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Literature and Culture: A Survey of Ruskin Bond's Works in Special Context to the Present World

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Abstract

The most ancient and the mother of almost every culture of the world, Indian culture has been immortal with its traditional entity. It is the purest one with its refined traits and inside it; there lies love, respect and egoless personality. Basic elements of it have been inspiring and combining not only Indians but the foreigners also. In spite of the diversity, whole India is a unity because of its common culture and that is why when the ancient cultures and civilizations of the world e.g., Greek, Egyptian and Rome have perished but Indian culture and civilization is intact even today. Behind Indian culture there are major features such as the spirit of deism, coordination, unity in diversity, ancientness, and benevolence and these are life-giving elements that calm us down and assure us to withstand the attack of post modern mechanized culture. History tells that the imbibing power of Indian culture is employed under its currents, either trying to make itself most beautiful or battling and defeating inner or outer foes. Today the whole world is accepting the greatness of Indian culture, besides many causes, contributions of many philosophers and ideologists are also appreciable in its publicity and dissemination. Classical writers like Kalidas, Shudrak, Bhas, Shri Harsh etc. have disclosed the culture of the golden era of India in their works; for in the shadow of literature, features of particular age are hidden. Later a long series of the writers of regional languages have echoed and expanded the Indian way of living, thinking, and behavior, according to their own style. Anglo-Indian literature is also not spared this particular subject and many writers are contributing in spreading Indian culture throughout the world. Ruskin Bond is one of the shiniest stars in this galaxy and his whole literature is based on 'Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam' ideology. The present paper is an endeavour to evaluate Ruskin Bond as a writer and a Culturist.

Keywords- Culture, Civilization, Indianness, Tradition, Socio-political ambience

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To define a vast concept like Indian culture whose elements are present in every caste, creed and religion requires a brief survey of Indian-social, political, economic history. The world has been getting the glimpses of such histories through the creations of literary artisans. The ancient treaties, as Ved, Puran Shastra and other religious books not only define vices and virtues, but also preserve the mythological stories of pure and pious traditions, customs and refined decorums. Later literators stepped up to step into their shoes and authors like Kalidas, Dandin, Bharavi, Bhas and many more others handed the generations over the characteristics of enriched culture. Indian literature is still adhering to this amenableness and that is why, after the slavery of hundreds of years, Indians have conspicuous views to teach others and potency to point the right way of conduct. Indian literature is full of welfare sentiments, and comprises these sentiments in public life, for it is the improvisation of artisans' minds and experiences. An artisan makes a world of own in which society and literature combine as body and soul. Ruskin is one of those selected writers whose alien culture has been enshrined with Indian culture. Ruskin's literature is true snaps of his experiences that harmonize literature and society. With great artistry, he presents promiscuous facets of Indian society in which concordance, conformity, progress, achievement, bestowal, similarity, equality, beauty, love, affection, motherhood, public-spiritedness, universal brotherhood are vital traits. Indian writings in English are the product of the historical encounter between the two cultures – Indian and western for about one hundred and ninety years. The circumstances under which Anglo-Indian literature was motivated were the factors namely-political, economic or cultural. It was the impact of Lord Macaulay that Indians were provided with a way to the western literature and to the western culture. Many Indians thought the language was appropriate to give expressions to their feelings and experiences. Hence, the peculiar body of Anglo-Indian literature was created in which contents were to be Indians, but its medium of expression was English. After nineteen twenty, Anglo-Indian literature had a special characteristic that was called 'Indianness'. This Indianness was noticed in the choice of subject, in the texture of thought and play of sentiments, in the organization of material, and in the creative use of language. A long series of writers have made Anglo-Indian literature of international fame, but Ruskin has attained a special place amongst them because of his 'unquestioned vitality'. His rich imagery is one of his major contributions and the sources of his imagery are Nature, human civilization, culture and philosophy of India. Bond is Indian by heart, so his literature has an Indian appeal. For Non-Indian readers, the feature of Indianness makes it exotic and gives a deep feeling and experience of real India. As a social reformer, he wants to bring improvement in post modern world conditions and through the medium of his literature, he is sermonizing the Indian way

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of life, along with the thoughts and feelings. In his depiction of myths related to Indian trees, cultures, hills, festivals and fairs, he throws his contemporary writers flat on the back who supremely claims to be pure Indian. P. K. Singh remarks that Bond “gives his renders the true “feel” of Indian life he has seen and lived. His European blood seems to be fully naturalized with the Indian spirit.”

