so your novels and stories seem to have emerged from within Indian homes. And your heart is in the mountains with your inborn love for nature. . . you have gone to the source of Ganga, you have lived in cottages without pretensions of hippies. . . infect you have become a Garhwali, not one of those whom the Imperial Army preferred for their talent of wielding the Khukhri. . .but as a spiritual descendent of the poet pointer of the 18th century. (Anand : 1995 : 34-35).

Ruskin Bond's acceptance of India is unprecedented, because not only British, but some Indian writers also have written under British spell. They have hopefully searched for their roots through foreign symbols and images. When Edmond Gosse assessing Sarojini Naidu's lyrical genius, advised her to take up Indian themes and portray the India unknown to the West, he took first step in revealing the banished interests that would attract the foreign writers. Today her image varies with different authors keeping in view their psychology and interests. Mulk Raj Anand, Bhabani Bhattacharya and Kamla Markandeya expose her myriad social problems. R.K. Narayan has chosen a comic stance and enjoys idiosyncrasies of man in his day-to-day life. Raja Rao is moved by Vedantic India. Manohar Mulagonkar and Nayantara Sehgal assess her history and politics respectively. Arun Joshi and Anita Desai are also searching their roots in India. A suspicion, a sort of restlessness and despair is palpable in their India. Desai's Hugo Baumgartner and Jhabvala's Esmond are unhappy and they repent for their choice to stay back in India. Esmond's Broodings over the monotonous eternal white sunlight reflects his mind;

Unchanging, unending expanse of white blue sky,
'Indian sky', the epitome of meaningless monotony
which dwarfed human life into significance. (Jhabvala:
1958:202).

According to her, one may admire her magic; go into raptures over her art and sculpture, but one always feels reckless in India. Whereas,

(Bond's) India lives and breathes in the hills. To him trees, mountains rivers have a special appeal and have as much beauty and as many problems as humans have. He is not attracted by the glitter of ever expanding cities, nor is he unduly moved by the ever-present social problems. (Bond : 1995 : 103-4).

Fiction writing chiefly comes from metropolitan backgrounds. Very few like Ruskin Bond are working far away from the urban centres. Those who are either educated abroad or settled abroad mainly enrich Indian English writing. Anand, Sehgal, Vikram Seth, Amitav Ghosh belong to the former class and Raja Rao, B. Rajan, Kamla Markandeya, Bharati Mukharjee, Sunita Namjoshi and Shanta Rama Rao to the later one. Many others temporarily migrated abroad and spent a good time of their creative life there like Anita Desai and Geeta Mehta. A few among them have been teachers of English like Shiv K. Kumar, Shashi Deshpande. Most of modern writers belong to the world of art, media or stage like Shobha De, Arundhati Roy, Vijay Tendulkar and Girish Karnad. A few of them have background of big business houses, administrative or diplomatic services. They have hardly touched the mass of India exactly as it breathes and smiles without any tinge of socialism, individualism or realism. In short, the main stream of Indian English writing hails from a type of intellectual elitism. Jasbir Singh aptly mentions :

Given this background, we have a fictional scene and a critical approach both of which look for Indianness – in form, in technique, in philosophy in the collective unconscious and in the thematic thrust. (Jain: 1997:56-7).

The problem needs to be viewed in wider perspective taking into account the socio-economic scene, the hegemonic status which western thought controls, religious attitudes that blurs the vision and above all writer's own interest in the depiction. Bond's case is of a double inheritance. Born an English man during British regime in India, Ruskin Bond was brought up in changing times as a boy of divided loyalties. Though his roots were in England, he was grafted in Indian soil and nurtured by Indian air and water. By the time of his teens, India became free and British Raj returned to England leaving behind a race of split loyalties. Though most of English and Anglo-Indian families returned to U.K., many of these families chose to remain in India. Ruskin Bond and his mother's family were among such

'Whites' settled in the peaceful town Dehra. When others were passing through post-colonial trauma of displacement, of loss of country, friends and parents, of insecurity and of finance, for Bond it was only a trauma of a loss of identity. He tried to search his roots in India, because the question of filial relationship was as glaring to him as to others. But he could find nothing common with other English people except pigmentation. As he grew out of his teens, he began to love this country. He was happy in Dehra and felt homely in the company of his few friends;

. . .to love it through the friends I made and through the mountains, valleys fields and forests which have made an indelible impressions on my mind. For India is an atmosphere as much as it is a land. (Bond :1997 : XVI).

Hence the declaration, "I am an Indian in the broadest all embracing, all-Indian sense of the world," (Bond : 1997 : XV) resolved the question of Bond's nationality. It was not a forced acceptance, or a choice of convenience. The great 'realization' came to him when he set foot on the foreign soil with the ambition to join the world of living literary legends like Priestley, Maugham, Mackenzie and Green. Though chances of success were uncertain, the optimism of youth lured him away;

In the west I shall start following this trend and that, fashions and styles and topicality. I shall probably emerge a hack one of thousands. I can still write if I remain here even though few will read my work and there who knows, nobody might read me. (Bond : 1997 : XV).

He started his new inning on the foreign soil. But soon after his short stay at New Jersey, he felt nostalgic and India began to haunt him. It was all that he had known and loved so far. Bond longed for the 'languid easygoing mango scented air' of small towns and villages;

The gulmohar trees in their fiery summer splendour, bare footed boys riding buffaloes and chewing sugarcanes, a hoopoe on the grass, bluejays performing aerial acrobatic skills, the scent of wet earth after the first rain and most of all, the easy going pleasure of his Dehra friendship. (Bond : 1997 : 132).

True, it was the warm familiar touch of people in India that he missed most. New Jersey became a real island of his life devoid of friends and familiarities. Once talking about the concept of loneliness, Bond remarked;

The loneliest period of my life consisted of two years I spent in Jersey, a real island, where I lived with relatives. They were not unkind to me, but we did not really love each other. . . and yearned for all that I had left behind in India (Bond : 1998 : XIII).

So he finally returned to his 'home', to "the sensuous welcoming arms of the land" (Bond : 1998 : XIII) he had left.

Human touch is the soul of Indian culture. There are no strangers in India. People meet and inquire about each other's family without being misunderstood. They touch unhesitatingly each other out of love or regard. Whereas, in London people were reserved, constrained and highly individual. In spite of joining 'pubs' and 'societies' in New Jersey, Bond missed warm real touch of familiarity. Later it proved to serve as a contrast to the East and the West. It was like two poles diametrically opposite in social and cultural ethos.

Bond had been there for three years but he felt himself an alienated soul, a foreigner in the crowd of his own creed. Many writers penned down Indian diasporas in one or the other way. Salman Rushdie in *Imaginary Homelands* writes about the sense of loss which emigrants experience;

It may be that writer in my position, exiled or emigrants or expatriates, are haunted by some sense of loss, some urge to reclaim, to look back, even at the risk of being mutated into pillars of salt. . . physical

alienation from India almost inevitably means, that we will not be claiming precisely the thing that was lost, that we will in short create fiction not actual cities or 'villages', but invisible ones, imaginary homelands, India's of my mind. (Rushdie : 1991 :21).

Bond has not been the only victim of alienation in foreign land. The inability to adjust or to return is the theme of many other writers too. It is also a fact that in spite of longing for their homeland, hardly a few have ventured to return to their country. It is Bond who followed the call of his conscience and returned to India to merge his own self with its soil. He made up his mind to struggle against ignomy and poverty and to carve a niche in the world of literati. Even unhygienic conditions, gruesome heaps of garbage, flies and mosquitoes and above all carrier uncertainties could not deter him.

The problem of split nationality was resolved forever by getting a firm foothold in India never to waver again. His vision of India is very clear-India as it is with all its mythical historical structure, political, social and cultural variance and togetherness as well. In this way Bond belongs to the tradition of C.F. Andrews, Sister Nivedita and Anne Besant who had merged their national and racial identity with the rich compound of Indian culture. Highlighting Bond's adaptation of India P.K. Singh states :

Bond's writings give the true flavour of the Indian soil which T. D. Burton calls 'national quintessence'. Bond is not 'an 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 readers the true feel of Indian life he has seen and lived. His European blood seems to be fully naturalised with the Indian spirit. (Singh : 1995 : 7).

A unique combination of the east and west sensibility has shaped Bond's personality as free from prejudices. Endowed with remarkable openness, he is always ready to receive impression coming from all sides.

He himself feels proud of being a man of double identities. The special attribute has enriched his vision making him more adjustable and liberal;

Being a child of changing times, I had grown up with divided loyalties; but at the end of journey I had come to realize that I was blessed with double inheritance. And I was determined to make the most of it. (Bond : 1997 : XVI)

It is an interesting fact that his first book attracted a good readership in England because it was a document of Indian life from a Britisher's eye. A press note by Miss Merry, the critic, after the publication of *The Room on the Roof* in England is noteworthy in this regard;

Mr. Bond, while really belonging to India sees it through the sharp and often satirical eye of a Westerner, so that what Indian writers cannot make intelligible to us, suddenly comes into focus. (Scrutton : 1956).

Though due to racial prejudice they could observe a sharp and satirical eye of a westerner only, Miss Merry at least affirmed that Ruskin Bond truly belonged to India. He did not succumb to the lucrative urge for which many a youth leave their motherland and ultimately settle down abroad. He rose above the considerations of religion and money in order to choose the country he loves. He firmly says;

Race did not make me one. Religion did not make me one, but history did. And in the long run, it is history that counts. (Bond : A year in Jersey : 30).

It is a fact that Bond's friends at Dehra played a decisive role in making his historic move to India. For him his friends were the powerful medium to grapple the true spirit of India. He vividly describes how his friendship familiarized him with the soul of the country. Rusty, the hero of his short

stories and novels, represents his own story of belongingness. Like Bond Rusty was brought up in alien environment. For him, India was something very different in the beginning. He felt a little awkwardness about his land. In *The Room on the Roof*, Bond has created two Indian characters with the purpose to present a contrast of two ideologies. The contrast of Rusty's character and that of his guardian, Mr. Harrison symbolizes two contradictory responses to India. Mr. Harrison ultimately leaves for England. Whereas, Rusty leaves for India. Bond's favourite Englishmen are those who like Rusty love this country. They have spent cheerfully a major part of their life in this country and now India is their home.

Miss Mackenzie in the story "The Prospect of Flowers", lives with flowers of her garden in a hilly town. She does not feel alienated. She had no intention of going to England she knew she would not fit in with the life of post-war Britain. Her home was in these hills, "among the oaks and maples and deodars' (Bond : 1988 : 114). Bond's characters love mountains and flowers. India has captivated them by the charm of her natural beauty and serene environments. Bond is proud of being an Indian.

R. K. Narayan created Malgudi a town of his dream and creative fulfillment; Hardy's Wessex provided him creative essentials, in the same vein Ruskin Bond's vision gets quickened by Sylvan environs of Dehra valley. The town emerges as a powerful symbol of his belongingness to India. It was the quintessence charm of its heavenly landscapes, languorous summers, and comparatively low decibel bazaars and shops that beckoned him in his boyhood. Bond's passion for the Himalayas is the focal point of his Indianness. Instinctively Bond realizes that mountains are the soul of India. They are the abode of Gods and Goddesses. They are divided; nothing is more permanent than the Himalayas. Occasionally many Indian and English writers have turned to the Himalayas, but their approach is ephemeral, whereas, Bond has solely given up his soul for its divine spell. The further he went from them, the greater they pulled him back. He recalls;

It was while I was living in England in the jostle and drizzle of London, that I remembered the Himalayas at their most vivid. I had grown up amongst those great blue and brown mountains; they had nourished my blood, and though I was separated from them by thousand of miles of ocean, plain and desert, I could not rid them from my system. . .There is no escape. (Bond : 1993 : 92).

Later, Bond found that mountains are good to all, especially, to writers. He draws magnificent pictures of the Himalayan splendour through his narration. There is no doubt that Bond like a sage in the Himalayas, feels his soul transcending towards divinity. For him, mountains are not only the favourite places of a naturalist, but also a great source of spiritual enlightenment. Bond's heroes in his short stories also experience a sublime force in the hills charging their spirit. The change in air and attitude brings a complete change in them body and soul. They also feel that in the mountains Gods speak gently to the lonely mind. Such wholesome rejuvenation of human spirit by the hills and the mountains is missing in the vision of other writers. Arun Joshi, for example, describes graphically Som Bhaskar's journey to a temple through the mist, sparkling streams, deep valleys and fearsome gorges. The hero looks with awe and wonder at the floating glaciers and snow capped peaks. He describes;

The path, chalk-white in the moonlight dripped sharply. . .No vegetation, or animal or reptiles or bird. Only vagrant winds, black waters, bronze cliffs in the shadow of the mountains a blind glacier gliding from one end to the other, keeping guard on the gates of whatever it was that lay behind. (Joshi : 1981 : 193).

Though Bhaskar is wonderstruck and feels elevated to be face to face with eternity. Yet he is not free from his mundane grim. Anita Desai's novel *Fire on the Mountains* is set in Kasauli, and has beautiful descriptions of

landscape. The protagonist Raka moves amidst the sound of cicadas, the whispering pines and whistling hoopey. But he is shown crushing the newly sprung lilies and setting fire to the pines. Such apathy towards nature on the part of Bond's characters is impossible. He has so much imbibed the Paganism of India that each pebble and twig are a part of an organic whole.

The India he loves is not one which makes headlines, but one that comprises the goodwill and humour of common people, a tolerance for all customs; a non interference in others' private life, a philosophical acceptance of hardships; love and affection especially in children. His stories move around the rural or middle urban class. People are farmers, small shopkeepers, grass cutters, postmen, tonga drivers, schoolteachers, gardeners or retired officials etc. They truly embody Indian spirit of universal love and fraternity. Glamour and competition the two prime facts of western culture – have not yet violated the sanctity and peace of their life. Love of humanity sits at the centre of their heart.

Cheerful, easy-going, fun loving boyhood is another spectrum of Indian life. The boys and girls are not premature under heavy pressure of materialism. Vijay, Bisnu, Kishen, Suraj, Arun, Satish, Rusty and many other boys go to school but they have enough time to wander about the slopes and attend to their fields and cattle. Satellite channels have not snatched away their social delights. Occasionally, they enjoy cinema, *chaat* and circus too. Their social belongingness is still very sound. Bond has portrayed real Indian society. His characters are not isolated in their own islands. Though Ram Bharosa in the story "The Blue Umbrella" is excommunicated due to his own malicious nature, the girl, Binya offers her hand of friendship and brings him back into the main stream of life. Social cause has always been given priority over individual interest in Indian culture. Therefore, his characters symbolize a remarkable balance between social and personal concerns. For example, when the panther attacks Kalam Singh's son in the story "Panther's Moon", the villages rush forward to rescue him, when Bisnu gets late in return to home, they get worried and search for him in the deep forest.

There are no strangers in India. People meet, they exchange pleasantries according to their age, as son, daughter, sister, grandmother and grandfather etc. The address in itself is sufficient to remove their alienation and strangeness. Bisnu walks daily five miles from his village Manjari, to reach his school but the distance is easily covered up people largely enquire about each other's family and soon an intimacy envelops them; "In India when strangers meet, they must know each other's parental history before they can be friends". (Bond : 1999 : 703).

In India family relations are closer, warmer and more reliable than any other thing. Brother-sister and mother-son relations are elaborately presented in Bond's stories. In the story "Panther's Moon", there is loving Puja who helps her brother Bisnu in the field and prays to God when he gets late to return to home. Her demand for red and golden bangles is in traditional colour. The mother in the family prepares meals for Bisnu, she waits for his return at the dusk and always prays before God Ganesh for his safe return. In "Sita and the River", the grandmother shares her days of youth and girlhood with Sita. She tells her the stories of mythological gods and goddesses when she falls ill; the little girl attends her ailing grandmother will motherly care.

Bond has described with remarkable authenticity the interiors of an Indian village house – a string cot, a clock and picture of Ganesh enshrined the most prominent corner of the house – are essential for an Indian house. He describes in the story "Panther's Moon"

Loud tickling that came from the battered little clock, which occupied the second most honoured place in a niche in the wall. The most honoured place belonged to a picture of Ganesh, the god of learning. . . Ganesh is the God who blesses all beginnings. The author who begins to write a new book, the banker who opens a new ledger, the traveller who starts on a journey, all invoke the kindly help of Ganesh. (Bond : 1991 : 27-8).

Bond has ingeniously reflected the spirit of diversity of faith in Indian culture. If Bisnu propitiates Ganesh's blessings, Sita (Sita and the River) adores Lord Krishna. Her faith in Krishna as the great protector of helpless beings is so deep that Vijay, the simple boy of the village, who saves her life, becomes the blue god, Krishna. Bond has developed a deep understanding of the motif behind Indian myths. He knows that in this land people are, by nature, very grateful as a man becomes God if he helps or protects them. Sita very easily associates herself with Vijay. Her faith not only strengthens her against the natural calamity, but blesses her with bright optimism also. Her philosophic surrendering to the whirlwind of life and her conviction that, "we are part of the river". (Bond : 1988 : 209) is truly Indian in spirit.

Bond encourages no controversy or supercilious impression in the delineation of myths. He knows well that myths are conspicuously a part of Indian life; they have contributed a lot in strengthening the humanistic attitude of Indian culture. Therefore in the frame of cultural and ethical realism he has described various superstitions and stories of ghosts and fairies. They are a part of the life of hill-people. People, in the hills, simply believe in angels, *Jins* and *Churails*, though they never claim to encounter them. Urbanites or people with cold 'reason' may jeer at these simpletons, but for Bond, these stories are as real and ancient as are these mountains. He has fabricated them in the plot of his stories as a part of regional realism. For example, the story of Pari Tibba and other ghosts are in consonance with local belief.

Bond believes in the immortality and transmigration of soul. The truth that physical body perishes and mixes with the dust from which it springs is reflected in his stories. The heroes in their soliloquies frequently contemplate about the eternity of soul and nature. The protagonist of *Delhi is not Far* resolves his conflict in the wake of this realization;

I believe in the death of flesh but not in the end of living. .even as children we are old in experience. We are not conscious of a beginning only of an eternity, a rest for a tired and misused body, which has to be destroyed before it can be renewed. (Bond:1999:810).

Realization of life and death comes naturally as a part of experience and instinct for a typical Indian. He knows that life goes far beyond the known limitations of time and space. Like an average Indian, Bond also believes that relations are predestined. The role of intuition in bringing people closer is remarkable. The two strangers meet and feel quite familiar with each other. No science can dissect the functioning of intuition. It may be a matter of accumulated consciousness or pre-birth impressions, which every child carries with him. The closeness of Rusty and Somi, Rusty and Kishen, writer-hero and Suraj appears to be the natural product of such pre-birth accumulated impressions.

India is a land of body and soul, sense and spirit. Religion is not merely a mode of ritualistic worship, it teaches the art of living in full conformity with nature. Bond has described Hardwar and Rishikesh as the spiritual seats of India.

Depiction of Indian festivals and seasons imparts a powerful realism to his short stories. Rains are sensuous, refreshing, intoxicating and charming in India. Bond gets virtually charged with poetic fervour when he describes rains. In his short stories the description of swinging in the trees amidst drizzling is in the true vein of the celebration of rain in Indian villages and towns.

