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Ruskin Bond and Rudyard Kipling: A Comparative Analysis

Sukhvinderjit Kaur Chopra

Assistant Professor,
Centre of Professional Enhancement,
School of Humanities,
Lovely Professional University,
Jalandhar, Punjab. (India).

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Abstract:

Ruskin Bond and Rudyard Kipling. Both intellectuals have enriched the world and people's life with their remarkable penmanship; of stories, anecdotes and verses. Their writings are accepted as par excellent and this is proved by the numerous awards granted to them by authorized institutions. A close reading and understanding of their writings show how these two titans of English Literature share similar traits. At the same time they are a foil to each other, making the present analysis, an interesting intersection of their views and presentations.

Keywords: analysis, enriched, foil, par excellent, similar, titans.

Introduction

One of the most illustrious writers of English Literature is Rudyard Kipling. Joseph Rudyard Kipling was born in the Indian city of Bombay in 1865, during the British Raj. He along with his siblings was sent to England when he was about five. But Kipling returned to India in Lahore as a young man and worked for local newspapers. He wrote a number of short stories here. But then after some time he returned to England. He lived in US for a while with his wife and happened to meet Mark Twain once and was deeply influenced by him. But due to a family dispute that brought him public shame, Kipling returned to England. During his time, he wrote poems.

Another stalwart of English Literature, Ruskin Bond was born on 19th May in Kasauli in Himachal Pradesh in 1934. So, he is basically of British Descent. He lived there till he was six. Since his father joined the Royal Air Force, Ruskin along with his mother and sister came to live

in Dehradun with his maternal grandparents. He completed his schooling from Shimla where he won several prizes in Writing Competition. As a young adult he went to his aunt in London for better prospects and whilst in British capital, he wrote his maiden award-winning novel *The Room on the Roof*. He returned to India after two years and has lived in Dehradun/Mussourie ever since then. His sister lived in Ludhiana Punjab, till she died in 2014. His brother lives in Canada. Because he has lived in cities known as hill stations in India, they have had a profound impact on his writing. Most of his writings are about the places in the foothills of Himalayas. He has also written many short stories for children

So, Bond and Kipling were born in British India. Rudyard's father John Lockwood Kipling and Ruskin's father Aubrey Bond served the British in India. The former went to England when he was five and the latter too, had gone to England as a young adult. Interestingly, both returned to India. However, here lies a difference. Kipling who worked with local newspapers in India had some dispute with his employers and left India in 1889, forever. While Bond, who returned from England has never left India, ever since and has been living in Dehradun most of the time.

Bond has been awarded with the Sahitya Academy Award for *Our Trees Still Grow in Dehra* in 1992. The Indian Council for Child Education has recognized his role in the growth of children's literature in India. He has also been felicitated with the Padma Shri in 1999 and Padma Bhushan in 2014. Kipling has been a Nobel Laureate. He was awarded this distinguished prize in 1907. And his achievement is un-parallel because he was the first recipient of this prestigious award for English-Language. That is in the field of Literature.

The stanza above is the testimony that both of them are geniuses in writing. Bond has been awarded with the highest and most prestigious award of the country and likewise Kipling has bagged an equally prestigious Nobel Prize for Literature.

Presentation of the Indian cultural Milieu.

There is one similar trait that runs through the writings of Bond and Kipling. And that is the very explicit portrayal of India in their literary works. The setting in most of their fictional works is in India that showcases the Indian culture in terms of lifestyle, the description of its places, viz the cities and villages and other aspects that constitute the Indian milieu.

Ruskin Bond to begin with. The setting of most of his writings are in Dehradun, Mussourie, Shimla and other cities known as hill stations in India. His book *The Room on the Roof* is about a sixteen year old boy named Rusty. He is an orphan and lives with his guardian, Mr. John Harrison. The little lad detests the disciplinarian ways of Mr. Harrison. They live in Dehradun in an area inhabited by Europeans and Anglo-Indians. However Rusty doesn't like the sombre ambience of this European ghetto. He strikes friendship with Somi and Ranbir and the threesome frequently hang out together riding bicycles and indulging in fun-filled pranks. Instead of the strict European culture at Mr. Harrison's place, Rusty loves the lively bazaars, the melas (fairs), and the chaat shop. Cows on the roads and the myriad of Indian Railways are a faithful representation of Indian-ness. So happy is Rusty with his two friends that he runs away from the house of Mr. Harrison.

In *Delhi is not Far*, Bond talks of a small town called Pipalnagar near Delhi. It's about friendship between two men Arun and Suraj who live in this city. All characters in the novel are Indians. The story is a very sensitive portrayal of the people living in this small city with their mundane activities. Arun has an interest of writing, but he has to do menial jobs to earn money for livelihood. So sometimes he sells vegetables or plies a taxi. He dreams of some better times when he would go to Delhi and his fortunes would change for better. He stays with his friend Suraj. And Kamla, a prostitute. This novel describes the dreams of people of a small city who wish to migrate to the nearby big city. Although in reality, nobody would make it. Similarly, *Time stops at Shamli and Other Stories* mention this small town of Shamli near Delhi. This small city is important to him as he met his first love there. It's a non-descript place yet the grace with which it is pulling on with all its challenges is narrated beautifully by Bond.

