

ISSN:0976-8165



# The Criterion

AN INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL IN ENGLISH

Bi-Monthly Peer-Reviewed eJournal

**VOL. 15 ISSUE-2 APRIL 2024**

**15 YEARS OF OPEN ACCESS**

Editor-In-Chief: **Dr. Vishwanath Bite**

Managing Editor: **Dr. Madhuri Bite**

www.the-criterion.com

**Impact Factor: 8.67**

AboutUs: <http://www.the-criterion.com/about/>

Archive: <http://www.the-criterion.com/archive/>

ContactUs: <http://www.the-criterion.com/contact/>

EditorialBoard: <http://www.the-criterion.com/editorial-board/>

Submission: <http://www.the-criterion.com/submission/>

FAQ: <http://www.the-criterion.com/fa/>



ISSN 2278-9529

**Galaxy: International Multidisciplinary Research Journal**  
[www.galaxyimrj.com](http://www.galaxyimrj.com)

## **Aesthetic Awareness in the Selected Short Stories of Manoj Das and Ruskin Bond**

**Pratikshya Mohanty**

Ph.D. Research Scholar,

C. V. Raman Global University.

<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.11105945>

**Article History:** Submitted-02/04/2024, Revised-14/04/2024, Accepted-18/04/2024, Published-30/04/2024.

### **Abstract:**

The present paper aims to analyze critically, some widely read short stories by Manoj Das and Ruskin Bond in the light of Aesthetics. These writers have immense admiration for Indian culture, atmosphere as well as the emotion and reactions of people of those rustic places. India is widely recognized for its Aestheticism and that is reflected in writings of both these authors. Many writers from various countries have discussed this thematic aspect, but Das and Bond's approaches are distinct. Here I have taken into account Das's two stories: *Mystery of the Missing Cap* and *Catching a Thief*; Bond's *Mathura's Hallowed Haunts* and *Thus Spoke Crow*. These four stories of both the story-tellers focus on the creativeness and artistry of India, its architecture, sculpture, beauty and emotions of its people through various literary devices.

**Keywords:** Aesthetic awareness, literary devices, imagery, symbolism, irony, personification.

### **Introduction**

In Indian literature there are many genres of writing and short story has claimed a special place. Starting from oral stories told by grandparents to their grandchildren, it has evolved a lot till date. The earlier Indian-English short story history has works like *Jataka Tales* and *Panchatantra*. However, this genre bloomed towards the end of nineteenth century as Kamala Sathianandan published the book *Stories from Indian Christian Life* (1898). After that came K.S. Venkataramani's *Paper Boats* and *Jatadharana and Other Stories* as collections of short stories. Towards middle of twentieth century the land produced many excellent short story writers like Mulk Raj Anand, R.K. Narayan, Raja Rao, Khushwant Singh, Manjeri Isvaran, Ruth Praver Jhabvala and others. The trio including Mulk Raj Anand, Raja Rao and R.K. Narayan is considered as the pioneer of Indian short story. Though these above-mentioned names

are renowned, yet there are many more writers, who have contributed to this field of writing. There were K.A. Abbas, G.D. Khosla, Bhabani Bhattacharya, Bunny Reuben, Chaman Nahal, Purasu Balakrishnan and others. No matter how well known they are, there are two such literary figures, who are par-excellence and they are Manoj Das and Ruskin Bond. A.N. Dwivedi in his book *Indian Writing in English*, appreciating both Das and Bond writes, “Ruskin Bond and Manoj Das are, no doubt, the redeeming figures for contemporary Indian English short story” (Dwivedi, 135). Similarly, many writers from India as well as foreign countries, belonging to the field of short story have dealt with the concept of Aesthetic. As Abrams’s *A Glossary of Literary Terms* suggests, “Aesthetics designates the systematic study of all the fine arts, as well as of the nature of beauty in any object, whether natural or artificial” (Abrams, 4). Starting from the use of poetic devices to expressing emotions as well as appreciating the creativity all come under the study of Aesthetics. Indian-English writers like Vikram Seth, Amitabh Ghosh, Anita Desai, Arundhati Roy mostly use literary devices symbols, imageries in their writings to express all the emotions and love, but Manoj Das (1934-2021) and Ruskin Bond (1934- ) have a significant place here. They are associated with India and so with its every bit. Both of them have written a number of collections of stories and many of which present this concept of Aesthetics. Starting from the use of poetic devices to displaying emotions as well as appreciating the creativity all come under the study of Aesthetics. Both have made their works rich with critical reflection on art, culture and nature of India, specially focusing of the rural regions. They lack nowhere in presenting the natural beauty of India and mostly its countryside. Starting from river, mountain, jungle to simple basket selling girls and ancient history of India in everything they find beauty and glorify them. Both being true sons of Indian soil represent these beauties quite authentically by using various literary devices those come under Aesthetics. These devices are like simile, metaphor, irony, symbolism, imagery, personification and so on. Not only do they describe the beauty explicitly but also glorifies the creativeness of music, dancing and literature. The book *Indian Aesthetics* quotes Kapila Vatsyayan in its second chapter who says,