All the places— streets and lanes, bazaars and railway platforms, theatre and garden have been portrayed in the very native colour. Indian life with its vivid and varied colours can be discerned in all aspects. In the story “The Kitemaker”, one can find Mahmood Ali, the kite maker, sitting under an old banyan tree and contemplating on the glories of bygone days with half shut eyes anywhere in this land. Likewise in the story, “The Blue Umbrella” a girl named Binya running after her cow Neelu can be easily traced on the slopes of the hills. In the story, “Sita and the River”. Sita curing for her old sick grandmother and chatting with her doll Mumta can be seen in any village house. In the story ‘Panther’s Moon’, Bisnu represents every schoolboy in the hills who walks many miles daily to reach his school amidst the lurking

fear of a panther. Persons like Dukhi, spending the entire day on his haunches and trimming the garden hedge, Pritam the easy going Sikha truck-driver, Bisnu serving tea in cinema-halls, Daya Ram losing his small money bag in the train, Masterji grabbing money by leaking question papers, reflect the various shades of Indian life. The observation of Miss Indu in this regard is noteworthy;

Collectively viewed the stories project a segment of life in the Indian districts over the last fifty years during which the even tenor of rural life though dull and drab, was still proceeding on a familiar track unmarred by senseless violence. . .life was lived with inherited values of basic honesty, faith and love for the family and neighbours. (Sariya :1995 : 212).

Bond is, no doubt, fairer and more convincing than other writers of mutiny, such as Flora Annie Steel. She in her novel *Mutiny* tried to see the Indian side and John Company's butt could not penetrate homes of rebels. Unity in diversity is the most fascinating feature of Indian culture. People of various sect and creed live in peace and harmony; they respect each other's views and faith. Such broad concept of individual liberty and social coherence have made this land truly democratic. He writes;

Ours is a land of many people, many races; their diversity gives it a colour and character. For all Indians to be alike would be as dull as for all sexes to be the same or for all humans to be normal. (Bond : 1999 : 817).

Bond shares many Indian conceptions about nature. His attitude is not that of a naturalist only. At times he is very close to paganism, which forms a part of Indian psyche. He is an ardent worshipper of nature and diligently raises the cause of nature through fiction. He strengthens his point by quoting from myths and legends prevalent among common folk. He quotes a

grandmother bequeathing age long beliefs to her grand children; “A blessing rests on the house where falls the shadow of a tree”. (Bond : 1988 : 238).

Trees are worshipped as other godheads in India. Tulsi, the plant full of medicinal qualities, is considered as the beloved of Lord Krishna. Housewives in India devoutly worship the little plant of Tulsi in their courtyard, because it protects their family from various diseases and brings bliss to their life. The tree is said to have sprung from the nectar of the gods and people still worship it as a means of purification both of spirit and environment. Another myth regarding the origin of Neem tree is related with Sun God. Bond narrates the story;

The tree is also connected with the sun, as in the story of Neem-barak the Sun god invited to dinner a man of the Bhairagi-tribe whose rules forbade him to eat except by daylight. Dinner was late and as darkness fell, the Bhairagi feared he would be late, but Suraj Narayan, descended from a Neem tree and continued shinning till dinner was over. (Bond:1993: 149).

Neem tree, from the ancient times has been connected with the Goddess Sheetla, who protects children from diseases like small pox. Bond does not meddle with the authenticity of these stories. He believes in their emotive and symbolic powers as they have inspired people from ages to grow trees and to save them from being cut down. In central India, the person who wants to cut a tree first begs pardon for the injury he is going to inflict on it. Bond has observed that Gonds, particularly, pour ghee on the stump saying; “Grow thou out of this, O’lord of the forest, grow into a thousand shoots ! May we grow with a thousand shoots”. (Bond : 1993 : 149).

These beliefs have helped in the preservation of forests and climate of the country so far. But the rise of ‘logical’ indifference towards the concept of trees as godheads has resulted in deforestation and distortion of climate. Bond has accumulated all prevalent myths about trees to reinsure faith in

them. According to Indian concept trees are not stationary but living sensory organisms always moving upward and spreading sideward. In most of his stories characters enjoy their company and share their gloom and gaiety with them. Rusty feels that trees are conversing with him in the moments of solitude. In the story “Dust in the Mountains” Pritam and Bisnu have a narrow escape from death because of the Oak tree. The protagonist of “My Father’s Trees in Dehra’ says;

The trees seem to know me. They whisper among themselves and beckon me nearer. . .They are moving. In this small forgotten corner of the world, my father’s dreams are coming true. (Board:1988: 146).

The jackfruit tree reminds the boy of the pleasures of his boyhood, when his little sports revolved around its sturdy trunk. Its dense shoots and branches provided a suitable place for playing hide-and-seek. In the story “Sita and the River”, tree is older than the grandfather; it symbolises an emotional chain that binds many generations together. Therefore, in India trees stand for forefathers; their death indicates the loss of protective coverage that people enjoy underneath. The story "Cherry Tree" beautifully reflects this attitude towards nature. People plant peepal tree in their courtyards because it gives relief during hot summers. The heart shaped leaves of peepal tree, ‘catch the least breath of air and flutter eagerly’, cooling those who sit beneath it. For the grandmother in the story “Sita and the River” Peepal leaves look like Krishna, broad at shoulders, then tapering down to a very slim waist. This similitude makes the tree more sacred and loving. The tree, being an abode of good and bad spirits, grandmother warns Sita not to yawn without snapping her fingers in front of her mouth. Tree emerges as a great protector when the island gets immersed into flood and Sita clings to its trunk and feels secure.

In the folklore of Garhwal, the mango is wish-fulfilling tree. In spring the young leaves and blossoms of the tree symbolize the darts of Manmoth or

Kamdev – God of love. Deodar the most common tree in the Himalayas is also sacred though it is not worshipped. Its timber as Bond tells, is used in making doors and pillars in the temples. He admires this tree because it is the most godlike among the Himalayan trees. It stands erect and look magnificent. Its beauty and majesty truly represent creation in its noblest form. As far as Bond's personality is concerned, he himself resembles the calm and poised attitude of a Himalayan Saint who for the last fifty years has been scribbling Indian stories because he loves this soil. In the true spirit of ancient Indian precept, "Satyam Shivam Sundaram", he is recreating a world that is true, beautiful and good for all. They inspire the readers for living a better life. Bond writes;

After forty years of writing very little money and not much recognition outside India. But I have sung my songs and told my tales. And I doubt, if I would have done my better in other circumstances. As a boy reading was my religion, writing helped me record its journey. (Bond : 1998 : 182).

The dilemma 'had all done this, had we got that' does not gnaw his consciousness. His devotion to life and work fits exactly in the frame of the *Bhagvat Geeta's* concept of *Nishkam Karma*. His relationship with Indian soil is holier than that of those ungrateful brats who 'jump at comparable offer in some other land' and grouse against their own land for so many reasons. At last Bond asserts;

I am an Indian. My heart is here. I spent my childhood here. India is my real home. I may have been reincarnated here; I may have been Dukhi before being in an English family. (Aggarwal:1998:).

The analysis undertaken in the preceding pages bears out the truth of the contention that a theme-based classification of Bond's short stories often defies critical skill. Pigeon-holing of literary creations in general can be done

only at the expense of clearly defined discriminative criteria. It is more so in the case of Bond's stories which have as their themes an extensive array of religious, ritualistic, social, familial, fantastic and fabulous features that seldom show any aversion to mingling among themselves. Nevertheless, an attempt is made to classify Bond's short stories thematically in broad, general terms, for the sake of convenience of critical analysis.

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CHAPTER-III

RUSKIN BOND'S ART OF CHARACTERIZATION

It is interesting to know how a creation takes shape and vigour in a piece of fiction. While talking about the art of characterization, E.M. Foster warns against the practice of recreating real-life personas. He says; "characters in a book are not exactly real, they are like life. . . ."(Foster: 1927: 70). Robert Scholes holds the same opinion; No character in a book is a real person, characters in fiction are like real people. They are also unlike them" (1968 : 17). Somerset Maugham views it in a different perspective. He believes that a writer cannot create out of abstractions. His characters are not hypothetical; he must have some living sparks to fire up his imagination in order to create a convincing character. The skillful amalgam of fact and fiction creates tantalizing characters;

The writer does not copy his originals, he takes what he wants from them, a few traits that have caught his attention, a turn of mind that has found his imagination and then constructs his characters (Maugham : 1967 : 158).

Maugham's art comes closer to realistic fiction, in which writer tries to emphasize the life-likeness of characters. So did Maupassant and *Chekhov*. They wrote about real people and that's why their stories are not dull. Writers may have different opinion on how much they must take from real life, but all of them do have some original of their prototype somewhere in the world.

Ruskin Bond's great strength lies in his art of characterization. He is a master creator of characters and he has left behind a whole galaxy of characters. Characters are very central in his art. Bond's stories are peopled with big and small men and women. They are ordinary, simple, educated and uneducated men and women like house servants, shop-keepers, schoolboys, thieves, gardeners, beggars, wrestlers, school-teachers, farmers, soldiers, drivers and so on. Bond's world is the world of the poor and the middle class

people. Bond's greatness can be seen in the originality and naturalness of these characters. His stories are not books printed on paper but worlds full of real living and breathing people. He is no creator of card board characters; his men and women, angry, hungry, strange, foolish, honest live their own lives in the books. And they are moving and acting most of the time. His characters are true human beings. He always writes serious stories but that does not stop him from creating such characters. He is equally good at creating very interesting situations. His stories are like pan-vision films with hundreds of people suffering, acting and moving all the time.

Bond's true greatness lies in his sharp observation, his knowledge of the joys and pains of ordinary, humble folks, his great sense of humour and above all his kindness for the saints and sinners alike. He rarely talks of philosophy in his books. He is just a great storyteller. His characters are realistic and live. He is a short-story writer who recognized that a character may not remain the same throughout the story but he or she can grow or develop or deteriorate as a result of what happens in the short story. He acquired an immense amount of knowledge of human nature, psychology, there is feelings and then applied them to the depiction and exploration of the character. He has created a large number of characters.

Bond's fiction, in all probabilities, is very akin to real life. His characters originate from the people he has either met or seen around him. Bond frankly admits;

I've been writing stories of one kind or another. . . it has always been the people I've known and met who have given me these stories – friends, lovers, relatives, chance acquaintances, strangers, or other people's friends and relatives. (Bond : 2000 : VII).

Stories hang about Bond in Dehra and Mussoorie that even a conversation with him, finds its way into some of his fictional character. He holds an interesting conviction that no two persons are alike. It is their stark individuality that attracts him. Plots of stories are woven around their

individual traits, which are highly captivating and surprising. Bond loves them because he says;

I find most people interesting. The dull ones are those whose lives are a little too orderly, or who are forever boasting of the ease with which they have succeeded in life. Yes, life is full of surprises. And so are people, in their different ways. (Bond : 2000 : VIII).

Endowed with a great insight into the psychology of man he is motivated to write about what is uncommonly common in human nature. Therefore, his prime concern while writing a story is to highlight the extraordinary in an ordinary type of man. The story moves with the development or some revelation in the character within the folds of a given situation. Resultantly, there are a number of moving character-portraits bright and serene in varied colours and shades. He points out;

Theme of my stories develops from characters. Their plot is subservient. In fact, there isn't any plot in the midst; it is more a study of a character or a portrait of a person. (Aggarwal : 1998).

Bond is the writer of hills and small towns. Most of his characters-men, women and children of various age and class belong to the high hills and valleys of Garhwal. They are born in small tranquil villages and hamlets. They are the people of soil-farmers, traders, vendors, chawkidars and schoolteachers etc. Boys and girls of different age play a pivotal role in many of his stories. His observation of adolescent psychology is unsurpassable. After R. K. Narayan, it is Bond who has related himself so naturally to the innocent world of children. He loves them because they are as natural as nature itself. His courtship with children started when he was at the verge of middle age maturity. Hypocrisy of the grown ups forced him to peep into the innocent world of children. The glaring contrast of the young and the old world is manifested through characters corresponding to their age and spirit. He says;

When I was about forty, I started writing stories about children – the children of nearby villages of hills, middle class children working in the fields or going to school. . . I write because I may have an understanding with them. (Aggarwal : 1998).

Though Bond's range of characters are large. He is the most consummate author of hills and it is impossible to ignore the universal appeal of his characters. Like any man, they are greedy, kind, shy, sensuous, brave, stubborn, loving, friendly and crooked. They may take away other's life to protect themselves. Cold-blooded murders are also a part of Bond's gallery; he deals with them with equal felicity, focusing upon the mysterious background of their being so. Bond lays emphasis upon the circumstances of a person for his idiosyncrasies. It is the process of growing up that has made him what he is today;

We are creatures of circumstances. If our genes have shaped our biological make-up, our environment has shaped the development of our natures. (Bond : 2001 : VII)

Bond's portraits are not static. In spite of their seeming inactiveness, they steadily move towards maturity. The process of development is conspicuous in both young and old. They are remarkably pliant to harmonize with the people and surroundings. We can classify them as types and individuals both. They are gripping and tantalizing as individual human beings, while representing their particular class to which they belong. It has always been interesting to trace the source of these creations. During his long walks, Bond meets many people and some of them get deeply imprinted in his memory. They become a part of his 'mental luggage'. He revives them through stories. Critics may accuse him of particular obsession, but it is quite natural that some of our meets linger with us. Bond says;

Meet some of the people I can never forget. . . because their individuality made them stand out from the common place. It was not money or success but pride in themselves that set them apart: people like my Granny, or my father, or the old kitemaker, or the wayside station's khilasi, or the epileptic boy who sold trinkets for a living. (Bond : 2000 : VII)

Bond's extensive gallery has a variety of pen portraits ranging from man and woman, young and old, rich and poor, simple and complex, autobiographical and fictional. Some of them like Rani, Markham and Sensualist are meant for psychological observations, while some like Kishen Singh, Pritam and Hari are regional simpletons. Some characters such as Sita, Suraj, Vijay and Rusty etc. have allegorical connotations and some are autobiographical or semi-autobiographical portraits. Bond has created a few caricatures too like Sita Ram and uncle Ken. His world is not of male dominance; girls and women are not less gripping than men in his stories.

Autobiographical nature of his fiction makes him an Indian Charles Lamb. The dilemma of growing up is powerfully presented through Rusty, his favourite autobiographical hero of the stories *Rusty, The Boy from the Hills*. Through him Bond speaks of his own tribulations standing at the threshold of manhood. Rusty's sensibility, his urge for friendship and above all his Indianness are truly of Bond himself.

Doing father, who takes away his son on the slopes of Dehra for planting saplings in many of Bond's stories, is Mr. A. A. Bond, his loving father. The writer is so deeply attached to his father, that he brings him back to life whenever he has to talk of a father in the plot of his story.

Another character of semi-autobiographical touch is Dukhi, the gardener, in stories like "A Job Well Done" and "The Room of Many Colours." The character emerged out of Bond's early reminiscing of Granny's gardener sat on his haunches weeding and proyning the hedge. He is lovable because he grows flowers. His frail body is camouflaged in the flowers, grass, bushes,

weeds and soil around him. Dukhi, one of the most humble men of Bond's worlds, surprises his readers by a sudden act of heroism in the story "A Job Well Done". It may be a case of court claummy, but Dukhi feels no remorse for killing Major Sahib who forces him to make the pigeons homeless by closing the old well in the garden.

Bond shows his awareness of the development in the field of science and philosophy of the 20th century. The result is that in his hands the short story becomes highly philosophical and psychologically insightful. He looks into the minds and hearts of his characters and reveals the thinking and feelings, likes, dislikes. Sufferings and frustrations of his characters. Bond presents highly complex characters. Their actions at first appear to be puzzling and even contradictory, but when Bond analyses the person's psychology and shows us why exactly he acted in those different ways, his character becomes convincing.

Some of Bond's characters have deep psychological implications. They are the men of split personality. Though each human being possesses duo phase, some have to act perforce antagonistically when caught in a dilemma. Their conflict gears up the story. They are essentially good at heart and their goodness is put to a rigorous test under heavy pressure of situation. Sometime they dissimulate wickedness through gentle profile like Uncle Bill and sometime they act as a traitor to their own self like Inspector Lal.

In semi detective story "A Case for Inspector Lal" Keemat Lal is made up of such stuff that is unlikely to be found in his profession. The character originates from a real official who was of Bond's close acquaintance. He does not act like Holmes, but does peep into the mystery of Rani's murder case. A policeman who is trained to maintain law and order is also expected to use his discretionary powers at times. Inspector Lal, whose promotion solely depends on solving the case, falls a victim to these two codes face to face. A girl, named Kusum, is the murderer in primafacie, but the motive behind murder is truly to protect herself against the melafied intentions of Rani. Inspector Lal is scared of the girl's future in remand home. Bond has picked the crux so

emphatically that the suspense is shifted to the discretion of Mr. Lal Inspector Lal closes the 'file' of case and of his promotion forever. His victory as a man smiles upon his failure as a professional, "I should never have been a policeman." (Bond : 1988:121). The honest submission reaffirms his faith in humanity as the ultimate concern in life.

Uncle Bill is a character of negative shades, the anti-hero of the story "He said it with Arsenic." He is a dissimulator par excellence, a perfect gentleman in tone and gesture. He sends death in small parcels and nobody ever suspects him. 'A born murderer' Uncle Bill has devised highly sophisticated ways of killing his targets. The narrator describes him;

If there was a born murderer, he must surely have been William Jones. The thing came so naturally to him. No extreme violence, no messy shootings, or hacking or throttling. Just the right amount of poison administered with skill and discretion. (Bond : 1999 : 342)

Uncle Bill as a duo-a gentleman and a killer sails smoothly. The situation turns when the killer in him gives way to the gentleman. He could have refused the mortal drink offered by his nephew whom he tried to make his last target, but the gentleman made him to empty the glass down his throat. In the circumstances, he says, "it seemed the only decent thing to do". (Bond : 1999 : 349).

In the story "Chachi's Funeral", Chachi is a simple woman and cannot understand Sunil's nature. Sunil is her ten-year-old nephew. He is a little brighter than her own sons. He is more sensitive, and inclined to resent a scolding or a cuff across the head.

On the evening of the 5th of April, Sunil has been in high spirits and feeling hungry. He enters the kitchen with the intention of helping himself with some honey, but the honey is on the top shelf and Sunil is not tall enough to get to the bottle. He gets his fingers to it but as he pulls it towards him, it falls

to the ground and crashes. Chachi reaches the scene of the accident before Sunil can slip away. Removing her slipper, she gives him three to four furious blows across the head and shoulders. This done, she sits down on the floor and bursts into tears. Sunil might have cried; but his pride is hurt, and instead of weeping, he mutters something under his breath and storms out of the room. He goes to his secret hiding place, a small hole in the wall of the unused barsati, where he keeps a clasp knife. Opening the knife he says; "I'll kill her ! he whispered fiercely, I'll kill her; I'll kill her" (Bond : 1988 : 29) 'who are you going to kill, Sunil ?' It is his cousin Madhu a dark slim girl of twelve. Sunil's chachi is her Mammi. " 'Chachi', says Sunil. She hates me, I know, well, I hate her too. This time I'll kill her."(Bond : 1988 : 29).

In this story, Bond analyses the child psychology. Sunil knows Chachi's nature so he hates her. But that time Madhu comes and understands the psychology of Sunil. So she tells him,

You'll be caught by the C.I.D. officers. Because they are very clever. Do you want to go to jail ? Then better do not kill your Chachi. At least not this way. I'll show you how. (Bond : 1988 : 29).

Madhu produces pencil and paper; she goes down on her hands and knees. She screws up her face in sharp concentration. And she makes a rough drawing of Chachi. Then with a red crayon, she sketches a big heart in the region of Chachi's stomach. Now, she says, 'stab her to death !' Sunil's eyes shine with excitement. He holds the drawing against the woodwork and plunges his knife three times into Chachi's pastel breast. 'You will kill her.' Says Madhu.