Creator of many of the world’s most cherished short-stories, Ruskin is considered one of the finest writers of short fiction in international literature. Credited with popularizing the short story genre in India, Ruskin is perhaps most famous for his insightful stories of Indian culture and society. His stories are replete with human values that are the welcoming traits in Indian culture. No doubt, Bond presents an honest picture of the contemporary Indian scene. In fact no Anglo-Indian writer can be so bold and forthright in his criticism of Indian ways of life as he is. As a pioneer of short-stories in India, Bond is realist par excellence. He chooses to deal with the factors of life which he knows best. All the short-stories are based on real experiences, occurring in daily life. He takes minimum liberties with the facts; therefore he presents his characters without gloss. In the story ‘Woman at Platform No.8’, narrates a common scene of meeting a motherly woman and a boy. In India, it is so ordinary to make affectionate relations with strangers. At platforms and bus stops people begin to talk congenitally that every difference between them abolishes itself. Bond’s heart is like a clean slate and so much so that the disgracing word ‘thief’ gets its place on it; if one comes to him in a friendly way. In the story, “The Thief”, Arun gives shelter to Deepak, the thief; but gets deception in the relation, still Ruskin emphasizes the other facet of coin that is goodness and that is heavier than the demerit as treachery. He ends the story in a normal way as nothing has been done, being a symbol of true Indian, Arun forgives Deepak, without showing the fact that he has known all about Deepak’s theft.

Ruskin Bond is one of those notable Indian writers of postmodern age, who enamour readers with new fiction that reveals the genuine Indian temperament and Indian sensibilities. Bond does not blindly glorify the Indian culture and custom, but instead, he sees it as it is. Being a man of British descent is not a deficiency to him but it is a boon not only to him but to Indians as well. He writes in English, the common language that is helpful to connect Indians of every culture, custom, beliefs and race. Bond himself decides his nationality when he says, “I am an Indian in broadest all embracing, all Indian sense of the world” (Scenes xv-xvi). Bond frequently uses the Indian beliefs, superstitions, and sentiments to shape some of his enchanting stories. It was Bond’s desire to be a writer that pulled him to England, but smell of Indian soil dragged him back; for Bond feels, “India is an atmosphere as much as it is a land.” (Scenes xvi) Bond as a man accepts that if his racial roots are in England, his experiences, ethics, behaviorism, ways of life are rooted in India. It is his Indianness that reflects in

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his first novel *The Room on the Roof*. His friendship with Indian boys, his acquaintance with Himalayan flora and fauna, his boyhood in the wonted Indian society attracted British readers and critics to such extent that he won his first literary award. Bond's unfathomable attachment with Indian culture, faith in myths and respect for its human values make him nearer to India and Indians. He 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 a Dukhi before being in an English family. I belong to the grass, to the trees, to the hills here" (*The Fictional World of Ruskin Bond*, 169). Bond uses Shivalik hills as background of his stories and as he is cognizant about hills and hill dwellers, so his multi dimensional understanding helps him to bring forward their customs, cultures, and manners. Himalaya is preserving long myths of Indians. With the passing of time, many superstitions have also been associated with it and now they have prevailed in remote areas of hills and have become the culture of Hillmans. Bond's description of these superstitions has a reason as well. As depicting the trees as other god heads, he tries to preserve the forests and climate of the country. Neem tree is connected with the goddess Sita, Tulsi is the beloved of Lord Krishna and mango tree is a plant to fulfill the wishes. Bond never mocks at simple beliefs of hill folks but joins all the mysteries of mountains and shares them as a culture of hill society.