Classical Indian architecture, sculpture, painting, literature (kavya), and dancing evolved their own rules conditioned by their respective media, but they shared with one another not only the underlying spiritual belief of the Indian religio-philosophic mind,

but also the procedures by which the relationships of the symbol and the spiritual states were worked out in detail (Indian Aesthetics).

In the selected short stories of both these Indian-English writers we find a lot of descriptions about natural beauty and usage of figures of speech like simile, metaphor, irony, pathos, personification, imagery and symbols that relate to Indian landscape as well as reflect Indian lives.

### **Literature Review**

Monika Jaiswal (2019) in her article throws light on Manoj Das's treatment of India. How Das in his books focuses on various aspects, which are particularly found in Indian scenario and these ideas make them unique.

According to Mahendra Kumar Bhoi (2018) the techniques and methods used in the stories of Manoj Das are unique and narrative is either in first person or omniscient author. Giving descriptions of Observer-Author point of view and Omniscient-Author point of view, he surveys Das's stories.

The article by Santosh Kumar Nayak (2019) shows the psychological perspective of Manoj Das's characters. Keeping in mind all these stories, Nayak examines these concepts and finds out a relationship between literature and philosophy as shown in such works of Das.

Diya Panjwani (2020)'s article on Ruskin Bond reflects the by gone migration days of Bond. Her thematic exploration is Bond's idea of home, identity, Anglo-Indian, ambition, love for adventure, insecurity, nostalgia and cultural conflict. The pain and struggle Bond's protagonist Rusty goes through, shows his own suffering of his early days.

As per the view of Manoram Sen (2019) about Ruskin Bond's treatment of ecocriticism in his short stories is to create environmental concern. Taking into consideration Bond's stories she describes the loss in our natural resources and how it is caused by humans.

In Prafulla Kumar Sahoo (2014)'s view, Bond has taken up Indian-English writing to a different height through his child characters and stories. To examine Bond's child characters, Sahoo chooses stories along with that the fantasy, dream and love for nature those characters have, are all expressed here.

### **Four Stories of Bond and Das**

Both Manoj Das and Ruskin Bond appreciate the creative and aesthetic elements of India. Indian sculpture, emotion, architecture etc. and express them by using various literary device. In Das's works we very often find metaphors and similes, whereas in the writings of Bond we have instances of imagery. Most of their works do the same. They brought the past days back through imagery and imagination. The first story of Das *Mystery of the Missing Cap* begins with a picture of two leading characters, Sri Moharana, a well-established villager and Babu Virkishore, a minister. A meeting is held for the minister and this enthusiasm for the event creates various new incidents in the village. All the villagers get engaged in the preparation for that meeting. Primary school children practice a welcome song, Sri Moharana gives up his habit of taking a nap in afternoon, the school head-pundit composes that welcome song without having any poetic activity since birth. On the day of minister's arrival, everyone gets excited, females of the village blow their conch-shells to welcome him, half-dressed village kids walk parallel with the minister, minister is served with the most luxurious lunch and a separate room has been prepared for him. However, the celebration comes to a pause as the minister's cap gets disappeared. Only the narrator knows that the village monkey Jhandu has taken it away. Everywhere curiosity spreads and villagers get afraid of the consequence of the cap's disappearing. To control the situation, Moharana spends one hundred rupees. He says that one admirer of Babu Virkishore has secretly given this amount of money only to keep the minister's cap as a memento. Babu Virkishore gets delighted to know this this and starts exaggerating himself. Towards the end of the story, truth is revealed. When the minister is about to bid farewell to all the villagers, the naughty monkey comes and keeps the cap beside the minister. The minister asks Sri Moharana whether this is the admirer and nervously Moharana says yes. The story ends here, but the speaker says that this incident spoiled Sri Moharana's dream of becoming a minister, because Babu Virkishore got upset.