In this way, Madhu transfers Sunil's anger and mind from situation and makes him give vent to his feelings. This analysis of character and search for motives appears to be very pleasant and convincing.

The character can grow or deteriorate during the course of the short stories. The characters do not remain the same by the end of the short story as they were at the beginning. Bond firmly believes that man is a curious mixture of vice and virtue, even those whom we call villains, are not devoid of the streaks of nobility. That is why we say that he creates round characters and not flat ones. The characters undergo a change as they naturally react to their circumstances and environment. Each one of his characters grows and evolves for good or bad circumstances and environment plays major part in their being so. His stories give a sort of psychological treatment to bring them back into positive tenor. Ram Bharosa in the story "The Blue Umbrella" is such a pliant character. Being the only shopkeeper in a small hill-village, he is awfully possessive of anything that is valuable and beautiful. His exclusive position in the village squirms when a poor girl named Binya, owns a beautiful umbrella. In his mad pursuit to vindicate himself, he gets socially alienated. The worst happens when he tries to steal the umbrella and children derogate his name from 'Ram the Trustworthy' to 'Trusty Umbrella thief'. The egocentric man gets ultimately confined to his house-shop, which nobody visits now. He even loses his appetite. Financially dwindled, socially alienated Ram Bharosa hardly looks like a man. Bond portrays his extreme fall, but a sudden turn in the situation revives him miraculously. Binya, the co-victim of 'umbrella vanity', realizes the cause of his miseries and relinquishes the umbrella. Ram Bharosa by now has paid much for his greed; he has also realized that true joy lies in sharing, not in possessing. Both his anguish and reversal are genuine. New Ram Bharosa is born who values Binya's frank smile above all riches.

The story "The Thief" reveals same predicament of human psychology. The story moves about the conflict of a thief whose habitual urge to steal forces him to rob his very friend, Arun. But his simple logic, "I am getting out of practice . . . He does not even pay me," (Bond: 1988: 40) evades when he feels guilty of robbing the very embodiment of trust in life. He wails;

He was the most trusting person I had ever met. . . It is easy to rob a greedy man. . . but it is difficult to rob a poor person, even one who really doesn't care if he is robbed. (Bond : 1988 : 40).

The story aims to reveal that even a thief can discriminate panic reaction on the face of a person robbed from the shocking indifference or lack of reaction of his friend towards the abominable act. The thief fails to enjoy his accomplishment because the target is not a sufferer at all. The story presents a drama of complex human psyche. The moment thief realizes that it is he who has been robbed of trust, the most valuable thing in life, he repents and returns to regain it. The story indicates that the line that divides a man as good or bad is very thin almost indiscernible and one can dodge it easily.

In the other story "Death of a Familiar" Sunil is the central character and his age is only twenty. He is bad man and a good for nothing fellow in the beginning. But contact with Narrator and Maureen, as a schoolteacher at Simla, brings him to the right path and he becomes worthy to marry Maureen. However, in the end of the story he dies. Bond declares his view on the desirability of the growth of character in a short story through Sunil in "Death of a Familiar". It is rightly said that character is not a state but a process. Further it is not defined for all time but it grows or deteriorates in the light of opportunities and environment. Bond's characters develop gradually as we come to know them. They go from weakness to strength or from strength to weakness, according to the work that they do and the thoughts that they cherish.

Some of Bond's creations have supernatural shade, they are normal human beings, but placed in such circumstances, that enforce them to be interpreted as weird creatures. They are alienated mysterious looking persons passing the ordeal of life. Markham in the story "When Darkness Falls" is a war veteran condemned to die for the world. In a tragic accident Markham

has lost one of his eyes, part of his nose and flesh of his side face a ravaged physique sufficient to make an onlooker yelp out of fear. This is how a real flesh and body Markham lives in a cellar for many years without daylight and morning breeze. Markham is an embodiment of horrible ordeal for no fault of his own. His urge for company, which finds a pathetic substitute in a shrew that visits his cellar, makes him more destitute. When suffocation becomes unbearable, he walks on the deserted road in the silence of night, sometime horrifying a casual passerby. Darkness of supernatural implication devours Markham. His impatient attempts to play old notes on Piano in the stillness of night reflects his desperate move for normal life. In spite of suffering from utter sense of vacuum, Markham is not foolish dreamer and he tries hard to adjust with his horrible truth, "but how long can a mind remain normal in such circumstances ?" (Bond: 2001:14).

Markham is a normal mind handicapped by physical abnormality. His desperate insistence to take him as a normal soul makes him highly pathetic. Bond writes about the origin of this moving character;

As a boy I did know of a man who never left his room and whose meals were left outside the door the reason was different, the man was a leper. . . Markham is a different sort of outcaste . . . but he too is a creature of circumstances. (Bond :2001:VII-VIII).

Overwrought Rani in the story "The Room of Many Colours", is also a product of circumstances. She appears insane; her discordant talks, obsession for bright glasses and dazzling jewellery in contrast to the dark room where she sits, impart her a bizarre shade. She is nameless; perhaps her state of being Rani has dwarfed her individual self. The pall of mysteriousness surrounds her, being confined to her rooms situated at the top of the ruined palace. It is further intensified by repeated references of ghost, snakes and lizards. Being cut off from the main stream of life, she affects pathetically her state of being Rani through gems and pearls in all her fingers;

Oh, you must believe me, I'm a real queen, I'm a Rani !
Look, I have diamonds to prove it. . . only a queen can
have these. (Bond : 1999 : 235).

Her insistence to be treated as normal one is as pathetic as Markham's, "Quite normal Mrs. Khanna. . . I'm quite normal." (Bond :2001: 16). Both Rani and Markham struggle to come out of their deceptive shells Markham yearns for a normal life and Rani for a normal womanhood. Whatever seems bizarre about her is only an illusion, or an escapade from the leaden force of circumstances. Her anxiety to protect snakes in the garden because they were princes who died unmarried; speak of the tragedy of a queen whose status denied her the natural bliss of matrimony.

The story "Susanna's Seven Husbands", is about a vamp of obscure traits. Susanna, the lady of seven husbands, is a cynosure of city youth. She is sought after for her wealth and beauty. The list of her wooers is quite long. Seven out of them marry her to die within the year of their matrimony. The lady is generous in her bounties, but rigorous towards her menials. Highly unpredictable Susanna becomes a prodigy of fear and fascination. Bond portrays her character on three possible lines – first, she kills her husbands for some bitter childhood impressions that prompt her to dominate the opposite sex, second, it is simply her nature to hunt for new adventures, third and sheer chance is responsible ultimately for deaths in succession. But for the people of her town she is an enigma, a lady of supernatural prowess.

Bond has written some story on mysticism e.g. in "A Face in the Night", "The Monkeys" and "The Man who was Kipling" are adequate, though by no means brilliant.

In "A Face in the Night" in the beginning at the story, the narrator states;

It may give you some idea of rural humour if I begin this tale. I was walking alone at night when I met an old man carrying a lantern. I surprised that the man

was blind. I asked old man if you cannot see, why do you carry a lantern. He replied that he carried this so that fools do not stumble against me in the dark. This incident has only a slight connection with the story that follows, but I think, it provides the right sort of tone and setting. (Bond : 1988 : 122).

In this way Mr. Oliver is the central character in this story. He is a bachelor. He is an Anglo-Indian teacher in school at Simla. He has been teaching in the school for several years (He is no longer there).

One night Mr. Oliver carries a torch. When its flickering light falls on the figure of a boy, who is sitting alone on a rock. He senses that something is wrong with a boy. The boy appears to be crying. His head hung down, he holds his face in his hands and his body shook convulsively. It is strange because soundless weeping so Mr. Oliver feels distinctly uneasy. Mr. Oliver says, well what is the matter ? But the boy will not answer or look up. His body continues to be racked with silent sobbing. Come on boy, you shall not be out here at this hour. Tell me the trouble. The boy looks up. He takes his hands from his face and looks up at his teacher. The light from Mr. Oliver's torch falls on the boy's face- if you can call it a face. He has no eyes, ears, nose or mouth. It is just a round smooth head with a school cap on top of it. And that's where the story should end – as indeed it has, for several people who have had similar experiences and dropped dead of inexplicable heart attacks. But for Mr. Oliver it did not end there. The torch falls from his trembling hand. He turns and scrambles down the path. He runs blindly through the tress and calling for help. He is still running towards the school buildings when he sees a lantern swinging in the middle of the path. Mr. Oliver has never before been so pleased to see the night watchman. Watchman says, "What is it, Sahib ?" Mr. Oliver answers, I see something – something horrible, A boy has no face, eyes, nose or mouth nothing, watchman says, Do you mean it is like this, Sahib ? And he raises the lamp to his own face. The watchman has no eyes, no ears, and no features at all

not even an eyebrow ! The wind blew the lamp out and Mr. Oliver had his heart attack. In short, Bond describes something horrible in his stories. He talks about some unbelievable and supernatural phenomena of people.

In contrast to these macabre creations, Bond has painted a number of spriteful adolescence like Kishen, Suraj, Rusty and Vijay. They are more than individual beings. The particular situation in which they find themselves and aftermath of their actions impart them extra dimension. A close analysis of the boys in Bond's fiction reveals that they symbolize a definite journey of self from innocence to experience. There is constant movement towards ripeness. Rusty matures from sensuous delights of boyhood to a sort of metaphysical awakening. Kishen in *Vagrants in the Valley* matures from his adolescent recklessness to a grave acceptance of life. They are like caravans going through various stages of growing up along with the widening expanse of experiences. Ordinary conditions shape ordinary individuals, but hardships train them for heroic aptitude. An introvert like Rusty becomes highly responsible youth cherishing a definite aim. The state of being homeless transcends his 'self' to universal belongingness; " 'I'm nothing' said Rusty 'I am everything'. . .I have no home', he said and felt proud of that too". (Bond:2003:144).

This submission to the will of God creates in him an ascetic's indifference towards woes and foes. It is interesting to note now adolescents enter the portals of wide world with rare understanding and fortitude. They are capable to translate their life as well as that of others in desired direction.

In the story, "Bus Stop, Pipalnagar", Bond reveals the reality of life through Suraj's character. Suraj is the central character in the story. He is an orphan and a refugee. He works as a helper in a teashop; but when he starts having epileptic fits, the shopkeepers ask him to leave. He has saved some money, and with it he buys a small stock of combs, buttons, cheap perfumes, and bangles, and converting himself into a mobile shop, goes from door to door selling his wares in the Pipalnagar. He loves his life. He sees positive

attitude to life. He is ambitious and optimist. When he fails in the exam. He says;

Never mind . . . I will pass next year . . . almost everything can be tolerated. He stood up, the tray hanging from his shoulders. What would you like to buy ? (Bond : 1988 : 74).

In this way, Bond gives us philosophy of life through Sujar's dialogue; "Let us go where there are no people at all. . . I am a little tired of people. I see too many of them people". (Bond : 1988 : 66).

Vijay in the story "Sita and the River" becomes a blue skinned god, Krishna, to save Sita from the angry river. He is by all means a normal village boy but his appearance on the scene when Sita is struggling hard for life, transforms him into God. For a girl, who grows with the stories of mythical Gods and Goddesses in her blood, it is quite natural to accept her protector as Godhead. Vijay not only saves Sita, but also introduces her to the real world that lies beyond her island. Melodies pouring out of his flute, and lustrous blue of peacock feather fill her life with a lively spectrum of sound and colour.

Besides these multi dimensional characters, Bond has penned simple regional representatives who smile amidst the hardships of hill life. Bisnu in "Panther's Moon" is a small Garhwali boy, the only school going boy of the village, Manjari. He covers almost ten miles daily to reach his school. His day begins after bowing before the image of lord Ganesh. He loves his pet, Sheroo, the people of his village, jungle and fields around. Trauma of the panther does not deter him. Kishen Singh in the story "The Tunnel" who belongs to the rural class understands the forest and its creatures very well. He is scared of the city and its people because they bring havoc in his peaceful surroundings. The confidence, with which he drives away the dreadful panther from the tunnel, is a sign of his being in their close communion. But he feels uncomfortable to cope with the ways of 'civilized

man'. His observation, " it is safer in the jungle than in the town. No rascals out here". (Bond : 1996: 312).

Bond's women form a different category. They being a very important creation have been portrayed with care and ease. Bond presents a confluence of the eastern and the western ethos in the portrayal of his women. They are not shown as victims of male predominance; at the same time they are happy to confine themselves to domestic chores. They love to look after their home and family. They are gifted with amazing common sense and power of observation. Bond reveals good insight into the psychology of women. He looks into the minds and hearts of his female characters and reveals their thinking, feeling, likes, dislikes, suffering and frustrations. His impressive female characters are the grand mother (Granny), Koki, Unknown Young girl (whom he loves by heart), mother's younger sister, Aunt Mariam, Miss Mackenzie, Kusum, his mother (Narrator's mother), Madhu, Sita, Sushila, Kamla, Binya, Ula, Maureen, Chuchi, Susanna and Pooja etc.

Bond does not believe in modern drawing room feminism. In his stories the woman appears in diverse roles of a mother, a wife, a sweet heart or a tender girl. In the story "Most Beautiful" She is the caring mother of a deformed child whom she loves as the most beautiful child of the world. In "The Woman on Platform No.8", she bestows her motherhood on a lonely boy. In "His Neighbour's Wife" she herself marries the young bachelor while searching a bride for him. She is Susanna, a lady of seven husbands, who loves each of her husbands to death. In "The Most Potent Medicine of All" she is the woeful wife who stabs her own heart to make a cordial drink for the ailment of her sick husband. In "A Guardian Angel" she becomes an angle for an orphan boy. She is old Miss Mackenzie who fondly shares her knowledge of Himalayan flora with a stranger school boy in "The prospect of Flowers". She is also a 'practical wife' called Sushila who enacts simultaneously as a wife and beloved to two different persons with great aplomb in "Time Stops at Shamli."

Most of Bond's romantic heroines are in their teens. Ula in "The Girl from Copenhagen" is a modern Danish girl. She is a feminist dressed in tight jeans and small duffle coat. She carries all her immediate requirements in small handbag. She perfectly embodies the concept of a new woman who lives her life in accordance with her own codes. She is a serene picture of womanhood fresh and tender. For her lovemaking is a natural act of refreshing body and mind in which no sense of guilt or lust gets involved. She truly belongs to the class of those liberated women who are revolutionary in traditional frame of womanhood and who encourage no emotional mess in their life. They live a, 'good feel' life free from tensions and worries. After two days delightful togetherness, she bids good-bye to the boy without even making any commitment to meet again.

Maureen in the story "Death of a Familiar" is also a feminist. She believes in unbridled pleasures of life, so she turns down Sunil's proposal to marry her. Both Ula and Maureen represent western norms of life. In Indian set up Bond's woman is every inch Indian. She may fall in love with someone but she marries only the person of her parent's choice. Most of Bond's heroines, in spite of their pre-marital and even extra marital relations, are faithful to their families. They smoothly sail as practical wives and enticing beloved. Sushila in the story "Time Stops at Shamli" leads the class of such practical wives. In the story "Love is a Sad Song" Sushila* is in her sweet sixteen passionately loved by a writer. She radiates innocence and enjoys every moment of being in love. It is another matter that she is not mature enough to understand the intricacies of love and therefore, the lover finds her behaviour unpredictable at times.

He gets disillusioned;

There were times when you kept at a distance and did not even look at me. . . I knew you could not show your familiarity with me in front of others.(Bond :1988 : 224).

* In both the stories same girl, Sushila, is the heroine. Though "Love is a Sad song" was written after "Time Stops at Shamli", the former story seems the second half of the later one having Sushila in central role.

In the last sentence of this story, the narrator says; "I may stop loving you, Sushila; but I will never stop loving the days I loved you." (Bond: 1988 : 237).

Actually, Sushila is an average middleclass girl, who miserably depends upon her parents. Her infatuation succumbs to the family discipline. She does not protest, not because she lacks the spark, but because she seeks her bliss like a traditional girl in the consent of her elders. In "Time Stops at Shamli", Sushila is the wife of Mr. Dayal. He is a complete mismatch of his young vivacious wife. But like an Indian wife Sushila lives her married life unperturbedly. Her integrity is put to a test when her lover proposes her for new beginning. For an Indian woman the reputation of her parents and husband is above all consideration. She understands her responsibilities better than a man, and she candidly says;

I am not happy and I do not love him, but neither am I so unhappy that I should hate him. Sometimes for our own sake, we have to think of the happiness of others. (Bond : 1989 : 57).

Sushila stands for a paradox – on one hand she is a traditional Indian wife, on the other she feels no remorse for her liaison with the lover. The option; "I am always here and you can come to see me and nobody will be made unhappy by it." (Bond : 1989 : 57) is quite bold. Sushila represents the transitional mode of woman who balances her individuality within traditional setup.

The woman who deserves our adulation and love is "The Woman on Platform No.8". Bond portrays her with a few graphic strokes as noted by the boy on Ambala station; "A saw a pale face, and dark kind eyes. She wore no jewels, and was dressed very simple in a white Sari". (Bond :1988 :13).

Boy makes no mistake in tracing out a benevolent soul behind this simple attire. Her 'deep soft voice' and 'serenity of face' evoke trust in him. The boy cannot turn down her generous offer of tea and *samosa*. Narrator reveals the grace of her seemingly average personality by weaving a farewell

scene on the platform. Her grave simplicity is set as a foil to the large imposture of Satish's mother. The woman understands the psychology of a boy so deeply that she no longer remains a stranger dreaded by overwrought mother of Satish. The curt reply of the boy, 'I like strangers' and woman's instant snaps; "Yes I'm Arun's mother" (Bond :1988 :15) are the key statements revealing their mutual confidence and mental setup. It is meant to proclaim that her motherhood is more genuine than that of the preposterous mother of Satish.

Aunt Mariam in the story "A Guardian Angel" is another memorable portrait of motherhood without going through the virtual experience of it. As a lady of dubious character, Mariam comes from a family of Christian converts, originally Muslims of Rampur, but she becomes an angel for an orphan boy. She calls the narrator 'Ladla', her darling, and tells me she had always wanted to look after him. She had never married. Her total personality is minutely sketched by the boy himself for whom;

She was a joyous, bubbling creature, a force of nature rather than a woman and every time I think of her, I am tempted to put down on paper some aspect of her conversation, her gesture or her magnificent physique. (Bond : 1988 : 84).

Mariam is a sort of enigma. Her mode of living is untidy, reckless, her nights are full of mysterious visitors, but she is all love and compassion for the little boy. On growing up, he gives her a rare tribute by calling her an angel, an apostle of motherhood.

Above all, she is warm and full of understanding and it is this softness of her that overcomes resentment and jealousy in other women. Really, my Aunt Mariam, the very special guardian angel of my childhood.