Book of Nature yet another noteworthy literary work of Bond is an anthology of his childhood in Dehradun, his encounter with the flora and fauna of this hilly areas with an extensive imagery of flowers, gardens, mountains, tigers, bats, birds et al. It is a collection of his personal experiences and a descriptive analysis of the beauty of nature. The Book has chapters titled 'Trees', 'Flowers', 'Wilderness', 'Rivers', and each of them describes the hill stations of India, foothills of Himalayas and of course Dehra. Perhaps no other Indian author has brought out the beauty of these geographical parts of India, the way Bond has. In fact he has not just narrated but celebrated the richness of Indian bio-diversity in his writings. And the characters fit

in seamlessly in the narration and it is very clear that the Indian characters are an integral part of story- telling.

In the same book, in chapter 'Civilised Wilderness' Bond talks of the city Mussorie and says;

For the past few years, here in Mussourie, I have had to live in two small rooms on the second floor of a tumbledown building which had no garden space at all. All the same, it has a number of ever-widening cracks, in which wild sorrels, dandelions, thornapples and nettles all take root and thrive. You could, I suppose, call it a wild wall-garden. Not that I am deprived of flowers. I am better-off than most city-dwellers because I have only to walk a short way out of the hill station to see (or discover) a variety of flowers in their wild state. (32)

In the same chapter under the caption 'A Wilderness in New Delhi', Bond talks of Rajouri Gardens and Najafgarh Road and says thus:

The houses were built on one side of Najafgarh Road. On the other side, as yet uncolonised, were extensive fields of wheat and other crops still belonging to the original inhabitants. In an attempt to escape the city life that constantly oppressed me, I would walk across the main road and into the fields finding old wells, irrigation channels, camels and buffaloes and singing birds and small creatures, that no longer dwelt in the city...

The note book that I kept at that time lies before me now, and my first entries describe the bluejays or rollers that was so much a feature of those remaining open spaces. (39)

There is another caption titled 'A Village in the Mountain'. Bond mentions of a village in Garhwal that he visited to stay over a couple of days at his friend Gajadhar's home.

In chapter IV, 'Foothill to Treeline', under the caption 'Trekking Up the Himalayas', says Bond, "India, still rich in flora, is nowhere so prolific as in the eastern and western Himalayas. The mountain slopes and valleys present remarkable contrasts in elevation, humidity and temperature" (89). He mentions the pleasures of trekking in this Himalayan range and mentions places like Siliguri, Darjeeling, Kangra, Kullu, Almora, Pindari Glacier, Nandprayag, Tungnath.

In the chapter 'Trees', under the caption 'Notes on my Favourite Trees', Bond writes about jackfruit, peepal, banyan, jamun, walnut, oak, pine, sal, deodhar, mahua. The trees are not only described according to the fruits they yield or their practical benefits, but the mythology associated with them is also narrated. For example he says the peepal tree is sacred to Hindus because its roots represent Brahma, its bark Vishnu and its branches Shiva. He also talks of the rituals associated with this tree. A Banyan is considered holy and a tree of wisdom as Gautama Buddha attained enlightenment under a banyan tree. There is also a mention of silk-cotton tree (semul) and also gives the folklore associated with it (135-136).

In chapter VI titled 'Flowers', we are told of oxalis or wood sorrel also known as Khattamitha. We are told of cosmos, marigolds, petunia, snapdragons, carnations, geraniums. This and the details given above are a testimony of the fact that not only has Ruskin Bond assimilated into an Indian life but has accepted India as his home. The characters in fiction are majorly Indians and presented, true to their place and circumstances.

In contrast to the Bond's representation of Indian social and cultural aspects, Kipling presents the 'Indian-ness' in rather 'lowly' manner. For example, *Kim*. The story is about an Anglo-Indian boy who is orphaned and is forced to do odd jobs to support him. During these times he meets many people like Mahbub Ali, the Lama and others and the events that take shape in the novel, apprise of the social and cultural set-up of the country. As chance would have it,

Kim is recognized by one of his late father's colleagues, who takes him along and supports him to provide a decent upbringing. However, the story is not about India or Indians but about Kim, an Anglo-Indian boy. He is the focus of the writer and all others especially the Indian characters are at the periphery only to suit the purpose of glorifying Kim.

Other of Kipling's short stories, shows the same inclination. Like *The Education of Otis Yeere*. It's about the English middle-aged women's life in the British Raj. Mrs. Hauksbee and Mrs. Mallowe are friends. The former plans to start some business in Shimla to keep her occupied. The latter suggests she develop an affair with a young man to pass the time. Upon this suggestion, she selects a young man whose name is Otis Yeere. Mrs. Hauksbee and the young man strike up a friendship and he seems to be following according to the plan as she thinks she has been able to influence him. But all her illusions are shattered when she attempts to kiss him and gets ignored. *At the Pit's Mouth* is about the wife of a man who serves in the plains and she's left behind in Shimla. She develops an extra-marital affair with a man. And their secret meeting point is at a cemetery. One day under the surge of feelings they decide to elope to Tibet on a horse. Whilst on their way, the horse is spooked, the animal and the riders fall. The man dies and is buried in the grave in the cemetery that the lovers used to meet in a clandestine manner. These are some of the examples, other stories are in the same line where the characters are all English and it's about them. Kipling talks of the British in India, not India, at least in these writings.