Next story of Das is *Catching a Thief*, which is fabricated during a time of draught spread in a certain village. There is no sign of food left and even birds have stopped coming as the trees have nothing to feed them. The village is economically destroyed and people are begging for food. The village Mahasaya (landlord) offers our protagonist Raghunath a bag full of rice and he feels like getting nectar. Landlord gives only one or two bags of rice, but in return takes one acre of field. One bag of grain is so

precious for the villagers that they give away their lands. Raghunath, as the speaker says, hasn't seen such amount of rice since a year and this one bag comes as a life-saver for his family. His married daughter Annapurna and her son come to have a meal in his house and when she returns, Raghunath gives him some rice for her family. He couldn't give her much, because his own family was starving and his son was sick. Anu prepared a curry of wild herbs and leaves, which she collected by spending whole morning. After a long gap they enjoyed a satisfactory meal. Needless to say, Anu was not at all happy with the amount of rice her father gave for her family, which includes her good-for-nothing husband, children and herself. After having lunch at her father's house, she returned home teary-eyed, because she couldn't get enough of rice for her family. She couldn't, but took a wrong step. At night she came to steal some rice from her father's house. The villagers couldn't recognize her in darkness of night and thought her to be a thief and beats her brutally. Only Raghunath realizes that it is his daughter. When all the villagers leave, Raghunath and Anu both cry on their fates. Here the writer wants to display the deplorable condition of villagers, their agony, helplessness, hunger. The irony of such poor people can create a sense of compassion among the readers. Das as a boy from rural coastal area of Odisha has many a time experienced natural calamities and thus knows the pain it leaves behind. That is why his narration of such things are authentically presented in his writings.

Ruskin Bond writes in a vein that is quite similar to Das's. Bond presents the real India with its beauty in every form. In his travel story Mathura's Hallowed Haunts, he shows the beautiful events of Lord Krishna in Mathura, Mathura's ancient history and significance. In the beginning he narrates the relationship of lord with the age-old place Mathura. Then the narrator gives many accounts of his own experience of that place. There are numerous birds like king-crow, doves in blue and green colour, kingfisher, kite, bluejays, parrots of green and golden colour. Similarly, in ponds there are wid duck, herbit, crane and snipe. The city stands like a symbol of Indian mythology. The mythological characters Krishna and Balaram are well-known in every household of India, their mischief and magic have captured the mind and heart of each and everyone. The rivers, forests, ancient palace, trees, birds, everything suggests their presence. The story highlights how Krishna once steals butter from his neighbourhood and hides himself in a jar. When the owner sees and comes with that jar to complain to Krishna's father, finds Krishna at his home. Like that once Krishna's mother sees the

whole universe instead of curd in his mouth. Another incident regarding Balaram is also narrated here. Once Balaram gets angry with river Yamuna and drags it in a different direction with his plough. Story about cruel king Kamsa is presented here. To kill these young boys, he sent elephant and then his wrestlers, but Krishna and Balaram defeated all. Apart from hearing these stories, the speaker gets to see the throne of Kamsa, heaps of pedas in shops and many temples that reflect the spiritual bent of mind of that place.

Another story by Bond is Thus Spoke Crow that shows how a mere bird feels for a human being and appears to cheer him up and give him some suggestions regarding life. At the beginning the speaker says that it is evening time of a summer season and clouds are gathered over the mountain as if to form a storm. The speaker comes and asks about the speaker's well-being and wishes to do something good for him. When he says that it has nothing to do with the bird, it says that in life one can never say who is helpful for whom. After so much insist by the bird, the speaker lets him know about his mental breakdown. But the bird advises that there is nothing in human life to be worried about. It claims that in one of its incarnations, it was a human and used to be in companion of Chang-tzu, Epictetus, Saul of Tarsus and Kashyapa. As he once got involved in politics, he got born as a crow. He goes on admiring the intelligence and ability of crows, because they know how to take advantage of everything. He makes the narrator aware of the fact that humans expect too much and wishes to get more success from the beginning. In between his conversation with the narrator, he eats the remaining part of sandwich from his hand and takes a sip from the speaker's beer-mug. After all these advices and suggestions, he flew away saying that crows are nature's greatest survivors.