All these women portrayals reflect Bond's power of observation and imagination. He has been able to penetrate the external self of a woman to

unravel her innate grace, power and softness. He has created memorable pen-portraits of girls, especially from nine to thirteen. He seems to have conceived a particular girl in his vision, who comes to fictional existence in different modes with different names. Each story reveals a fragment of her spirit. She is a perennial source of joy and inspiration. As a child of nature, she bubbles with life. In the story "The Coral Tree" she is a small dark unnamed girl who wants some flowers, but cannot reach up to them. The pigtailed girl reappears in the story "The Photograph" who used to go for swimming in a muddy pool with a lot of ruffian boys, and ride on the back of buffaloes. In the story "The Window", the girl is named Koki. She enjoys the colourful drama of the world through a window. Full of innovative ideas Koki likes dancing in the rain, laying flowerbeds and sowing pumpkins on the roof. She also imitates elders while pursuing these funny pastimes. In the story "Chachi's Funeral" the girl named Madhu consoles her cousin, Sunil, whenever he is confused or embroiled in his problems. The idea of killing Chachi, whom Sunil hates, is devised and materialized by Madhu. A picture of 'Chachi' is drawn on the cardboard, which Sunil vehemently stabs. Perhaps the girl too, does not know that her innocent trick has worked as 'catharsis' for Sunil. He now realizes the importance of Chachi, wishes her not to die and throws himself in her lap.

The story "The Night Train at Deoli" presents the girl in entirely different circumstances. She sells basket on the small platform of Deoli. Her pale skin, shiny black hair and dark troubled eyes speak of her plight. The story is about the love between narrator and a young girl. And in the story narrator meets her only twice and then she never meets him, though nothing seems to cheer her up, the eighteen-year-old boy does not fail to observe her innocence.

In the story "A Case for Inspector Lal", the girl named Kusum falls a victim to the atrocities of the world. She is hardly thirteen, but she matures within a night. Contrary to her instinctive openness, she is scared of people. Her bright disarming smile does not cope with the fear that peeps through her

eyes. The moment she kills Rani in order to save herself, she realizes the darkness of the world. She seems quite normal after killing, but Inspector Keemat Lal who keenly observes her facial gestures, digs out the truth. Kusum represents those unhappy innocents who become the victim of their callous elders.

In the story "Panther's Moon" girl named Pooja lives a strenuous life. She hardly finds time to frisk about the flowers and butterflies. She is brave, fearless and is eager to join the panther hunting party. She is every inch an rural Indian girl, as she helps her mother in domestic chores and brother in the fields. Sita in the story "Sita and the River" is a lovely girl who lives on an Island with her grand parents. Her doll days are not over and Mumta, the rag doll, is her best friend. Bond underlines the truth that the girl is a born mother through her. She nurses her ailing grandmother, cooks food and looks after little pets. When the river starts swelling, she packs all her belongings in a tin box carefully. Her faith in God is unshakable. Therefore, she translates the flood as the fury of gods in the mountains and patiently waits for their getting appeased.

Bond's prize-winner story "The Blue Umbrella" is focused upon Binya, a ten-year-old girl of sturdy physique and pink cheeks. Her pretty glass bangles and a necklace of glass beads with pendant of leopard's claw, render her true regional colour. Whole day she runs after her cow, Neelu, on the slopes of the mountains. Bond weaves a tantalizing drama of human passions through Binya. Beautiful blue umbrella, which she gets in exchange for her lucky pendant, becomes her first love and the cynosure of village, Manijari. Binya enjoys the streak of desperation in the eyes of postmaster's wife, Pujari and Ram Bharosa. Her innocent pride evaporates when she realizes the solitariness and despair of Ram Bharosa who madly tries to possess the umbrella. Here Binya matures and accuses herself responsible for his miseries;

It was all due to his own greed, no doubt; but she didn't want him to feel too bad about what he had done. . . and she closed the umbrella whenever she came near the shop. (Bond : 2001 : 54).

She learns that an 'umbrella is not everything' in life. Bond makes a sympathetic portrayal of her pride and innate generosity. After giving the umbrella to Ram Bharosa. She feels exceedingly relieved. There remains nothing between her and the blue sky. Innocent Smile that plays on her face betrays her noble recesses. Thus, all these girl portrayals reflect Bond's deep understanding of their nature.

To be concluded Bond's female characters come from lower and middle class, but they are not forgettable. Because most of female characters reveal woman's nature in the stories.

A gentle touch of humour pervades in most of his stories. His reader cannot help smiling at the subtle gestures of "His Neighbour's Wife", innocent skips of "The Boy Who Broke the Bank" and the humorous turns of Sita Ram in the Story "SitaRam". Humour emerges from the innocent actions of these characters. Bond does not aim to rail against social foibles, evils or individual short comings. Humour in his stories sprouts out of common deeds, words and gestures. Charm of all these characters lies in the empathy of their creator. He loves them indiscriminately. His search for the extraordinary in seemingly humdrum lives, make these commoners real heroes of life. He displays unique balance among them, in spite of their palpable differences of nature, dialect and attire. They are essentially humane above all.

Bond's method of characterization is both suggestive and analytical. After a few graphic strokes, he leaves the rest of the character to the vision of his readers. They are left free to interpret them in their own way. Bond's purpose is to stimulate reader's own power of observation while grasping a character as a whole. In that case a character no longer remains strictly

within the exclusive hold of writer himself. Whatever is individual and characteristic in their physique in general; whatever is of importance in their expression or demeanour at any critical moment is to be so individual as to stand out clearly in the reader's mind. Susanna, Markham, Woman on platform No.8, Javed Khan, Rusty, Sita Ram, Lady with Hookah, Mariam, Binya, Ram Bharosa, Bisnu, Suraj and many others are such potential personae. They change the hue of their very surroundings. Rani in the story "The Room of Many Colours" imparts her own mysteriousness to the room. Bond explains vividly how a character affects his surroundings;

At a dark windy corner in the bazaar, one finds an old man haunched up over his charcoal fire, roasting peanuts. He died last summer. . . than came a new occupant of the corner. . . a boy of thirteen or fourteen, cheerful, involved in exchanging good-natured banter with customers. In the old man's time it seemed a dark gloomy corner. Now it is lit up by sunshine, sunny personality, smiling and chattering. (Bond : 1993 : 157).

Surroundings indicate innermost recesses of man. In the story "A Guardian Angel", aunt Mariam's beds are unusually left unmade; clothes lying over chairs indicate her carelessness in the style of living. Potted palms of Mr. Harrison's big house are suggestive of his stern behaviour; the supple malacca cane in his hand also suggests parochialism. On the contrary, wide stretched garden around Somi's small house clearly indicates his broad vision of life. The pale woman clad in white Sari is an emblem of simplicity and grace. The girl's shiny curly black hair tied with red ribbon is suggestive to her Indianness and traditional set-up. Her sparkling eyes radiate natural vigour and curiosity. Miss Mackenzie in the story "the Prospect of Flowers" wears old fashioned but well preserved dresses corresponding to her deep love for the old garden. Rani's obsession for pearls and rubies suggests her royal state. Ula in her tight jeans speaks of her feminism.

A character is so much harmonized with his surroundings that they appear to share oneness. The lean and spindle legged Dukhi remains camouflaged in his garden. Bond describes;

He was an old man, skinny and bent and spindle-legged; but he had always been like that. His strength lay in his wrists and in his long, ten drill-like fingers. He looked as frail as a petunia, but he had a tenacity of a vine. (Bond : 1988 : 124).

Dukhi is deeply rooted in the objects of the garden where he works. Life for him is not a matter of one year succeeding another, but of five "Seasons – winter, spring, hot weather, monsoon and autumn – arriving and departing". (Bond: 1999: 232). The old Kitemaker with hollow cheeks, mehendired beard is like a kite, 'torn and stuck in the old banyan tree'. The maker dies and the 'stringless kite' too flits in the blue sky.

To be concluded, in the book "Friends in Small Places", it is mentioned that Bond's characters are not the sort who make the headlines but are nonetheless, remarkable for their quiet heroism, their endearing idiosyncrasies, and their heartwarming ability to find happiness and contentment in everyday events.

Ruskin Bond lays emphasis on characters rather than incident in short stories. He can visualize a character by means of his sympathetic insight. He can convince us by his knowledge and good analysis that the actions of his characters, which appear contradictory to us all, arise out of some deep motive.

In short, Ruskin Bond made his characters absolutely real. His men and women really appear to be creatures of flesh and blood.

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CHAPTER-IV

RUSKIN BOND'S CRAFTSMANSHIP

The technique of narrating a story is determined by the kind of experience and the quality of vision, which the author seeks to convey through the mutual interaction of character and plot. Works by eminent practitioners of the genre, however, bear testimony to the fact that the artistic value of a good story lies ultimately in something beyond method and technique. Kempton has rightly observed, "a noble theme may sound merely pretentious under poor telling", (1954:33) Form and technique, it must be admitted, make the vital elements of the short story, for they are inseparable from the subject matter of the short story. To many readers,

The way of telling is the mark of good fiction: scene, detail, dialogue all the elements that make an imaginative creation of life. (A critical Anthology: 514).

The emergence of short story as an art has emphasized the importance of narrative technique. Percy Lubbock has concentrated upon the craft of fiction as the most intricate and essential part of writing. He observes, "The whole intricate question of method in the craft of fiction is governed by the question of the point of view" (Lubbock : 25). A writer may use different methods to tell his stories such as direct or epic, documentary or autobiographical in accordance with the demand of his subject matter. Bond is the master storyteller of the present age because he has developed his individual style of narration. His narration is marked with simplicity of tone and depth of meaning. He is a conscientious writer. Though, writing for him is a spontaneous overflow of emotions, his stories are carefully crafted. He believes that thoughts have to be translated in intelligent and readable language if "they are to convey anything to others." (Bond : 1998 : 10). For him writing is a means of conversing with the world. He writes to ease his soul. He also believes that writing is an art, it needs as much devotion and love as an artisan does have for his creation. He says;

Love thy art, poor as it may be . . . I have never regretted following this precept;. . . I have tried to use words creatively and lovingly. The gift for putting together words and sentences to make stories or poems or essays has carried me through life with a ceration serenity and inner harmony, which could not have come from any unloved vacation. (Bond:1998: 193).

Working within his limitations, he has achieved a perfect craftsmanship. He has combined two essentials in his art paying attention to every detail and “working with loving care” (Bond : 1998 : 195). Like Hemingway, he seems to believe that art lies in concealing the art and simplicity is the best garb to hide it. When most of his contemporary writers affect intellectualism and pedantry, he adheres to simplicity of thought and clarity in expression. He strongly feels that obscurity or waywardness in narration may affect the charm of a story. And story is basically associated with the softness of heart. Critics often charge him of extreme simplicity. But in reality his simplicity is in full consonance with his simple life. Bond has discussed the issue during his interactions with the reading class and in personal interviews;

People often ask me why my style is so simple. . . It’s in fact, deceptively simple. . . It’s clarity that I am striving for to attain, not simplicity. . . of course some people want literature to be difficult. (Banerjee:1998: 18-24).

He has experimented with the traditional Indian art of story telling and European impressionism in order to impart innocence and richness to narration. One can also feel the charm of the traditional bedtime narration of fable and romance with a wonderful sense of a psychological realism.

As a specific literary term narrative technique refers to the way the story is told. The author gives an account of the events and the way he organizes the story. The most frequently used ways of telling stories fall into two categories.

- ✓ First person narrator (narrator a participant in the story)
 - A major character.
 - A minor character.
- ✓ Third person narrator (narrator a non participant in the story)
 - Omniscient narrator – seeing into all characters.
 - Limited omniscient narrator – seeing into one character.

Short stories of Bond are also written in different modes of narration. Some of them recapitulate the charm of his boyhood. While some present the graphic details of hill life. Most of his stories are autobiographical, written in both third and first person narration. They reflect the longing of a reminiscing hero. These stories are fine examples of flashback device. Nostalgic and humorous, these stories present a moving spectrum of life.

Ruskin Bond uses first person narration in the story “The Night Train at Deoli,” He narrates how the narrator comes to Deoli Railway Station. It is a small station about thirty miles from Dehra. And he meets the stationmaster and unknown young girl. As a major character of the story he has independence to move freely with in the fictional world. He can approach other fictional characters as closely as one human being can approach another. In the first person narrative, there is one limitation that the author has no way of understanding other characters except by observation of what they say and do. The author has to rely on the information provided by the concerned character. There are little chances to delve deep in the mind of other character. There is chance of subjectivity in this pattern.

In his story “Death of a Familiar”, he uses first person narration, but there the narrator appears as a minor character. Since the story is meant to be philosophical only, there are hardly any differences whether he is present as a major character or not. He is successful in presenting his vision of life. As he wishes to give personal belief about the man and woman relationship. The first person narration is an effective device for him.

The other category of narration refers to non-participation of the narrator in the story. In literary world, it is mentioned as the third person narration. Generally speaking, there are two kinds of third person narration. When the narrator knows everything about all the characters what they think and feel as well as what they do it is called the omniscient method of narration, whereas the limited omniscient narration is usually confined to revealing the thoughts of one character.

In “Bus Stop Pipalnagar” the central character, Suraj is revealed through limited omniscient narration, where Ruskin Bond provides a detailed picture of the central character only. There are a few references of other characters in the story but they are very sketchy and have little importance in the story. The writer employs this technique for this one character only because he is a hard worker. He has reached that stage without any guidance or personal help from anybody. Whereas the other characters of the collection who have attained development have taken assistance. Second important thing about this character is that he is dynamic.

The remaining stories are reflective of omniscient point of view. In these stories, the reader is exposed to many characters and situations. Ruskin Bond handles them successfully. He could achieve this by shifting the focus from one aspect to the other aspect or the close view to a larger perspective of the life of a character.

Though Ruskin Bond narrates other stories through third person narration, none of them is told in the same manner. The other stories of the collection are narrated experimentally. There are at least four stories within the story. One after the other they appear as if they are different layers. The story “A Case for Inspector Lal”, there is narration within narration. The first narrator ‘I’ requests Inspector Lal to tell some of his sensational cases and Mr. Lal begins in flashback style. He starts with Rani’s case, when Rani’s case ends; the reader is informed that Kusum is a killer of Rani. Then Kusum becomes the centre of importance. Then comes Mr. Kapur, a wealthy

businessman from Bombay, who is interested in befriending Rani. Obviously, now the focus shifts to Mr, Kapur.

Ruskin Bond deviates from chronological representation of events in a couple of stories. For this purpose he uses flashback technique e.g. “The Kitemaker” is the narration of the kite maker’s longing for the past. Sitting under the old banyan tree, he reminiscences the past. He is forcibly called back to the living present by his grandson;

. . .Grandfather sat nodding dreamily in the sunshine of their back courtyard. ‘Grandfather’, shouted the boy, ‘My kite has gone’. The old man woke from his daydream with a start and raising his head, displayed a beard. . .(Bond : 1988 : 101).

Thus, the story reels in flashback – golden days of Mahmood Ali when his kites were the cynosure of the town are revived. The analogy between the kitemaker and the old tree underlines the relationship of man and nature,

both are permanent fixtures that were of no concern to the raucous, sweating mass of humanity that surround them. (Bond : 1988 : 103).

Skilful use of myth and symbol impart the story a remarkable intensity. When death steals upon the kite maker, he feels as if he were going to sleep and dreams of a big beautiful kite resembling “Garuda, God Vishnu’s famous steed. Myth denotes the salvation of his soul from earthly bondages and transcending towards divinity.

Some other stories in flashback device are – “The Photograph” in which grandmother revives a small naughty and defiant girl exactly as shown in the old picture, from her deep past. The story “Escape from Java” is in autobiographical first person narration. The story is about author’s miraculous escape from Java when Japanese planes bombarded the city during World War-II. The narration of their safe escape is intensified as the narrator adds

symbolic significance of a beautiful horse carved in jade. Somu, his friend, gives him the horse as a token of their friendship and it brings luck to them.

The story “Sita and the River” is an allegory of life. Characters (Sita and Vijay) places (Island, fair) and events (flood rescue) have allegorical interpretations. The story of Sita becomes a universal predicament when she assumes her protector Vijay as Lord Krishna. The story, quite long in comparison to other stories, is divided into many episodes titled as 'The Island in the River', 'The Sound of the River', 'The Water Rises', 'Taken with the Flood', 'A Bullock Cart Ride', 'The Return' and so on.

Bond has successfully experimented with the modern visual device of documentary film in narration. The stories “Panther’s Moon” and “Tiger, Tiger Burning Bright” reveal the life in the forest with all its awesome beauty and density. Wild animals, birds and insects with their peculiarities are in his main focus. Various issues related with the wild life such as deforestation, hunting, the problem of men-eaters etc. are vividly raised through narration. He has painted out the relation of man and wild life through these documentary cum-stories. The story “Love is a Sand Song” is in diary like style. Written in first person narration the story reveals the truth “remembered passion grows sweeter with the passing of time.”(Bond : 1988 : 210). The narrator is a sad lover who seems to turn the leaves of his personal diary while reminiscing the fragrance of his lost love. The story begins with the musings of lover;

I sit here and think of you, and try to see your slim brown hand resting against this rock, . . . you will not be thinking of me now, as you sit in your home in the city, cooking or serving or trying to study for examination. (Bond : 1988 : 210).

It gives the impression that the narrator still holds talk to his love though she now lives in some other town and recalls by gone days of courtship. By the passing of time, his passion gets intensified as he says, “I may stop loving you, Sushila; but I will never stop loving the days I loved you”. (Bond : 1988 : 237).

Bond's classic story "The Woman on Platform No.8" is in first person narration by a boy waiting alone for the train on Ambala Station. Yearnings of a boy and the generosity of a stranger woman are vividly dramatized through simple narration. The climax of the story is intensely moving;

I leaned out of the window, then, and put my lips to her cheek and kissed her. . . 'Good-bye'. I said to the other woman, 'Good-bye-Mother, .' (Bond:1988:16-7).

Bond's favourite story "The Blue Umbrella" presents a moving account of human passions in third person narration. The beautiful blue umbrella emerges as powerful symbol of longing and possession. It reveals the desperate attempts of those who fail to own it. Binya introspects her fault in making Ram Bharosa a miserable outcaste. The shopkeeper undergoes a rigorous alienation giving him ample opportunity to realise his misery.

Suspense is also a part of the art of story telling. Bond is undoubtedly, the master of this art. He picks up small idea and conceives a vibrating story around it in such a way that the reader gets impatient to grapple it whole. His latest collection of stories entitled *When Darkness Falls and Other Stories* is especially, replete with suspense and curiosity. The story "When Darkness Falls" is about a war veteran Markham, who is condemned to lifetime loneliness by a tragic accident. Written in third person narration, the story imparts a poignant account of his ordeal. His yearning to live a normal life makes him more and abnormal. The story becomes truly pathetic when Markham plays old romantic notes on piano in the stillness of night;

The words of Laurence Hope's Kashmiri Love song took him back to happier times when life seemed full of possibilities. (Bond : 2001 : 13).

There is an exquisite use of poetic expression in his stories. Emotional overflow of the character is preferably conveyed in poetic tone. Sometimes he quotes from other poets such as Tagore, Kipling or any unknown lyricist, and sometime he quotes his own verse as we find in the story "Miss Bun and

others.” The story narrated in diary like style is full of rhymes, which give it a novel expression. At times especially in the descriptions of rain and spring, his prose exudes poetic fervour. The soft and alliterating tone of his prose harmonizes with the mood of the story. P. K. Singh has aptly stated,

Bond's a prose is uncontaminated simple, bare and lyrical matching well with the generous emotions of his characters and reflecting vividly the poetic faculty of the artist. (Singh : 1995 : 13).

The effect of prose flowing rhythmically with emotional ebbs and flows is unsurpassable. One can note the vivid description of rain in *The Room on the Roof*,

The rain thickened, the tempo quickened. There was the banging of a door, the swelling of a gutter, the staccato splutter of the rain rhythmically persistent on the roof. The drain-pipe coughed and choked, the curtain flew to its limit, the lean trees swayed, bowed with the burden of wind and water. (Bond: 2003:123).