One of the most popular of his works is the *Jungle Book*, story of a human-cub raised in the jungle by one of the wolves. It has been adapted onto many T.V.serials in India where the protagonist Mowgli is a lovable character among children along with Sher Khan, the tiger, Bagheera, the black panther, Baloo the bear and of course Kaa the python. Interestingly, all animals have Indian names. Even the Hollywood adaptation of this book has retained the Indian names of the animal characters. *Jungle Book* is a genius of imagination woven around the Indian sensibility and the readers come to know that the forests and the animals living in them were the integral part of the Indian life. These natural habitats, jungles and the animals made India an enchanted place.

It can be said of Kipling, that he presented India in derogatory terms. This is evident from his poem, *The White Man's Burden*

Take up the White Man's burden
Send forth the best ye breed
Go; bind your sons to exile
To serve your captives need;
To wait, in heavy harness,
On fluttered folk and wild
Your new-caught sullen peoples
Half-devil and half child. (Kipling, *The White Man's Burden*)

From above lines we can make out that the poet supported imperialism. The last line of the poem reveals a lot about how Kipling viewed the colonized. He calls them half-devil. Could there be anything more humiliating than this, wherein the natives are not considered human beings at the first place? The phrase 'white man's burden' has been used by colonial critics to accentuate the vilifying of the natives, 'burden' here means the onus on the 'whites' to 'uplift' and 'educate' the colonized. And the reason they have to be uplifted and educated is because the natives were looked down as 'uncivilized' and 'lacking maturity'.

We all know that the British had a very long dominant presence in India for two hundred years, in Africa for four hundred years. It's supremacy in countries around the world had earned the epithet for them as 'The sun never sank over the British rule'. Meaning, the British had colonized so many countries that they had different time zones. And there was always day in some part of the colonial country/countries under the British colonial empire. A detailed analysis of the reasons as to how the British colonial masters managed to rule for so long and in so many countries is because they spent a great deal of studying about the colonial people and more than that they wrote a lot about the colonies but, through their own perspectives and understanding. They never made an effort to understand the cultural history and the beliefs of the natives rather they presented them as ones who were not at par with the British. The fictional writings that came from the British presented the natives as uncivilized, immature, ignorant and even barbaric. Examples would be Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* and Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*. Both the novels presented the British colonial master as a superior being and the colonized native as his inferior counterpart. And this binary positioning of the colonizer and the colonized was circulated through the writings that emanated from the English

writers to create a mythical explanation of the colonized, based on assumptions. In this way the colonial masters dominated the people not only physically but psychologically too. And this was done to authenticate their presence in the colonies and domination over the colonized.

On the above premise, the poem by Rudyard Kipling *The White Man's Burden*, was a psychological tool to make the colonized think that the British colonial presence was in fact for their own benefit, rather a much needed rule to bring about development and growth of the colony and its people. Such writings were a psychological thrust to dominate the natives, convince the natives of their inferiority and justify to the world, the British political dominance over the colonized. Literary works such as this poem by Kipling served to strengthen the political presence of the British, because it colonized the minds.

This stance is one among the many that propelled Edward Said to write *Orientalism* published in 1978. Said mentions, that the colonizers projected the colonized through the prism of their own assumptions, and not authentic study. The presentations of the colonized natives were Eurocentric which projected them as inferior. Another postcolonial theorist Homi Bhabha, talks of 'white man's burden' as psychological fall out of colonization. The reason of such long colonial dominance in so many countries was the propaganda machinery that presented the natives as base and ignorant. And this poem of Kipling served this purpose. Hence he has presented the colonized natives in a derogatory manner.

There is yet another difference between the stances taken in their writings. Ruskin Bond has never found himself in any controversy. One reason could be that he has never voiced his opinions on the political affairs of the country. Whereas Kipling has been very vocal on his political inclinations. One of his poems *Ulster* reflects his views on Unionist politics. When the First World War broke out, he wrote pamphlets supporting UK's stance on the war. He was one among the prominent British authors who signed an Author's declaration condemning Germany and that UK had to take action against them.

Conclusion

A close analysis of the works of Ruskin Bond and Rudyard Kipling prove that both writers possess excellent penmanship and are indeed gifted writers. Both have enriched English Literature through their views, imagination and narration. Both of them have been adorned with

literary awards. However, when it comes to the depiction of the Indian social and cultural milieu, they are diametrically opposed. For Kipling, the colonized people deserve to be colonized as he considers them inferior to the British colonial masters. Contrary to this, Bond's fictional and non-fictional works eulogize the Indian-ness, especially through the lifestyle of people and the many-faced Nature in hill stations. Bond deserves a Nobel Prize for this.

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