As it is said that true India lives in its villages, and Ruskin's writings take its subject from village life and culture, especially from hilly regions and having keen look on common Indian folk life, he creates literature on the basis of his power of imagination. In this sense, the statement of P.K. Singh seems relatively true about Ruskin's craftsmanship, "---Bond with European blood in his veins lyrically recreates in English language the Indian ethos and the variegated phenomena of his surrounding especially the hills and the people" (Agrawal, 7). No doubt, Ruskin writes for Indian people and about Indian people Bond frankly admits; "I have been writings 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" (Friends vii). In Ruskin's literature culture is the synonym of tradition. To him, Indian civilization is a form of life and culture is its beauty. Specific Indian culture, that is persistence and irrevocable, springs out from his stories, novellas and poems. His characters retard properly in both kinds of lives- Individual and social. In the story, "Going Home", Daya Ram represents the heedless nature of Indian farmers who have cultivated the habit of cheerful temperament in spite of their loss. In the same story, the scene of a crowded train compartment shows the living spirit of Indians who can communicate with and can suggest anyone with or without need of it. Loyalty in relations is another trait of Indian and Ruskin has handled it

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with adroitness in the story 'His Neighbor's wife', in which Leela is loyal to her husband even to know that he is not always loyal to her. It is after the death of her husband that she agrees to marry Arun. Quest for the opportunity of unraveling the intricate tangle of human motives, moods, emotions and thoughts takes him nearer to Indian way of life where he sees innocent girl like Kamla in the story 'A Case for Inspector Lal' who kills Rani to protect his chastity ; or goes to the remotes hilly village where Binya, a girl character in the story, "The Blue Umbrella", with all her pride and innate generosity gives his umbrella to Ram Bharosa; or makes the readers familiar with the person like Lala Ramji Lal, in the novella "A Flight of Pigeons", who is ready to suffer to what that is precise to him. Javed Khan in the same novella becomes an icon of Indian munificence when he provides food and shelter to Mrs. Labadoor and her family. Although he wants to marry Ruth Labadoor, Yet his instinct becomes obstructive to fulfill his desires forcibly. His award winning juvenile novella "The Room on the Roof" unfolds the progressive and unabashed thought of every Indian who is rational enough after being sentimental. In the novella, the news of Meena's death comes like a shell that smashed Ruskin's tender heart and he almost decided to drink himself to death but in the conflict state of mind Rusty Thinks, "I am not interested in today, I want tomorrow. . ." (*The Room on the Roof and Vagrant in the Valley: Two Novels of Adolescence* 101).

Ruskin is a votary of town life of India. He weaves his stories around Indians to depict the inner reality of Indian society. For him India 'has always been an atmosphere more emotional than a geographical entity.' He further claims 'small-town India- that is my India.' As a lover of Indian society, he keenly observes faiths, superstitions, fears, myths, legends, follies, prevailing in Indian society. Scarcely there is any facet of life and manner that is not present in his works. Bond's contribution in spreading Indian culture throughout the world can be estimated in the light of the press note by Miss Merry, the critic, after the publication of "The Room on the Roof" in England – "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" (qut.in Aggrawal 70).

Tint of Indian philosophy and culture in Bond's writings is scattered in such exuberant measure that aspirations for better life is foremost to him and the idea of degrading the men is unbearable to him. That is why he considers the words 'prostitute', and 'drunkard' as a slur to society. In his delineation of life, he praises primitive and elemental man, nor the artificial mawkish man of urban society. It is evident that in his stories he messages the aged long Indian philosophy that evil is only a stepping stone towards good and the evils of life are the results of selfishness, guile,

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deceit, etc. which are the offshoots of artificiality, materialism and other dirty thoughts. Bond's poetry also roars with a high idealism and great optimism of Indian culture. Amita Aggarwal observes, "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" (24).