The short story is defined as a short prose narrative usually involving one connected episode or a sequence of related events. So the element of plot is basic to this literary form. Plot is the sequence of events in a story and their relation to one another. A short story can cover the events of a brief episode, or encompass action that takes years to conclude. The writer may omit complex episodes to intensify their dramatic effect or expand single incident to make a relatively story.

Ruskin Bond presents many stories with a single incident. The story, “The Woman on Platform No.8”, it is just an account of how Arun arrives at Ambala station. He is waiting for the northern bound train. In the story Arun meets an unknown woman on platform No.8 at Ambala station, she is not young and she is not old. She is a very simple woman and she provides mother’s feeling to him. In short, the whole story depends on this single

incident, whereas other stories of the collection cover events from the characters' day-to-day life. Thus, there are a few stories in the collection, which cover a longer time and involve in the characters' changes from one state to another.

A plot includes the basic pattern of a beginning, middle and an end. A short story writer divides the basic pattern into five stages such as exposition, rising action, climax, falling action and conclusion. In different stories Ruskin Bond arranges these stages differently into a complex structure and impresses the reader with its balance and proportion.

The first part of the plot called the exposition, introduces characters, scene, time and situation.

Ruskin Bond introduces various characters in varied ways. Sometimes he introduces them by physical detail as in the short stories. In short, the most of Bond's stories introduce character's physical details, for example in "The Garlands on His Brow", Hassan is the central character. "Hassan had a magnificent build with great wide shoulders and powerful legs" (Bond : 1988 : 80), sometimes by the time of the character, for example in "Chachi's Funeral", the narrator starts the story with the words, "Chachi died at 6.00 p.m. on Wednesday the 5th of April". (Bond: 1988 : 28) and sometimes by the object of the character, for example in "Bus Stop, Pipalnagar." Suraj is the central character.

Suraj begged for a moving from one town to the next and ending up finally at Pipalnagar. He had saved some money and he had mobile shop at Pipalnagar. (Bond: 1988 : 65).

At times Bond reveals the special characteristic of the character, for example in "A Guardian Angel." Aunt Marium is the central character. "Aunt Marium was a strong woman, taller than most men in the bazaar" (Bond : 1988 : 84). Sometimes by profession for example in "A Case for Inspector Lal". Mr. Kapur was a wealthy businessman in Bombay" (Bond: 1988 : 118). And sometimes

by the familiar aspects, for example in “Love is a Sad Song”. Sushila is the central character,

“(Sushila’s mother) She’d six children – a seventh was on the way and they had all come into the world without much difficulty and were the healthiest the entire joint family. (Bond : 1988 : 227).

The second part i.e. the rising action is portrayal of events that complicate the situation and gradually intensify the conflict. There is a variety of rising action in the short stories of the collection. In “A Case for Inspector Lal”, Rani’s story is double folded. The reader is told how Kusum kills Rani in house. At the same time Inspector Keemat Lal gets some information about Rani’s case.

That way, Bond is regarded as a master of complicated plots. His plots are not simple. His stories are stuffs with various incidents and he weaves them very efficiently. He has a high sense of consistency and unity. He never introduces any incident unnecessarily. Every incident has some relation with the main thread of the story.

The last section of the plot, the conclusion is comparatively brief and falls generally in the final paragraph of the story. In the conclusion the sequence of related events comes to an end. In this collection a few conclusions are slightly longer. In the conclusion the sequence of related events comes to an end and there are one or two lines at the end. That way, in each story, Ruskin Bond catches the reader’s attention in different ways.

Some of Bond’s stories are open-ended. For example, “The Coral Tree”, an unknown girl is the central character in this story. The narrator meets this girl in England. And both talk about nature. In the last sentence of this story, the narrator says; “I’m gong everywhere’, I said to my self and no one can stop me.” (Bond : 1988 : 20).

In “The Night Train at Deoli” An unknown young girl is the central character. It is a love affair between narrator and a young girl, who was selling

baskets on the platform. And in this story narrator meets this girl only twice and then this girl never meets him again. At the end of this story the narrator says;

I prefer to keep hoping and dreaming, and looking out of the window up and down that lonely platform, waiting for the girl with the baskets. (Bond :1988 : 56).

In all stories Ruskin Bond's plot does not emerge just through the description of events, it can also be carried forward with the help of dialogue. The reader gets lots of relevant information through the conversation between two characters in a few stories.

Ruskin Bond introduces unexpected turns in his stories. Sometimes the readers anticipate a turn of event but the author does not shape it as per the expectation of the readers. Suraj and the Thief's story contain such dramatic turns.

For all his experimentation with the plot Ruskin Bond's goal is the same, to 'show' the reader what is important through the dramatic action of the plot, and not just explicitly 'tell' the reader what to think. His plot construction in these stories are beautifully organized and arranged differently in each story to sustain the interest of readers. And he is successful to get attention of his readers, who at times think it a compelling reading.

Style reflects the author's personality, life and thoughts. That is why it is said that the style is the man himself. Ruskin Bond has great command on English, which is reflected in all the short stories. In his short stories he exhibits rich treasure of vocabulary. He puts right words in the mouths and right situations in their times. His words are suggestive and they reveal both character and situation. His dialogues are lucid, sharp and precise. Their tone changes according to the mood of the character and the demands of the situations. His characters use language, which suits their status and temperament. His language is highly symbolic. His style and language contribute to the unity of effect or impression in his short stories. They show his characters in the search of identity in the midst of worldly complexities.

Bond is a distinguished short story writer in Indian English Literature. He is a talented writer who has a skill to transform any mood or a situation into an aesthetic experience with the help of his style and language.

Bond fuses personal history with social history. He has a marvelous capacity to see both the sides of every question. He has his own likes and dislikes. He upholds his beliefs with boldness and frankness. His stories are beset with courage frankness, honesty and simplicity.

“Bus Stop, Pipalnagar”, “The Garlands on His Brow”, “A Case for Inspector Lal”, “Panther’s Moon”, “The Leopard”, “The Fight”, “A Tiger in the House”, “Cricket for the Crocodile”, “The Blue Umbrella”, “Sita and the River” (Angry River), “The Tiger in the Tunnel”, “Grandpa Tickles a Tiger”. All the stories are beset with courage.

“The Woman on Platform No.8”, “The Coral Tree”, “The photograph”, “Chachi’s Funeral”, “A Guardian Angel”, “Death of a Familiar”, “The kitemaker”, “The Thief”, “A Job Well Done”, “The Cherry Tree”, “My Father’s Trees in Dehra”, “Love is a Sad Song”, ‘A Love of Long Ago.’, “The Room of Many colours”, “All Creatures Great and Small”, “Binya passes By”, “From small Beginnings”, “The Tree lover”, “The Last Tonga Ride”, “Life with Uncle Ken”. “Most Beautiful”, “Masterji”, All the stories are beset with frankness, honesty and simplicity. That way; his style has always a touch of a cultured and liberal humanist. He is free from the weaknesses of self-admiration and self-negation.

A mild touch of humour is all pervasive in the entire corpus of his fiction. He is gifted with the capacity to laugh on his own self. In the autobiographical narration his own ignorance, simplicity and bachelor-hood arouse ample streaks of humour. He laughs upon the little incongruities of life. Misunderstanding in ordinary life and little cunning of people arouse good humour in the stories like “A Crow for all Seasons”, “The Boy Who Broke the Bank” and “A Neighbour’s Wife.” The story “Uncle Ken” is a highly comic narration of the adventures of Uncle Ken. His delineation of humour is

different from that of others as it has the capacity to relax the trio of the writer, the character and the readers.

“The Boy Who Broke the Bank” is basically an interesting and humourous study of human behaviour. Bond has presented this story with deep psychological insight and pure non-biting humour. As we see, the Pipalnagar Bank has employed one sweeper boy Nathu. But it pays him late, which is annoying to Nathu. He does not like it. Once Nathu tells the son of washerman, Sitaram that he has not received the regular wages and he is determined to leave the job, as soon as he manages to recover the outstanding wages. This news is being circulated among Mrs. Srivastava Mrs. Bhushan, photographer Mr. Kamal Kishore, an old gentleman, Deepchand, a barber; tailor, beetle-seller, jeweller and beggar Ganpat. The simple news catches a twisted colour in the end. Every body derives a meaning that if the Pipalnagar Bank could not pay wages even to its Sweeper boy it must be on the verge of collapse. Nobody is interested to assess the validity of the news directly from the bank authority. The imminent bankruptcy is viewed very seriously. The people rush down to the bank to withdraw their deposited amount. The Manager fails to know the reason behind such unusual approach. He is perplexed; the crowd hits bricks and stones to damage the glass windows of the bank, demanding their deposited amount back on the same day. Next day, Nathu is surprised to see all this. But when Sitaram again informs him that the bank is going out of business, Nathu fails to understand the possible reason for that. The beauty of the title gets full glow when Nathu says; “I wonder how it could have happened, . . .” (Bond : 1988 : 47). He himself is not aware of the fact that he is indirectly responsible for the sudden collapse of the bank. The title is apt and meaningful, bringing inside out or the upside down of the story. The characters like Nathu, Ganpat the beggar, Mrs. Bhushan, Deepchand – the barber all are humorous. They make us laugh. The narrative style, the incidents that lead to the sudden collapse to the bank, the humour that gradually catches fire, Nathu’s ignorance etc all generate humour.

In this way, when something becomes “public”. The mob psychology starts working. We are here reminded of the story of a sparrow who went on complaining of having been beaten by a piece of sky and all the wild animals too accepted her claim as true ! Everybody rushed down to the bank to withdraw their savings' amount, generating unprecedented financial crisis for the Pipalnagar bank. The small village thus witnessed a storm in a tea cup!

Bond's style of telling stories is simple and descriptive. He has the artistic ability to present even darker side of the life. We smell the fragrance of 'dahlias' and hear the sparkle of a mountain stream or even feel the lush green panorama of any hilly area in his short stories. He does not believe in presenting convulsing tragic melodramatic situations. He loves to pick up the Slice of human life and presents that subtle human experience with compassion and love, giving his own treatment.

One of the Bond's stories, “The Eyes Have It”, is not an exception to his style. He explores the experience of the blind but he does it with skill and tact. He illuminates this experience, which is of course sensitive, with touches of pure humour. The reader does not feel the weight of the contents of the story. The blind narrator of the story encounters a blind girl in the train compartment. Whom he considers as a girl with visionful eyes. It strikes to his playful mind to conceal his own blindness to the girl. His efforts in doing so are sparkled with humour and fun. Unlike the narrator, the reader knows from the instances that the girl is blind too. And he is shooting arrows of his own visionful eyes by resorting to well organized pretence to that blind girl. Here lies the real humour.

The narrator appreciates the beauty of her face like a true gallant. He talks in a romantic tone about natural beauty spread in Mussoorie during the month of October. He feels like touching the perfumed hair of the girl. But the reverie is broken when the new passenger reveals that the girl was also blind. Here only the narrator comes across the truth. The story has stray touches of tragic plight of the blind. Their life is devoid of colours. They have to depend much on other senses specially ears. Their life is full of troubles and

loneliness. Their sincerest laughter's sometimes tell of their saddest thoughts! There is darkness for them even in the broad daylight. But Bond makes passing references to this. In short Ruskin Bond explores the experience of the blind, but does it with much skill and tact. He tackles this with lively style, which enlivens the spirit of the short story.

One notices a note of didacticism in the short stories of Ruskin Bond. The desire to teach and preach is unmistakable. It seems that Bond wants to preach through his stories.

In "What's your Dream ?", in a conversation with an old beggar, Bond hints at the cruelty of shattering other people's dreams and underlines the importance of freedom in one's life. This is how he puts it;

Follow your own dream, but don't take other people's dreams, don't stand in anyone's way, don't take from another man his room or his faith or his song. . Living long, my friend, Be wise and strong. But do not take from any man his song.. . . Freedom, I was beginning to realize, is something you have to insist upon (Bond: 1999 : 443-4).

Bond is fond of using words from native and foreign languages. In some stories he uses Hindi words such as, *Dhotis, Sari, Puri Samosas, Jalebies, chappaties, Annas, Maidan, Bidi, Hookah, Maro, Sahib, Gali, Paan, Mammi, Kotwali, Chacha, Chappals, Dharamsala, Khabardar, Mohalla, Chota Sahib, Rajas and Ranis, Pyjamas, Kerosene Lamp, Roti, Katur, Akharas, Chowkidar* etc.

That way, Bond rarely uses high-sounding words and figures of speech. He believes that uncommon words and figures of speech add variety and colour to the style, but such a style cannot be called natural. He conveys his ideas to his readers, with the help of his simple and natural style. His style is concise also. He can express many things in a few and short sentences. As a result, his style never becomes dull. He can produce maximum effect by the use of minimum words. So the readers understand the meaning of each

and every word without any labour. Thus his style is effortless. It has always the effect of simplicity and naturalness. He never makes a show, of his learning.

Thus, Ruskin Bond's style reveals his acute power of understanding and deep insight. His style can become quite powerful according to the needs of the occasions and situations.

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 token insignia and a means of identification. A. N. Whitehead defines this process;

Symbols become functions of human mind, when some component of its experience elicits consciousness, beliefs, emotions and usages respecting other components of its experience. (1928 : 9)

Symbols can be divided in two main categories – traditional 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 impressions 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 Mellarme 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 Whitman are pure symbolist. Symbolism in these writers is a governing principle; it is not a stylistic device but a point of view.

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 art or 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 untie man to man, to God and to nature. Without evolving any story 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. Locations or background (place) – India, Himalaya, Hillstation, Platform, Forest, Bazaar, City etc.
2. Seasons – Rain, Storm, Spring, Mist.
3. Flora – Trees, Bushes, Weeds, Flowers, Garden.
4. Fauna – Animals and birds like – Panther, Tiger, Jackal, Lizard, Snake, Leech, Pigeon, Crow, Monkey etc.
5. Elements – Water, Soil, Sunlight, Moon, Wind.

✓ Worldly symbols can be sub classified as,

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

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've always felt that India is my home". (Bond : 1999 : 756).

The great Himalayas is the symbol of eternity, of spiritual enlightenment, of 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 invincible spirits 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 the mountains for any length of time, he develops a sense of belongingness with them. The writer hero of the novella *Delhi is Not Far* experiences the great translucent force of the mountains, He says;

I don't think that a man can be complete until he has lived in the hills. . . There is something about a mountain that adds a new dimension to life (Bond : 1999 : 807)

A person feels change in air and altitude in the mountains 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 mountains serve as a powerful background in many of his stories and plots. They act as mother symbols too. They are the great reservoirs of primeval innocence – a peculiar feature of Bond's character. The mountains are free from the superciliousness of the mechanized society. Therefore, people of the mountains are as fresh as the red earth, as pure as the snow and as pretty as the flowers. In "Mother Hill", in the last sentences of this story, the narrator says;

When you have received love from people and the freedom that only mountains can give, then you have come very near the borders of Heaven. (Bond : 2003:12).

Hill stations, especially Dehra and Mussoorie serve as favourite backdrops for most of his stories. "My Father's Trees in Dehra", "The Night

Train at Deoli”, have Dehra in their centre. The story moves out of the lilting charm of its landscapes, bazaars and roads. Dehra Symbolizes peaceful life with idyllic surroundings. It is a place for longing, for return to home and old friends. Post independence Dehra was a town of gardens and avenues. It was like Adam’s paradise. Dehra of fifties and sixties as celebrated by the author is altogether different from the present hectic one. Mussoorie, the queen of Garhwal Himalayas, is 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.

Some towns are also associated with evil consequences and desperate deeds. In the story “A Case for Inspector Lal”, there is drab Shahpur, a town that has no attraction but ‘soaring heat and dust’, a general monotony, sometime cracked by such cases as Rani’s murder. Pipalnar, in *Delhi is Not Far*, symbolizes indifference, despair and resignation to both life and death. The hero finds its monotony awfully depressing his soul;

The town is almost truly reflected in the Pipalnar Home, where in an open courtyard surrounded by mud walls a score of mental patients wander about.

(Bond : 1999 : 773).

In “The Time Stops at Shamli”, Shamli, a small station at the foot of the Shivalik hill exudes 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; “There was no point in keeping man there to collect tickets from passengers who never came”. (Bond:1989:37) Days Ram’s hotel with its eight permanent eccentric residents appears a stationery place where hardly any new visitor arrives. The fearful storm at night pulls down the main hall of the hotel and now there remains a haunted ruin standing amid hushed silence of Shamli. These towns and cities leave a lingering impact on the psychology of characters.

The Bazaar of Pipalnar is highly suggestive in “Bus Stop, Pipalnar.” A medley of different types of people, it stands for the real India.

Indian bazaar is the admixture of people, sound and smell. The bazaar suggests a spirit. In the broad daylight, the bazaar is a nucleus of human activity, show and glamour but in the pith of night, it becomes a desolate place a custodian of the misery of beggars, dogs and homeless children. Bazaar is a sort of orientation into real life full of challenges and adventures.

Island in the story "Sita and the River" conveys solitariness either by choice or by compulsion. The story brings out the truth that each individual is like an island, till he is swept away in the current of life and starts interacting with other individuals. The island may provide an opportunity for calm contemplation but for his proper development man needs society, Sita, though happily living with her grandparents, has no vision of life beyond the island. It is when the flood sweeps away embankments and the island is submerged into water, Sita is introduced to the real world of life and relationships.

It is a fact that one cannot distance the fiction from the writer and one feels his presence powerfully in the delineation of nature. Bond dreams of having a garden of his own, not a very well kept garden, but a little untidy, full of surprises "like his own muddled mind" (Bond: 1993 :125). A garden soothes an agitated mind. It symbolizes a feast for eyes and soul. He says;

I suppose it was this garden of my childhood that implanted in my mind the permanent vision of a perfect garden, so that whenever I am worried or down in the dumps, I close my eyes and conjure up a picture of this lonely place; it does help to soothe an agitated mind; I would not call it meditation, contemplation rather. (Bond : 1993: 126).

For old Ms. Mackenzie, in the story "The Prospect of Flowers" her garden is, in fact, her life. The lady feels fresh and young in the sprightly company of dahlias, chrysanthemums, gladioli and orchids. The chilly winds keep her confined to the bedroom and curiously enough there are no flowers in the garden to recharge her spirit. So her soul goes away in search for new garden in the other side of the mountain.

Forest serves as a background, as a character and as a unifying theme. In the stories like "Tiger, Tiger Burning Bright" and "Panther's Moon" forest, besides being a natural habitat of animals and birds, emerges as a secure place for human beings too. It also symbolizes an attitude to life. Man learns to coexist with other fellow creatures of nature. The watchman in "The Tunnel", remarks;

It is safer in the jungle than in the town. No rascal out here. Only last Week, when I went into the town I had my pocket picked ! Leopards don't pick pockets.
(Bond:1999: 312).

Trees that hold major concern of the writer are the symbol of the perennial source of life. It springs out of the constant threat that lurks in his mind that; "If people keep cutting trees. . . there'll soon be no forests left at all, and, the world will be just one vast desert." (Bond : 1988 : 145).

Tree is closely associated with so many, other things such as, youth, longing for companionship, shelter and an overseeing power. Bond has presented a beautiful amalgam of mythical and personal views about the trees. In the story "My Father's Trees in Dehra" he visualizes trees and plants as moving characters of ancient past, ready to move again. The myth says;

There was a time when they could walk about like people, but someone cast a spell on them and rooted them to one place. But they are always trying to move – see how they reach out with their arms.
(Bond: 1988 : 145).

In "The Coral Tree", the tree connotes longings and dreams of childhood. The girl desires to travel far off places, but cannot, as she cannot pluck the coral blossoms being so high. Trees are the archetypes of friendship. The narrator feels, "They seem to know me". (Bond : 1988 : 146).

In the story "When You Can't Climb Any More", tree is the symbol of vigour and youth. The middle aged narrator comes to restore his bygone youth and energy, "it wasn't the cross I came for, it was my lost youth". (Bond: 1988:241). For a traditional grandmother tree is a blessing that rests on the house, "where falls the shadow of a tree" (Bond : 1988 :238). For a boy the jackfruit tree is a chest to keep his valuables like medal, catapult, some marbles, coins and twigs. "The Cherry Tree" symbolizes invincible power to exist. The great banyan tree is a world in miniature, densely populated with small birds and insects.

In the story "Sita and the River", the big peepul tree becomes a symbol of generosity and magnanimity. The heavy flood uproots the tree, which is as old as the island. Sita clings to its branches like an infant to her mother's bosom;

The tree was taking her with it. She was not alone. . .
the tree was her friend. It had known her. . . and now
it held her in its old and dying arms as though it were
determined to keep her from the river. (Bond :
1988:189).

Sita reciprocates the benevolence of tree by sowing a mango seed in the very place of the uprooted tree. For Bond himself trees are an overseeing power to kindle and restrain. He says;

The trees stand watch over my day-to-day life . . .
they are my best critics. They are the guardians of
my conscience. (Bond : 1993 : 3).

He visualizes 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 tree is supposed to be an abode of good 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 the 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 pleasures.

Flowers have been favourite symbols of world literature from the very beginning. They are the most affable ambassadors of delicate passions. According to Bond 'red roses are for young lovers, and French beans for long lasting relationship.' Roses are warm and passionate as he says; "even if it was down to its last petal, Beautiful, cold white marble leaves me well, just a little cold". (Bond : 1993 : 185). The mysterious looking Rani in the story "The Room of Many Colours" passionately, loves roses. Like her other ostentatious associates viz; room and jewels, roses are highly suggestive of her personality. Flowers act as subtle bond between Rani and Dukhi, the gardener. When words fail to communicate hearts, roses initiate wonderfully; " 'Thank him', she said, thank him for the beautiful rose" (Bond : 1999 : 248).

Some beasts like panther, leopard, jackal and reptiles like snake, lizard are suggestive to the particular mood. In the story "Panther's Moon" panther is an enigma;

There are occasions when he proves himself to be most cunning animal under the sun and yet the very next day he will walk into an obvious trap that no self-respecting jackal would ever go near. (Bond : 1988:166).

On one occasion, the panther, seeing a few barking dogs, flees away like a hare. But on another day it is so daring that it attacks a group of persons sitting around a campfire. It surprises by its sudden appearance and disappearance in small bushes. In "Tiger. Tiger Burning Bright", the beast symbolizes nobility. It represents the soul of India. Tiger safeguards the jungle and the villagers against infiltration of outsiders. It protects their rights

and cultural heritage. Therefore, when the last tiger is shot, they feel themselves unprotected, unguarded. They feel;

. . .something had gone out of their lives. . . as long as the tiger had been there, and the villagers had heard it roar at night, they had known that they were secure. . . but now the tiger had gone, it was as though a protector had gone, leaving the forest open and vulnerable, easily destroyable. (Bond:1991: 127).

Snakes have a distinct place in Indian life and mythology. They are worshipped because they are very close to Lord Shiva. They are also the incarnations of late forefathers in present form. Rani in "The Room of Many Colours" gets hysterical when the boy talks of some snake seen in the garden. She tells a new story of the reptile;

'Princes, when they die, are born again as snakes',
'All princes ?' No, only those who dies before the marriage. Did your prince die, before he could marry you. Yes, and he returned to this garden in the form of a beautiful snake. (Bond : 1999 : 244).

Turning of season's wheel signifies great changes in the psychology and life of people in Bond's stories, Monsoon emerges as the most awaited season. It brings relief from heat and dust. It is festive season for lizards, spiders and snakes. Agitated minds are cooled down by the sight of dark heavy clouds collected at eastern horizon. Even the trauma of uncertainty during the violent upsurge of revolution is wiped off when Ruth listens the patter of raindrops on the ground. Swinging on trees in Monsoon exhilarates their tardy spirits. Rain is associated with freshness; storm denotes impending terrible doom, madness, violence and devastation. Spring is the season of life and fertility; it brings hope and gaiety all around spring is the euphoria of rejuvenation and rebirth.

Nothing passes unobserved in nature from the eye of careful interpreter. Changing pattern of the sky, day and night, reflect very closely

the mood of characters. Mist is associated with gloom and loneliness. In the story "The Funeral", "the mist had crept up the valley and settled like a damp towel on the face of the mountain. Everyone was wet although it hadn't rained". (Bond : 1994: 78).

Mist responds to the gloomy boy who has lost his dear father, his single parent. Mist symbolizes melancholy, his acute sense of loss and a sort of suffocation caused by pent-up emotions. Even the birds stop chirping and perch silently as the mist comes surmounting the hill. The boy feels;

. . . that is what makes the mist melancholy; not only does it conceal the hills, it blankets them in silence too. Only an hour ago the trees were ringing with bird song. And now the forest is deathly still.
(Bond : 1993 : 20).

Being a great devotee of nature, Bond learns the art of living through natural objects. Water, the blue white liquid, fascinates him. Sound of brook pattering somewhere in the forest and glades drives his step frantically towards its source. Water Symbolizes sensual pleasure. Boys like Ranji, Somi, Bisnu, Sunil and Rusty love to jump into a village pool or small stream, not to wash off their body, but to enjoy the thrill of being in water. Their body glistening under the crystal-clean water and then after their lying on the green grass to let it dry in the sun symbolizes man's occasional return to the elements. Water washes away the dreariness and monotony of life. These bathing excursions are quite frequent in Bond's fiction. In the story "The Fight" a pool of clean cold water becomes a bone of contention between the two boys who fight for the right of bathing first. Water stands for life, for blossom, for creation and for harmony. Bond says;

Be like water, taught Lao-tzu philosopher and founder of Taoism. Soft and limip, it finds its way through, over or under obstacle. It does not quarrel; it simply moves on. (Bond : 1993 :105).

River symbolizes life and continuity in “Sita and the River.” Man’s belongingness with the essential elements is the specific feature, which distinguishes Bond from his contemporary class of writers. His characters are deeply in touch with the soil. Their primitive innocence is elemental. The girl in ‘The Coral Tree’ is “fresh and clean like the rain and red earth.” (Bond : 1988 : 18). Soil is the symbol of motherhood. Life springs out of its bosom and merges into its very substance after death. The coffin in the story “The Funeral”, goes deep into the massive entrails of the earth. The boy imagines the plant shooting out of the soil, as the resurrection of his dead body.

There are few inanimate objects that act as symbol. In “Sita and the River”, for example the rag doll of Sita whom she calls Mumta is her only friend on the lonely island. She communicates with the doll in a heart to heart talk sometime like a friend and sometime like a mother. Later on, the doll brings about the Katharsis of Sita when she ponders over the role of gods in causing flood; “ If I can be so careless with someone I have made, how can I expect the gods to notice me ?” (Bond : 1988 :187).

Another such object is *hookah*, which once belonged to Sita’s great grandfather, now belongs to her. When the floodwater starts surging in her hut, she hurriedly keeps it safe in the trunk. The hookah here emerges as a symbol of heritage, a tradition handed down from one generation to another. It is interesting to note that an object may change its connotation with the change of contexts. In “The Neighbour’s Wife” hookah stands for the dominating male instincts of the neighbour’s wife.

Sometimes a trifle acquires astounding power as in the story “Ranji’s Bat,” the bat is not an ordinary playing tool made of wood, but a symbol of success. It connotes that confidence is the secret of success. It is the trust in the miraculous power of the bat (though very ordinary) that makes it lucky to win all the matches. All these illustrations evince that Bond’s symbols are not merely ornamental, but they are a part and parcel of the plot and give the story a deeper meaning. In “The Tunnel” Sunder Singh lights up a lamp and

the train safely crosses the tunnel. The lamp is like a firefly for the traveling thousands and the royal beast that crouches in the tunnel only a few seconds before the arrival of the train. The lamp is suggestive of the humanistic attitude of Sunder Singh.

The mementoes serve as strong links between the past and the present, the conscious and the unconscious ground of action. In the story “The Photograph”, the photograph of a little girl takes the old granny down the memory lane. It revives the mischievous funs and sports of childhood. In the story “Escape from Java” the little sea horse, carved out of pale blue jade is a lucky memento that Sono gave to his friend, when he escaped from Java along with his father during the Second World War. It signifies love and love is luck as father says;

Keep it carefully; it may bring us luck; ‘Are sea horse lucky ? Who knows’ ? But he gave it to you with love and love is a prayer. (Bond :1999: 415).

Sometimes an ordinary thing can surprise us by its altogether different connotations. As in the story “A Case for Inspector Lal”, axe is not a symbol of violence, instead it is an instrument to punish the devil. Half wood-half metal, it makes Rani bleed to death. She deserves to be axed. The axe symbolizes an arm of justice to punish the culprit.

Love for the life and the people find varied expressions through these apparently insignificant objects. They motivate the thought and action of the characters. Their emotional ebbs and flows are regulated by them. Window is an object in point. Window, which is like a small screen, opens a wide spectrum of the world outside. Bond personally feels that a window gives life and meaning to the room; it gives a view to the resident, without a view a room is hardly a living place, merely a place of transit. He frankly says;

The quality of my life was certainly enhanced if any window looked out on something a little more inspiring than a factory wall or some one’s backyard. (Bond : 1993 : 201)

Windows have always been a great source of inspiration therefore he keeps his window open. He laughs upon his lack of enthusiasm of a starving poet 'suffering from consumption and living in a garret and 'writing odes' to birds'. Rather, he loves to have a window for the fresh air and view of landscape; Train windows are filmier as they offer an ever-changing panorama of fields, terrain, and towns in quick succession. In the story "The Window", two little friends discover immense powers of window. They recount;

The window was more fun than anything else. It gave us the power of detachment. We were deeply interested in the life around us, but we were not involved in it. 'It is like a cinema', said Koki, 'The window is the screen, and the world is the picture. (Bond : 1988 : 26).

It is the magic of this screen, which binds them in the bond of friendship. The boy says; "I took her to the window and showed her the world, she turned and smiled and we were the friends." (Bond : 1988 : 25).

Kite in "The Kitemaker" acquires a meaning, which is different from that of Maugham's story "The Kite". Here it signifies spoiling possessiveness of a mother. In Bond's story it is a symbol of past, when time did not scuttle but moved in slow pace and man had ample leisure to enjoy kite flying. The times have changed, the leisure has shrunk. Children now do not show much interest in them. Kite becomes a symbol of freedom, when it succeeds in breaking the tie, "it pulls, determines to be free, to break loose, to live a life of its, own". (Bond : 1988 : 103). The kite maker Mahmood Ali is like a kite whose string lies in the hands of destiny. The image of a torn kite stuck to the tree, reflects his old age when he finds himself outdated and isolated;

And a sudden gust of wind caught the torn kite and lifted in the air, carrying it far above the struggling city into the blind blue sky. (Bond : 1988 : 104).

The image conveys the ultimate truth of life, as the kite maker gets freedom from earthly bondage and flies towards eternal deep.

One of the liveliest symbols is the umbrella in this story “The Blue Umbrella.” Umbrella is the symbol of the snobbery of exclusive possession. The story concludes with the remark of Binya, ‘an umbrella isn’t everything.’ The whole story revolves around the blue umbrella. For Binya, it is like a flower, a great blue flower that has sprung on the dry brown hillside. She craves to obtain it and gets it too in exchange for her lucky charm pendant. As an object of urban sophistication, it stirs up the related passions like envy; pride possession and isolation. Unlike their elders, children are full of praise for the pretty umbrella, which has saved Binya from the poisonous snake. It becomes an object of temptation, of social prestige only because a poor girl owns it, while the schoolmaster’s wife a second class B.A., has to content with an ordinary black one. Shopkeeper Ram Bharosa’s ego is also badly hurt. Though umbrella is of no use for him but his mad pursuit of possession pricks him to obtain it. He muses;

Of what use is a pappy in a cornfield ? Of what use is a rainbow ? Wreten ! I, too, have a soul. I want the umbrella, because I want its beauty to be mine. (Bond : 2001 : 46).

The Pujari also craves for it. When he fails to obtain it, he tries to pacify his ownself hoping that, the umbrella,

Would shrivel if the sun is fierce, it would collapse if the wind blows, it would not work, if it rains heavily, it would attract lightening it, would prove unlucky. (Bond : 2001 : 40).

The umbrella acts as a catalyst. It evokes cynicism that springs from one’s failures in life. It poisons human consciousness. The worst victim of this cynicism is Ram Bharosa. He says; “It just a sickness that has come upon me. And it’s all due to that girl Binya and her wretched umbrella”. (Bond : 2001 : 45). His impatience to possess the umbrella by hook or by crook reduces him to a shameful twist of his name. From Ram, ‘the trust worthy, he

becomes trusty umbrella thief.' Ultimately, umbrella becomes an arm of chastisement;

Because of the umbrella he had suffered the tortures of greed, the despair of loneliness, because of the umbrella, people had stopped coming to his shop. . . who would have dealing with a man who had sold his soul for an umbrella. . . from the 'trust worthy' he becomes 'trusty umbrella thief. (Bond : 2001 : 52-3).

Umbrella isolates not only the shopkeeper, but Binya too though in a different form. There is umbrella between her head and the sun, between her hair and the wind, between her eyes and the sky. She no longer enjoys her sense of pride. Binya realizes herself to be responsible for the misery of Ram Bharosa, 'had she loved the umbrella too much,' and she relinquishes it saying;

I do not need it any more', But it is such a pretty umbrella 'I know' said Binya but an umbrella isn't everything. (Bond : 2001 : 55)

It is a highly evocative symbol, capable of attracting and repelling alike.

Train, a wondrous giant of science, is a favourite symbol of Ruskin Bond. Train is a romance on wheels trekking into the remote corners of this land. Steam engine is a dragon wonderful, awful and delightful. Bond talks about his innocent delight;

Even now when I see a train coming round the bend of a hill. . . I feel the same sort of innocent wonder that I felt as a boy, Small wayside stations are for me the outpost of romance, lonely symbols of pioneering spirit that led man to lay tracks in the remote corners of the earth. (Bond : 1993 : 201).

Trains stand for romance and roads are associated with realism. The smooth concrete roads symbolize certainty, whereas unpaved muddy tracks in the fields and forests indicate vagrancy.

Besides objects and places, some characters also convey deeper traits than their physical appearance. They tremendously linger in the mind of readers by their exquisite charm of personality. The stronger lady in the story "The Woman on Platform No.8" is a mother icon without being virtually so. Her simplicity of attire and understanding of a boy's psychology are highly evocative. Aunt Mariam in "The Guardian Angel" truly becomes an angel for an orphan boy. Her selfless love is not of this earth. The stone angel, though now with a broken wing, raised upon her gravestone, is a symbol of her divine attribute. Another symbolic character in "The Night Train at Deoli", is the basket girl at small Deoli platform. The girl represents the delicate romance that so often, flits about, but never without a touch of sadness. She reaffirms Keats' stoicism that 'heard melodies are sweet but those unheard are sweeter to the ears of deities'. In the story "A Case for Inspector Lal", Inspector Lal symbolizes Bondian humanism. He sacrifices personal interest for the sake of greater ones. His realization "I should never have been a policeman". (Bond:1988:121), points out that profession is not a sole passion for him. Sushila in the story "Time Stops at Shamli" is a hallucination, 'a Major Robartes' whom the desolate lover looks for. In the story "The Room of Many Colours", the character of Rani has symbolic overtones. Her discordant talks, frequent references of snake, mongoose, ghost and lizard give her a bizarre touch. One of her rooms is dark and the other is lighted up with the bright reflection of red, yellow, green glass windows. These associations impart her uncanny touch.

The simplicity and innocence of Bond's world is also symbolic of the life around him with very little urban influence. They to a great extent symbolize perfect union with nature and her creatures. Streaks of smile light up the entire scene in the story. It does away with initial awkwardness of two strangers meeting for the first time. It brings young and old alike on common

grounds of amity. A little shimmering on the face repels doubts and menacing ego. It reaffirms the faith that is prerequisite for all sorts of relationship. "The Thief" reciprocates Arun's trust in him by an innocent smile. Similarly, in "The Woman on Platform No.8", the spontaneous kiss of Arun sealed on the stranger woman's cheek symbolizes reciprocated love for a mother.

Colours speak of diverse moods and tones. Red colour is traditionally associated with passion. At times, it also signifies life, innocence and belongingness to the elements. The pigtails of the little girl in several stories are tied up in bright red ribbon and she is fresh and clean like the rain and red earth.

Accidents are ominous. They portend something drastic or something unusual in life. The story "When Darkness Falls" is about a war veteran Markham, who is condemned to lifetime loneliness by tragic accident. The story imparts a poignant account of his ordeal. His yearning to live a normal life makes him more and more abnormal. But sometime accidents usher in constructive pattern. In the story "Dust on the Mountains", the truck accident gives a new meaning to the life of Pritam and Bisnu. They realize that it's better to grow things than to blast them. They return to their villages to work in their own fields. Vagrancy is also symbolic of a crucial phase, which comes in the life of people, of society and even of country. It is a symbol of struggle in order to grab some settlement in life. The study reveals that symbols are indispensable to the thematic design of Bond's short stories.

That way, Ruskin Bond who believes that art lies in concealing the art, knows that the power of pen in honest and gifted hands is greater than the grave. Therefore, his short stories are not only rich in exterior embellishment of narration, but has the sublimity of vision too. The essence of his art lies in his parting words to his reader; "May you have the wisdom to be simple and the humour to be happy." (Bond : 1998 : 200).

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The Dimensions of the short story : A Critical Anthology.

CHAPTER-V

RUSKIN BOND'S VISION OF LIFE

If I am not for myself, who will be for me ? And if I am not for others, What am I ? And if not now, when ?
(Hillel).

The above lines of ancient Hebrew Sage as quoted by Ruskin Bond aptly reflect his attitude towards life and world. The aspect that gives him a distinctive place in Indian English fiction is the high value he attaches to his vocation as a writer. A writer is not a trifle, playing with the emotions of people for earning wealth and celebrity. Bond believes that a writer should be responsible to society and humanities. Bond is neither a propagandist nor a philosopher. His short stories are replete with human values and universal appeal.

Bond fabricates a simple unambitious, innocent world, where man does not cut each other's throat for his advancement. His characters struggle hard for their survival, but the 'weariness, fever and fret' have not disillusioned them. The plots of his stories emerge from the silent sympathies of human soul, which he has stored up in his consciousness. His characters are also lively embodiments of the magnanimity of his soul. Bond is not a rebel like the eminent novelist Mulk Raj Anand. Rather, he believes in the powers of man, which can ultimately mould the things accordingly. Unlike Raja Rao, who immerses deeply in philosophy in his creative quart for ultimate truth. Bond wades through physical joys of nature for the union with her. Unlike Bhabani Bhattacharya, Manohar Malgonkar and Khuswant Singh, who are much concerned with the intricacies of socio-historical realism, Bond prefers to live in living present, Unlike B. Rajan and Arun Joshi, who strain their creatures in psychological realism, Bond delights in palpable truth like a boy. Unlike Arundhati Roy and Shobha De who are keen to reveal the dark-fiendish visage of sophisticated class, Bond is a writer of common man living with ordinary delights and sorrows. Unlike Vikram Seth, who observes life from the pinnacles of brain, Bond returns to the ceremony of innocence, which

is dwindling in the fast growing materialistic society. To be brief, Bond is not a Utopian dreaming of golden future, but a singer of today. He puts his own viewpoint through the protagonist of the story “Bus Stop, Pipalnagar” when he says;

There are other singers, sweeter than I, to sing of tomorrow. I can only sing of today, of Pipalnagar, where I have lived and loved. (Bond : 1988 : 78).