Though Bond is related with other cultures, yet his international stature reflects, among other things, his unique ability to make rhythms and intricacies of Indian life and culture. In chapter third of his novella 'The Room of the Roof', he presents true scene of Indian culture through the eyes of Rusty- "The bazaar and India and life itself all began with a rush of noise and confusion" (*The Room on the Roof and Vagrant in the Valley: Two Novels of Adolescence*, 13). Bond is not directly concerned with Indian festivals, so his hero Rusty who becomes able to enjoy Holy festival in the company of his friend Ranvir is also ignorant to Indian festive culture. But in reality it is the novelist's keen power of sight that enables him to reveal it with the same degree of enthusiasm as Indians celebrate it. Bond describes the whole event – "children formed groups. They were armed mainly with bicycle pumps, or pumps fashioned from bamboo stems, from which were squirted liquid colours. And the children paraded the main road, changing shrilly and clapping their hands. The man and woman preferred the dust to the water. They too sang, but their chanting held significance, their hands and fingers drummed the rhythms of spring, the same rhythms, the same songs that belonged to this day every year of their lives" (*The Room on the Roof and Vagrant in the Valley: Two Novels of Adolescence*, 25). In the story, "Bhahiji's House", Bond skillfully presents the culture of typical Indian united family. In the story, Arun, the husband of Shobha who wants to invite his wife to dinner at a restaurant; but as he is a member of a joint family, finds himself unable to do so, therefore he adopts a dexterous manner. Bond exposes it – "Last night he wanted to eat out at a restaurant, but did not want to be accused of wasting money; so he stuffed fifteen supers in my pocket and asked me to invite both him and Shobha to dinner" (*The Lamp is Lit* 39).

Bond's literature has a great significance with regard to the spiritual culture of mankind. It is a means in the hands of a true prophet of bringing about a spiritual awakening through the revelations of man's higher self to man, a means that has an end in itself. And this literature is optimistic, accompanied with delight that comes from the revelation of the real human self which is to be achieved and which is ideal. Bond presents the spiritual culture of India, reestablishing a relationship between man and God. In the story, "Delhi Is Not Far", he uses Indian myths about Lord Shiva who

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drank deadly poison to protect the human race, so that the world may be familiar with the Indian doctrine of supremacy of love over death. Lord Krishna assumes different names in his literature and Ruskin through the medium of god of love gives the society the messages of love and warmth. His flute becomes a symbol of spreading sweetness in the world. In this way, Bond throws light over the sweet and humble culture of India. Illuminating age old Indian culture in his literature Bond teaches mankind the truth about divine love that is selfless. In the story, "Sita and the River" Vijay endangers his life to save Sita as god saves his way devoutly. In this way, Bond achieves success to show the world the divine relationship between 'the ways of God to Man' and 'the ways of Man to God'

It is the impact of Indian culture that has been a part of his life, and which has filled him with compassion and sympathy for human beings. He has learnt to share in others loneliness, to make a distance from throat cutting competitions, and to benefit others at the cost of his loss from Indians. Through his pen, he unfolds the secret of socialization and civilization of Indian society where everyone is ready to give up even one's favorite desires and contents for the sake of others, and where, Age-gap has its end ; young and old, being one try to make each other happy, at ease, and out of misery. Rich Indians culture is the soul of Bond's literary world. Love, sympathy and human attitude are the components of Indian society. Being the true son of the soil, he presents the characters, ready to absorb every culture. In the novella, 'The Room on the Roof' Rusty finds sentimental support in the company. His friends like Somi and Kishan. Without any hesitation, these archetypal characters dispel his doubts and fears of being stranger. In the story 'Panther's Moon' whole village seem to rush forward to rescue Kamal Singh's son from panther's attack ; for there are a long series of relations in India and everyone is attached with this unbroken chain. In the story 'The Fight', Bond presents unimaginable but true picture of Indian society where two people can be friends even after fighting. Bond observes and explains to the world that love and understanding, prevalent in Indian society, is the root cause of it. So the whole study of Ruskin's literature is suffice to say that his literature based on Indian culture, civilization and myths is relevant to the context of the present world and is cultivating a special understanding to the country of colours and diversity.

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