He looks at life with the curiosity of a boy and undiminished desire to enjoy it. Bond’s philosophy of life is very close to R.K. Narayan’s philosophy. When R.K. Narayan portrays human psyche through remarkable sense of humour like a perfect cartoonist, Bond displays his exquisite sense of balance in harmonizing man and nature. Both love their creation and life as they find it. Bond reflects in the ‘introduction’.

I have always sought to buoy myself up by the sentiments embodied in an old-fashioned verse passed on me by my father, 'the pure, the bright, the beautiful that stirred our hearts in youth. The impulse to wordless prayer. The dreams of love and truth';. . . (Bond : 1988 : II).

Issues such as , love, birth, death, poverty, isolation and pollution etc. are dealt as natural adjuncts of life. Bond deals with them not in pieces but as a whole.

Bond believes in one religion – Humanism. His faith in humanism is evolved out of his profound study of the East and the West and his close affinity with Indian culture and life. His humanism is not political or social like that of Marxists, nor mystical like that of Saints; it is completely humane and simple to follow. He puts faith in the creative vision and unconquerable spirit of man. In his short stories he places essential goodness of man and dignity of human self above all consideration. His characters, though may be a thief, a villager, a beggar, a farmer, a school-teachers, a hooligan or a pros, are not

disgraceful and hateful. He calls them fondly as 'endearing crooks'. In one of his interviews he has said;

I know that there is evil in the world . . .but I have never known anyone completely evil and I have always found the better qualities of goodness and truth dominating. I do try to wrig out the best in people, in human beings because it is there in almost each one of us. There are exceptions. . . It is just due to circumstances or lack of sensitivity or mental development. Most writers often have characters that are very evil and cruel, but I cannot honestly say that I've come across someone who is totally evil. (I. G. Taqui :1989).

Bond's interest lies in highlighting the human aspect of his characters, which remains concealed under the mark of seeming crookedness. They may forge, murder or may have extramarital relations, but they are every inch lovable human beings. Inspector Keemat Lal in the story "A Case for Inspector Lal" decides not to solve Rani's murder case officially, even though it means delaying his own promotion. During the investigation he finds that an innocent girl named Kusum, has killed Rani to protect herself against her callous design. He also realizes that if the poor victim were convicted, remand home would crush her spirit forever. For Inspector Lal, compassion and sympathy are weightier than duty and personal advancement. So, he closes the file of Rani's murder case forever and saves the little murderer.

Mr. Kaushal in the story "Masterji" is an embodiment of corruption in education. He is proud of doing 'Public Service' by issuing false certificates for nominal charges.

Leela, in the story "His Neighbour's Wife", alters her love swiftly from husband to a bachelor-friend. Even though she is an unfaithful wife, she arouses laughter instead of derision. Aunt Mariam in the story "A Guardian Angel" is a mistress, but her 'unfeigned' love and mute sacrifice for an orphan nephew canonize her as 'guardian angel'. Sunil in the story "Death of a

Familiar” is a flirt, ever searching for new pleasures. But he invokes our sympathy at his death. Ganpat in the story “The Boy Who Broke The Bank” feigned lameness and deceived people for years receiving pity instead of punishment. He emerges as a little crook and we simply smile at his tricks. Even the protagonist of the story “Bus Stop, Pipalnagar” invokes sympathy in our hearts for his tragedy.

The portrayal of characters reflect a peculiar aspect of Ruskin Bond’s humanism that appeals positively to the notion of a core humanity in terms of which people can be observed and appreciated. Humanism is a viewpoint based on the rights and dignity of man and his value as an individual. Bond’s humanism touches simpletons like Dukhi, the gardener, in the story “A Job Well Done”. He had uncharacteristically taken a step like murder on an impulse that was in reaction to Major Summerskill’s order to close the old well in which the pigeons nested. Equally uncharacteristic was his cold-unrepentant silence about the disappearance of Major. The story establishes Bond’s scale of values that intentions weigh heavier than actions. Murder to save one’s or other’s life is not a ‘sin’, at least not in Bond’s penal code. His humanism like that of the Christian Humanists is anthropocentric which means;

Instead of regarding man as a fallen, corrupt and sinful creation, their idea of truth and excellence is based on human values and human experience. (Gray : 1988 : 100).

Bond’s humanism admits no inhibitions and prohibitions in life. Each individual has a right to live and to develop his traits freely. Ishrat G Taqui, aptly says;

He gives a human touch even to his criminals, which reduces their villany and ever makes them commendable. His attitude seems to suggest. So what ? . . it happens. . .we are only humans and the devil does take possession of us occasionally. (Taqui:1995: 148).

The story "The Blue Umbrella" is a dramatic presentation of good and evil forces at clash and final victory of basic goodness of man. The story highlights better than any didactic lesson that human vices are not inborn, but a result of circumstances. A touch of compassion, an ability to share other's gloom and sense of justice are essential to make this earth a seat of human bliss. Blue Umbrella acts as a catalyst in the conversion of Ram Bharosa. In spite of occasional hold of devil, he returns to divine attributes. Bond's faith in the potentialities of man is unshakable; it is magnanimous and all encompassing. His characters radiate his ardent faith in man's closeness to God. The story "Woman on Platform No.8" is a marvelous presentation of two opposite attitudes to life, embodied by two women on the railway platform. The stranger woman who gives tea, samosa and her pleasing company to the boy traveling alone, is in sharp contrast to Satish's mother who is ostentations and incredulous. The boy and the woman are epitome of faith in essential nobility of man, whereas the mother of Satish represents inherent suspicion along with other attributes. Therefore, one is moved to see how a pale sweet, stranger face gets (kiss) the seal of affection on her forehead by a stranger boy on the platform at the time of departure.

In his delineation of life Bond seems quite at ease with the primitive and elemental man. Most of his men are common hill folk who are motivated by Universal values of truth, goodness and mutual trust. Whereas, city people stand for artificiality, selfishness and snobbery. Characters like Inspector Lal find themselves unable to cope with such self mongers and logical pressures. His primeval humanism wins over practical humanism with the realization, "I should never have been a policeman". (Bond : 1988 : 121).

Other characters like Suraj, Sundersingh, Vijay, Binya and Rusty are motivated by similar instinct. They are capable to change their own lives as well as that of others. Their quiet tenor may be misunderstood as being static, but it is moving steadfastly towards a distinct aim. This world is infected by the virus of social disintegration, neck-to-neck competition or blind clashes of diverse interests – the attributes of modern mercenary of life. On the contrary, they try to remain content and happy in all situations. S. C. Dwivedi in his article opines;

His characters make us both society oriented and individual oriented. They touch our hearts and awaken our conscience suggesting to break our narrow minded cocoons of individuality and selfishness. (Dwivedi : 1995 : 160).

Sita, in the story “Sita and the River” lives alone in an island and confronts the process of socialization through Vijay. The protagonist of the story “Bus Stop, Pipalnagar”, comes out of his shell and mixes with the society through Suraj. Recurring scenes of railway platform in Bond’s story serve the purpose of social orientation of his individuals. He neither argues nor propagates, rather, presents his views plainly through a simple plot and equally simple character. Bill Aitken writes in his article “A Memoir of Ruskin Bond as a person”,

Good writing originates from genuine feeling and for all the flimsiness of the Bond corpus I still value it above the more literary products of writers like George Orwell and Graham Greene on the strength of its vision. Ruskin is world affirming, pointing out the miracles of daily life, whereas the industrial gloom of Orwell and Greene places a pall of despair over all they describe. (Aitken : 1995 : 179).

Sense of beauty, liberty and harmony are the cardinal points of his world. Mulk Raj Anand, too underlines Bond’s lofty sense of humanity in his letter-cum-critique to P.K. Singh in response to Bond’s evocative writings;

I don’t know how far your sense of humanity owes itself to the fact, which you have revealed in your personal narrative of escape from death by sheer chance, after the seaplane in which you and your father flew from Java to escape from Japanese terror during the Second World War . . . That rebirth may have inspired the will to live and love people high and low (Singh : 1995 : 7).

Bond's early experience of deluding death may have some bearing with his humanistic attitude. The ease with which he mixes up with the commonest of commons reveals his unique sensibility. It is his capability to open himself for each and every creature that makes him to access their innermost beauty and sanctity of heart. Anand further says;

You have found yourself bathing in the village pond with Ramu. You accepted as companion in storm a sweeper boy touching him without any self consciousness about his being untouchable. You played with Somi and Daljeet from middle class sections, diving in pool in the wilds, you adventured with the vagabond Bansi, tango driver. . . you were charmed by the village girl, Binya. . .And your sympathy for old maids. . .uncles and aunts reveals a unique sensibility like that of the Anglo Indian poet, Henry Derozio of the mid 19th century in Bengal. (Anand : 1995 : 35).

The essence of Bond's philosophy lies in the positive approach to life and things. Without getting disillusioned or satiric, he does himself what he expects from others. Instead of moralizing for social vices such as pollution, inequality and untouchability, he practices their pragmatic solution. His story "Untouchable" does not present a shocking realism of untouchable's life that may rise to class-struggle in a chain of reaction and counter reaction. Rather, he joins the sweeper boy on friendly ground, sleeps with him on a fearful stormy night and holds his broom and bucket. This world is not a Utopia, but a real place where people are learning the art of living in conformity with man and nature. Bond believes in life of action and not of criticism, of acceptance not of derision. His mental equilibrium is close to that of a saint who realizes the truth of life. One of Bond's acquaintances and a renowned free lancer, Sudhir Thapliyal, is of the view that,

Ruskin Bond epitomizes humanity and it would be pointless to give examples. My aunt says: he's a Saint. And she has known him for a better part of the last fifty years (Thapliyal : 1995 : 193).

Here the word "Saint" is not to be interpreted in terms of denunciation, as Bond is an ardent lover of life. He believes in grace and dignity of human soul. Man is the master creation of God so it is most dignified and wonderful of all. Bond hates humiliation of any type. Confidence in one's powers is prerequisite for his graceful existence. Bond says;

Be proud, Be proud of what you are and what you've done. But be proud within. Don't flaunt it, you will only offend. There is something obscene about a braggart. (Bond : 1993: 174).

Proud of being a man and proud of having sense is the theme of many of his stories. The idea of degrading man either by himself or by others is unbearable. His scale of morality is governed by this single notion that an act of crime is no longer a crime if it saves man's dignity. Even a crook is commendable if he respects man's dignity.

Ruskin Bond tries to perfect his vision through such persons too that have eyes denied light and tongue denied speech. The story "The Eyes Have it" is a moving account of two blind strangers who happen to travel on opposite births in the train compartment. They conceal their respective blindness and share the joy and beauty of the visible world on their internal screen. The narrator aptly says;

It often happens that people with good eyesight fail to see what is right in front of them. They have too much to take in, I suppose. Whereas people who cannot see (or see very little) have to take in only the essentials, whatever registers most tellingly on their remaining senses. (Bond : 1988 : 34).

Such broad sensitivity is a characteristic feature of Bond's world without which man is a mechanized being devastating others and his own self in the long run.

His characters also 'look before and after' and 'pine for what is not', but such passion are ephemeral. The note of frustration does not last long. Poverty, illiteracy and unemployment force them to migrate. Landslides, drought and flood etc. worsen the situation, but their tremendous will power, social belongingness and organic unity with nature help them to survive. Bond has evolved a wonderful similitude between Oak and man. Oak is the icon of life. He says;

Like the philosopher who is careless about his dress and appearance, the Oak has secrets, a hidden wisdom. He has learnt the art of survival ! (Bond : 1999 : 482).

Hill-people have imbibed the steadfastness of Oak in their life. They are not glamorous, facility-ridden and self-centered. Like Oak, they have great tolerance and resistance and like its seed 'renew themselves' faster amid constant threats and wants. 'Never lose hope' is the motto of their life, which keeps them warm even in the chilliest winds. Bond's personal experience strengthened his belief in the design of God; he still remembers;

I had bouts of ill health and there were times when money ran out, editorial doors closed, just when one door closes, another has for me almost immediately miraculously opened. (Saili : 1995 : 185).

In the same vein, Aziz in *Delhi is Not Far* is always optimistic in spite of the fact that poverty and disease have devoured him up. Bond firmly believes that life can only be understood backwards but it must be looked forward. Likewise, Sudheer in *Vagrants in the Valley* carelessly shrugs off the worries of life saying;

Forget the dead, forget the past. . . let us live on it till it is finished and let us be happy. This is only the beginning; the world is waiting for us (Bond : 1999 : 730).

Bond's optimism is not an idle day-dreaming on the sunny bank or an opium-fumed fancy, it is absolutely pragmatic. His characters are ordinary people dreaming for ordinary gains. No fabulous promises are made to them, no Herculean vows are made by them, only little joys, little supports are desired and offered. They learn that wealth cannot buy health and peace of mind. Religion as depicted, is not merely a ritual, but a fine type of art of living. It does not embitter their social belongingness, rather, it is a highly personal practice to bring mental peace. Basically, they are the ardent worshipper of nature. Bond does not craft any activity around some temple, church or mosque, still they are deeply religious. The protagonist of *Delhi is Not Far* realizes that death is not an end, it is only a phase, an interval in the journey to eternity;

Death must be an interval, a rest for a tired and misused body, which has to be destroyed before it can be renewed. But consciousness is a continuous thing. (Bond : 1999 : 810).

Shankhini, the prostitute, is not a philosopher, but her observation of life is equally true. In the story *The Sensualist*, she says; "Death was a duty, just as much as life was just another way of dying". (Bond : 2000 : 254).

Bond talks about powers of insight. His philosophy is as wide as that of a mystic. In the process of introspection, he comes to know that what we perceive through our physical sense is not the only truth, even thoughts and feelings are true. Time is eternal and so is life, "it is not time that is passing by it is you and I" (Bond:1988:120) says Sushila in the story "Love is a Sad Song" An individual grows and fades away, while time remains the same. Science cannot analyse the power of insight, not even religion can solve the

mysteries of life and universe. Bond's stories present a wonderful blend of mysticism and sensual delights. He embraces body and soul, past and present, life and death. He asks through the protagonist of *Delhi is Not Far*,

Are we so unimaginative as to presume that life is confined to the shells that are our bodies ? Science and religion have not even touched upon the mysteries of our existence – let me not confine myself to the few years between this birth and death – which is, after all the only period I can remember well . . .
(Bond : 1999 :810-11).

He further says;

There are singers sweeter than I, to sing of tomorrow, I can only sing of today, of Pipalnagar, where I have lived. Yesterday I was sad and tomorrow I may be sad again but today I know that I am happy. I want to live on and on, delighting like a pagan in all that is physical, and I know that this one lifetime, however long, cannot satisfy my heart.(Bond:1996: 822)

He loves body as a beautiful shining cover of soul. He wonders childlike at the transient beauty of all flesh – of Suraj, though his body dying everyday, of Kamla, though she deals in shameful body trafficking, of child and of large bellied males. The charm of body persists though it is deformed and eaten up by time. Bond's vision of love is both physical and spiritual. He feels that spiritual love wades through physical attraction. This principle can be applied in almost all spheres of life. Love that unites both body and soul is perfect and can defy death.

Bond has delved deep into solely physical relations of man and woman too. They are devoid of any emotional involvement. Some of his heroes, who seek pleasure in brothers, are moved by the integrity of pleasure – girls. The protagonist of *Delhi is Not Far* sleeps with Kamla and experiences something beyond sex – a sense of union with all mankind. Shankini in the story, "The

sensualist" performs sex as her duty to relax man from the routine stress. She does it as an art and no sense of remorse or sin arises from it. Bond's attitude towards them is equally humanistic. The protagonist of *The Sensualist* is one of rare individuals who are reprimanded by Bond. He derives friendly pleasure by exercising his sexual aggressiveness against women but the passion to overpower them inspires him to do so, as he says;

I did not like her and she did not like me. We bore each other's hatred and malice and that was enough to make us physically attractive to each other. (Bond : 1999 : 911).

As the story moves ahead his aggressiveness is disarmed by the primeval innocence of an overpowering hill-woman. The woman sucks his virility. He is left completely exhausted, broken with wandering glances. Bond's remark on his tragedy is noticeable;

The world is not exclusively a place for the pursuit of sensual pleasure. . . you were in love with your ego. . . you took the love but spurned the lover. And so you had to lose both. (Bond : 1999 : 946).

He realizes that sense of dignity for each other is very important in this relation. Bond's stand is totally pragmatic. He is fully aware of human weaknesses and physical compulsions. Therefore, he draws no hard lines. If the relations cause no regrets on either side, they can be allowed to exist. For him love is a celebration of two individuals joined together. It may be for a short period – for a few days or a few months. Bond does not emphasize upon its longevity. In the story "The Girl from Copenhagen", Ula and her lover experience the warmth and texture of each other's bodies with such fullness that they feel as though it is not "Just this one passing night, but all nights of a life time, all eternity" (Bond : 1999 : 501).

In spite of such fullness of experience, the girl goes away without making any commitment and the boy too basks in the lingering fragrance of honeysuckle every night. Bond's conviction is very simple in this regard that,

if a person feels perfection in a transient relationship, why should he linger for years and years expecting consummation which is very remote.

Bond is a seeker of innocence in life. Innocent sex is a celebration, a feast; not a need for change only, but a moment of complete forgetfulness. He does not advocate free sex, or sex for the sake of sex. Tenderness of feelings makes it beautiful. There is description of naked bodies, lovemaking and intimate sensual scenes in his stories, but ultimately it is purity of emotion and dedication that he values most. In the story "The Girl from Copenhagen" the boy feels the kiss of Ula, "fresh and clean, like the earth after spring rain". (Bond : 1999 : 501).

He finds that,

There was a great joy in our loving, and afterwards we fell asleep in each other's arms like two children who have been playing in the open all day. (Bond : 1999 : 501).

The description of intimate love between Maureen and Sunil in the story "Death of a Familiar", is rendered so artistically that the act does not seem shameful, obscene or erotic, but a splendid celebration of passion and physique. Bond visualizes divinity moulded in human form. He says;

They looked very beautiful together and I had not expected Sunil and Maureen to look so beautiful. . . Sunil possessed all the sinuous grace and power of a young god and the woman, her white flesh pressed against young grass reminded me of a painting by Titian. (Bond : 1988 : 98).

Bond has remarkably broad outlook in the depiction of man-woman relationship, especially, in the matters of love and sex. Though he does not make it the motif of a story, he deals with it as an essential aspect of life, as a primary urge of man.

One who merged his consciousness with that of others can establish relationship even in the remotest part. The tragedy of modern man is that he has locked himself in his cocoon. Loneliness has emerged as a major theme in modern writing. It is a natural outcome of fast developing society where man has no time and consideration for others. Loneliness is dreadful; Bond also shudders the idea of being lonely. He marks a distinction between being lonely and being alone. One may be alone but not lonely as Sita in the story. "Sita and the River," though living alone in the lonely island does not feel loneliness. She has a rag doll Mumta, with whom she chats about numerous things. But the peanut vendor in the story "The Good Old Days", inspite of being surrounded by boys, is lonely. The pain of loneliness is reflected upon his face. Other pictures of loneliness are Miss Mackenzie in the story "The Prospect of Flowers", who dissipates her loneliness in the company of flowers; Mrs. Leela in the story "His Neighbour's Wife" puffs out her loneliness through hookah; Rani in the story "The Room of Many Colours" babbles about snakes and pearls and rubies; and the old Kitemaker in the story "The Kitemaker" gazes upon the stringless kite such as in the branches of old banyan tree. All of them are old and are passing their lonely world to share their lasting interests and obsessions. Bond shows unique sensibility in joining the old ones and their life long experiences with the innocent youngsters.

Boyhood appears as pleasant obsession of Bond. In most of his stories boys are in the lead role. They are sensitive, energetic, curious and innocent. Their careless demeanour is endeared to him, because it is harmless and natural. They hardly bother about future; they live in the living present with all its joys and odds: Their world is not divided in sections. Standing on the threshold of manhood, they experience an overcharge of spirit and energy. Confidence and self-assertion make them bold and straightforward. Bond relives his own boyhood through his fictional incarnations.

At a certain age a boy is like young wheat, growing healthy on the verge of manhood. His eyes are alive, his mind quick, his gestures confident . . .for a girl, puberty is frightening age. . .for a boy it is an age of self assertion, of growing confidence in himself. His physical changes are a source of happiness and pride. . . the body exudes virility and is full of currents and counter currents. (Bond : 1999 : 779-780).

Boys in his stories are ready to receive worldwide impressions. They love what is forbidden and take a mischievous sort of delight in pursuing forbidden enterprises. Kishen represents this phase of boyhood.

Against his parent's wishes, Kishen Kapoor spent most of his time in the bazaar; he loved it because it was forbidden because it was unhealthy, dangerous and full of germs to carry home. (Bond : 1999 : 587).

Apart from this daring attitude, boys love to travel in straight forwardness, transparency and they accept things as they are. For example in *The Room on The Roof* when Rusty is being appointed as Kishen's tutor, he says blatantly;

You can be my teacher on the condition that we don't work too hard, and you support me when I tell them lies, and that you tell them I am working hard. (Bond : 1999 : 590).

Later this straight-forwardness culminates into friendship with a mixture of parental care. Rusty bears the responsibility of Kishen after his mother's death in the vein of a loving guardian. M.A. Jeyraju has given a meaningful interpretation of adolescent psychology. He says;

In the absence of a conventional home, the adolescents draw all their homely comfort from youthful comradeship, Kishen would not mind anything

as long as he and Rusty are together. . . despite the exigencies of their destitute existence, the vagrants abide by an admirable code of principles and propriety. (Jayraju : 1995 : 85).

Actually boyhood is an age of friendship true and easy-going friendship. Adolescents have full faith on their friends. Their social belongingness is marked by a typical impatience. They bind themselves with self-declared codes of conduct. In the entire corpus of the writings of Bond, friendship emerges as another prominent theme. Friendship admits no distinction of age, caste or place. When two likely souls meet at some place, they are bound together unconsciously, in the knot of friendship. This relationship proves longer and happier than any other bond. In the world of neck-to-neck competition, where most friendships are false, Bond's world is truly a paradise. A little flicker of smile binds the two strangers together – boy and girl, young and old, rich and poor happen to meet either on the road or on the platform, they exchange smiling glances and an understanding develops spontaneously and they become friends. It happens in the story "The Windows". "out of window. . . after some time she turned and smiled at me, and we were friends". (Bond : 1988 : 25).

His conception of friendship is quite large. It is applied not only to the human beings but also to animals and plants. For Bisnu in the story "Panther's Moon" his pet, Sheroo, is a true friend. Old banyan and tall jackfruit are some favourite friend-trees in many of his stories. Friendship as projected in these stories, is a great source of enjoying this world. One not only divides his sorrows, but also multiplies his joys also through a true friend. In one of his notes Bond says; "If you have one true friend, you have more than you share". (Bond : 1993 : 174).

True friendship is neither demanding nor possessive; it is a mutual sharing of views in which each one keeps one's freedom in fact. This association may be of one hour, of one day or of few months but they try to make each other a happy lot. The protagonist in the story "The Coral Tree"

makes the little girl happy by showering coral blossoms upon her head. Koki and her boyfriend in the story "The Window" enjoy the colourful drama of their world on the window screen for a few weeks. When Koki goes away, her friend shuts the window. Sometime friendship emerges out of rivalry, as it happens in the story "The Fight", Vijay and Anil, who fight for the right of bathing first in the river, realize that fighting is of no use so they shake hands and become bosom friends. Formalities, restrictions and obligations are natural enemies of true friendship. Friendship is far above the considerations of cast and creed.

Bond has depicted mystical type of friendship too. Sometime sympathy for a particular self culminates into intimacy. In the story "Bus Stop, Pipalnagar", the protagonist loves Suraj, a street vendor who is a patient of epilepsy. Later, their friendship becomes more abiding than an ordinary one. They feel spiritually closer while their bodies move apart. At times it becomes quite difficult to analyse such bonds in traditional mode of friendship as happens in the story;

In moments of rare intimacy two people are of one mind and one body, speaking only in thoughts brilliantly aware of each other . . . he lies beside me with his eyes closed and his head turned away, but all the time we are talking, talking... (Bond : 1999 : 811).

Such union of minds is possible in rare circumstance when both the persons become indispensable to each other. Trust and sobriety in relation are essential to make friendship enduring. In personal life too, Bond 'hates the casual jocular sort of friend and the noisy backslapper.' The story "The Thief" is a moving account of breach of trust of a friend. In the story "Death of a Familiar", protagonist cannot abide by Sunil for a long time, because Sunil is too demanding and too glib to create trust in him.

Parent-child relationship is generally a matter of psychoanalysis and social observation, but in the entire corpus of Bond's short stories it emerges

as a persistent theme. Bond's personal infantile trauma owes much to the depiction of this relationship. Bond does not believe in any compulsions for healthy relations, but parental relations are beyond excuses, they are at his top priority. An unnatural experience of his childhood never allows him to forget those unhappy days of his life. He is nostalgic in many of his stories because he has not grown like a normal child. The emotional vacuum still persists in his consciousness. He firmly believes that once a child is born the couple is bound to patch-up their petty interests for the sake of greater one (child). Through a child, generations speak. His right upon parental love and guidance is unquestionably natural.

The story "Woman on the Platform No.8" is the manifestation of his unfulfilled childhood. The boy in the story travels alone, because his parents do not spare themselves for him. The stranger woman on railway platform compensates his want for a true mother. In the story "A Guardian Angel", the protagonist is moved by the affectionate welcome of Aunt Mariam. He feels his own vacuum soothed in the warm environs of a happy home. Ancient saying that for a mother, her child is most beautiful is reinforced in a moving story "The Most Beautiful". The story presents two different attitudes towards physically deformed and mentally crippled children. The society along with father of such an unhappy child is indifferent to the state of being cruel. But mother loves him all the more; for her the child is most beautiful.

God has gifted woman with motherly instinct. This truth is presented through the story "A Guardian Angle." Aunt Mariam bestows all her love and devotion to her orphan nephew. She being poor cannot keep the child under her guardianship for long. Though she loves him more than her life, she never claims her right upon him and dies an unlamented death. Her sacrifice is crowned, when the child on growing up, calls her 'a guardian angle'. Canonized Mariam truly represents the soul of great Mother Mary. Bond mentions :

Love is undying. The love that gives protection, even as you my guardian angel, gave me protection long after you have gone – and continue to give this very day. . . A love beyond death – a love that makes life alive ! (Bond : 1997 :163)..

There is one more guardian angel – an angel of Bond's real life, his father who appears in many of his nostalgic stories planting saplings in the loose soil of the valley and tramping along the roadside with his son. Even after more than give decades the 'boy' is rummaging those loving hands and eyes. Bond's childhood appears to have stopped at that very juncture when he lost his father; "And if you and I meet again, Dad, will you look the same and I will be a boy or an old man?" (Bond: 1997: 163).

Some of Bond's stories are narrated around dating grandparents and their mischievous grand children. Not only children old people also need great care and affection. Bond is highly sensitive towards their physical and mental requirements. In the absence of proper parental attention, grandparents compensate the natural expectations of children. He finds old people very interesting because they are full of experience and stories to relate. Jasbir Jain summarizes his chief concerns a such;

Ruskin Bond's sensitive portrayal of the countryside, his being so much in tune with nature and the vignettes of childhood – remarkable for their range, open out a new dimension of Indian writing in English which is not at all self conscious. (Jain : 1997 : 83).

Bond's short stories are a powerful appeal to eradicate the roots of evil and violence against man and animal and to keep this earth beautiful and healthy. In the selection and recombination of the matter of real life for his purposes , Bond is both a realist and a romancer.

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CHAPTER- VI

ASSESSMENT

Ruskin Bond is the only Indian writer in English to establish a reputation mainly on the basis of his achievement as a short story writer. He is a front ranking fiction writer of Indian English writing. In course of a writing career spanning over five decades he has written more than a hundred short stories, two full-length novels, three novellas and a number of essays. He has got many Awards during his writing career.

Bond's stories dive deep into human psyche and unfold human mind in relation to nature and environment. The incidents and situation depicted in his stories are not wholly fictional. He projects a part of his personality into his stories to make them authentic and interesting. He is not content to describe the things as they happened. He probes deep into how they happened and why they happened. He examines his characters from the inside and analyses how their minds worked. His short stories are well-finished and are integrated works of art. Most of his stories depend upon characters i.e. they are the short stories of characters.

The writings of Ruskin Bond, as discussed in the forgoing chapters is indeed a harmonious combination of experience and ceremony of innocence. He is basically a subjective writer who has lain out his own set of standard. Following the precept of his school days 'accomplished soccer goal keeper, rather than an aggressive goal scorer or goal-getter', Bond is still a 'goal keeper', protecting and defending whatever is good and delightful in life. He strives to hold strongly the cardinal values of life from getting smouldered. The characteristic softness of his tone springs out of his deep belonging to life and things.

Contrary to the current scenario of Indian English short stories, Bond's mission is to reaffirm the faith in the potentialities of man. He calls for action not for criticism, for acceptance not for derision. It is a world where people are learning the art of living in perfect relationship with other creatures of nature. One should not call it daydreaming or an evening in Utopia, because

with an instinct like that of Bond man can be what God has made. Perched in the serene surroundings of IVY cottage, he does not aspire for magna publicity of his work, though it is a fact that he is the most popular writer of the day, always in focus of large readership. Bond's credo is similar to that of archetypal devotees of Muse, who derived pleasure through creation. The analogy of pebble, which he coins for his ownself truly evinces his philosophy.

Ruskin Bond has published a number of collections of short stories. His favourite subjects i.e. themes are pets, animals and a variety of the have notes, including waifs, orphans, abnormal children, restless adolescents and frustrated old men whom he portrays with genuine compassion.

Bond is an ardent lover of nature. He breathes through her and writes for her. It is an everlasting love affair, which knows no satiety, because it goes on renewing itself time and again through transient scenes and colours. His imagination is flared up by the quaint beauties of nature interwoven with the melodies of breeze, forming a unique world free from discordant notes. Far from the sickening view of sociopolitical humbug, his literary journey trails on a different path in search of a winter garden, a cherry tree in Maplewood, a leopard or a panther, a hidden pool, a wayside teashop, a small railway platform, or village scenes. His earnestness to harmonize his own self with them brings him closer. While most of his contemporary writers are concentrating on social, psychological, political and cultural disintegration of man, Ruskin Bond seems to be consciously drifting away from the hydra-headed hurdles of mechanical world. He preferably enjoys the divine beauty of the hills and dales in Garhwal Himalayas. The entire corpus of his short stories is a magnificent document of his deep association with nature. It provides him endless impressions, which he moulds in the form of a moving story, novel, an article or essay. He approaches nature beyond any traditional or hackneyed trend.

Ruskin Bond's most favorite themes are childhood and boyhood also. He has written stories on childhood and boyhood. He is at his best in evoking a mood of nostalgia for the vanished sights and scenes of boyhood and childhood of the pathos of the inexorable march of time.

Bond is primarily known for his children's stories. He is, in fact, the pioneer of modern children literature in India. The rise of new children's literature is partly due to the breakdown of the traditional family set-up, when kids often, listened, to oral "Dada Dadi ki Kahani" or "Nana Nani Ki Kahani." The rise of media entertainment and telecommunications also has contributed to the popularity of children's literature. Bond has captivated his young readers by the charm and freshness of his narration, which is traditional as well as modern. Based on his vivid memories of childhood in pre-independence India he has adapted his stories to the ancient tradition of bedtime tales. The tradition of fables is very ancient in India. The stories of *Panchtantra* are a part of rich legacy of tales. Bond's children stories are also type of fables, though their delineation is modern. His observation of two generations of his adopted family of Prem that live with him has helped him to comprehend the spirit of Indian family. Before the emergence of Bond's children stories, young minds in India were generally driven into the exciting but alien world of Billy Bunter, Nancy Drew, Famous Five or Secret Seven. When Ruskin Bond wrote about the familiar atmosphere and Indian life for native children, he became, unquestionably, the best living writer of children stories and books in Indian English literature. Bond specifically caters to the needs of 'Young adults'. His sensibility and observation of the young world is amazing. Hence, Bond is the most favourite writer of that reading class which has so far been neglected by the English writers in India and kept half-fed owing to the paucity of good contemporary literature.

Bond as a master storyteller is well aware of human psychology. He portrays the magic of supernatural element in the tales. Though in an age of science one finds it difficult to digest his fictional encounters with the ghosts and *jins*, none can deny that they do exist in the psychology of each society either in the East or in the modern West. Stories of mysterious agents can be found in every literature.

Bond has described with remarkable authenticity the interiors of an Indian village house – a string cot, a clock and picture of Ganesh enshrined the most prominent corner of the house – are essential for an Indian house.

Ruskin Bond places the main emphasis on characters and not an incident. He is not concerned with material happenings but wants a probe into the mind and spirit of the characters and to see why the persons acted in the given way. His great strength lies in the real portrayal of character. He reveals the inner life of the characters and lays bare the motives behind their actions. He creates highly complex characters and so on the face of it their actions appear to be perplexing to us. When he analyses their motives and the hidden impulses, we get convinced that their actions are consistent with their real temperaments.

Bond introduces a whole galaxy of characters. They are ordinary, simple, educated and uneducated men and women like house servants, shopkeepers, school boys, thieves, beggars, wrestlers, school-teachers, farmers, gardeners, soldiers and so on. Several of Bond's main characters are Arun, Granny, Koki, Madhu, Binya, Suraj, Hassan, Aunt Mariam, Ram Bharosa, Ula, Sunil, Mehmood, Miss Fairchild, Rusty, Kishen, Miss Mackenzie, Inspector Keemat Lal, Mr. Oliver, Dhuki, Major Summerskill, Rakesh, Bisnu, Sita, Vijay, Shushila, Kamla and so on. One great quality of Bond's characterization is that even his minor characters are invested with the individuality of their own. All are marvellously differentiated. They are Satish, Narrator himself, Sunil, Deepchand, old Ganpat, Seth Govind Ram, Mr. Kamal Kishore, Bijau, Mr. & Mrs. Bhushan, Mrs. Srivastava, Ramu, Pitamber, Mulia, Maureen, Colonel Fanshawe, Anil, The Rani, Kusum. Mr. Nautiyal, Chittru, Mrs. Taylor, Mela Ram, Kalam Singh, Hukam Singh, Phambiri, Sher Dil, Dinesh, Pramod, Ravi, Mr. & Mrs. Kapoors, Asha and so on.

Bond has created a world in his short stories. His world is the world of the poor and the middle class. His greatness can be seen in the originality and naturalness of these characters. Bond's stories are full of real, living and breathing people. He is no creator of card-board characters; his men and women, angry, hungry, strange, orphan, foolish, honest live their own lives in the books. And they are moving and acting most of the time. His characters are true human beings. He always writes serious stories but that does not stop him from creating interesting situations.

Ruskin Bond has great command over English, which is reflected in all the short stories. He exhibits rich treasure of vocabulary. He puts right words in the mouths and right situations in their times. His words are suggestive and they reveal both character and situation. His dialogues are lucid, sharp and precise. Their tone changes according to the mood of character and the demands of the situations. His characters use language, which suits their status and temperament. His language is highly symbolic. His style and language contribute to the unity of effect or impression in his short stories. They show his characters in the search of identify in the midst of worldly complexities. He is a talented writer who has a skill to transform any mood or a situation into an aesthetic experience with the help of his style and language.

Bond rarely uses high-sounding words and figures of speech. He believes that uncommon words and figures of speech add variety and colour to the style but such a style cannot be called natural. He conveys his ideas to his readers with the help of his simple and natural style. His style is concise also. He can express many things in a few and short sentences. As a result his style never becomes dull. He can produce maximum effect by the use of minimum words, so the reader understands the meaning of each and every word without any labour. So his style is effortless. It has always the effect of simplicity and naturalness. He never makes a show, of his learning. Thus Bond's style reveals his acute power of understanding and deep insight. His style can become quite powerful according to the needs of the occasions and situations. Bond's symbolism and humours are also highly suggestive and unique piece.

Ruskin Bond presents many stories with a single incident. A plot includes the basic pattern of a beginning, middle and an end. A short story writer divides the basic pattern into five stages such as expositions, rising action, climax, falling action and conclusion. In different stories Bond arranges these stages into a complex structure and impresses the reader with its balance and proposition. His goal is the same, to 'show' the reader what is important through the dramatic action of the plot, and not just explicitly 'tell' the reader what to think, Bond's plot construction in these stories is beautifully

organized and arranged differently in each story to sustain the interest of readers. And he is successful to get attention of his readers, who at times think it a compelling reading.

Bond's further contribution is related to the form of the short story. The stories of the collection represent a modified western literary form to suit his Indian subject matter. In fact, it would no be in correct to say that he reinvents and Indianizes the form as no one else does. He accomplishes this feat by using traditional Indian genres such as the *Purana* and the beast fable to structure his work. He successfully mingles the fable and the short story in his stories.

Furthermore, his stories are written in an English that is uniquely Indian in tenor, tone, and texture. The Indianness of style is achieved by relying heavily on translation, quotation and the use of Indian proverbs, idioms and colloquial patterns. He creates new metaphors and images. At times human beings and animals in the story stand as independent images. He adroitly manipulates vocabulary and syntax to enhance the Indian flavouring of his English. The result is a style, which is distinctly Indian yet evocative and perfectly intelligible to western readers as well as the Indian readers. That is Ruskin Bond's foremost contribution to the discipline of Indian English short story.

In an age of ego-prone flippant, it is gentle world of coexistence. For those who seek a reversal of faith in life, his lamp is lit.

This is perhaps because he is reverentially read and enjoyed equally by both a ten year old and an elderly person. People can't live without stories and Bond is modestly proud of being a simple storyteller. The charm of stories is never slackened. Even after five decades of his literary journey, when one may think that the veteran writer is running short of theme and gusto, he is back with another gripping tale. Bond finds a little affinity with Sheherzade whose life depended upon his ability to turn out one tale every night in Arabian Nights.

Ruskin Bond's thematic preoccupations, characterization, plot construction, nativization of the form of short story and style that successfully act as a vehicle of articulating his vision of the world in his short stories.

Thus, Ruskin Bond is one of the most prolific and leading short-story writers in Indian English. He deserves to be recognized as a unique writer who explored India and its various aspects in a manner of his own, and that has provided a niche for him in literature today.

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