### **Aesthetics in Bond and Das**

Both Manoj Das and Ruskin Bond are true admirers of nature and beauty. In almost all of their writings, they have expressed several forms of beauty that is available in India, especially in rural landscape, river, forest, mountains, people, culture, spirituality and others. Both have seen these things from the very beginning of their lives and those experiences and enjoyments have been reflected in their works through comparison, imagination, symbolism, literary devices like simile, metaphor, personification, transferred epithet. The struggle, pathos and humour of Indian people have taken their place in their works and made the readers feel the pain too. Similarly,

the happy and joyous incidents mentioned there are much appreciated by readers and critics. As Mukalel writes, “Small-town people, their sentiments and simplicities attracted and appealed to him most and they in fact brought out the true writer in Ruskin Bond. He seems to possess a third eye to see the extraordinary in the ordinary” (Mukalel, 29). Starting with Bond’s story Mathura’s Hallowed Haunts, we witness many descriptions of beauty of Mathura using symbols. When the speaker visits that place, he finds a lot of things that stand for Indian mythology. Seeing them, the narrator recollects memory regarding Lord Krishna and Balaram. As a tourist he first he finds many beautiful yet strange birds of various colours and looks. The green and gold parrots remind him of Kamadev, the God of love and in the wheels of Mathura, there are water-birds. Finding attractive peacocks, he remembers that because of these creatures, Mathura is also called the Peacock city. To present the beauty of these birds, Bond artistically writes, “The peacocks seem to know that they are the chosen of Krishna. Spreading out their many-hued fantails, they glance at us” (Bond, 237). To present interesting ancient folk tales about Krishna and Balaram, he chooses incidents like stealing of curd. Once when the former one had eaten curd secretly, his mother came to check his mouth. To her utter surprise, she found the universe, the sun, the earth, the moon, all the planets, all the stars in his mouth. Another event about Balaram is of similar fantasy as he changed the shape of river Yamuna. Here the river has been personified to express emotion. The incident goes like this, the river was very fond of Krishna and once when Balaram was dancing on its bank, she commented on his weird dance. The speaker says it in this way,

Balaram, who was very strong, once led a dance on the Yamuna’s bank, but moved his giant limbs so clumsily that the river laughed aloud and taunted him, saying: ‘Enough, my clumsy child! How can you hope to dance as Krishna, who is divine? Balaram was very angry with the river, and taking his great plough he traced a furrow from the brink of the river; but so deep was the furrow that the river fell into it and was led far astray (Bond, 237).

This narration of beauty through creativity is mostly found in Bond. His speaker roams around the city of Mathura and finds beauty in every ordinary thing like river, throne of Kamsa, birds, tortoise, shops, sweets and many more. Through such pictures and highlighting of things Bond represents aestheticism of India. Neither does his



speaker visit any museum nor any luxurious place, yet the best of Mathura is in front of us.

Next story *Thus Spoke Crow* is all about a conversation between a human being and a bird. Using personification Bond conveys his view to a man through a crow. That bird sees beauty in human life. Being a human, protagonist complains of his life and luck, but that crow gives him advices and suggestions of life. How crows adapt themselves with every situation and happening is described by that little creature. Description of beauty starts from the very beginning of the story as the narrator throws light of the scenic beauty of sky above mountains. According to that crow, humans expect a lot and want to achieve more success in first attempt and ultimately when they fail, it hurts them. Bond, attributing a person's nature to the bird, writes that the bird drinks beer from the speaker's beer-mug. When finally, the speaker asks him, why is he interested in humans rather than his fellow birds, the crow gives an unpleasant reaction. '...If you'd taken the trouble to study crows, you'd have learnt something from them. Survival. Independence. Freedom from stress'. He took another sip of beer. 'No writer worth his salt can afford to ignore us. We are nature's greatest survivors!' (Bond, 203).

Bond explains how important every creature is and how immensely they make the world an interesting place through this piece of writing. He makes the bird feel for a human and establishes a bond between these two. whereas in the writings of Bond we have instances of imagery. As Bhutani (2021) says, "his (Bond's) melancholic childhood memory made him understand the children better and brought him closer to nature" (Bhutani).

Similar sense of appreciation for art and beauty is prominent in Das's works too. As a form of Aesthetic writing, in Das's stories we find a lot of use of simile, metaphor and irony of life in truest way. Considering his story *Mystery of the Missing Cap* we find the evidences in this regard. The story focuses mainly on two characters; Shri Moharana and Babu Virkishore in the early post-independent era. Throughout the story we find incidents related to minister Babu Virkishore's welcome to Shri Moharana's village. First example of symbolism used there, comes from the scene regarding Moharana's house. His house was the only pukka house in his locality and therefore stands as an example of modernity and freedom after independence.

His was the only pukka house in an area of twenty villages. Whitewashed on the eve of India achieving independence, the house shone as a sort of tourist attraction for the folks of the nearby villages. They stopped to look at it, for none could overlook the symbolism in this operation that had been carried out after a century (Das, 1).

As India was under British rule and had been tortured for long, this beautiful house showed up as a success and happiness and symbolized that long-craved freedom. People of that area couldn't resist that artistic beauty. Next there are many similes and metaphors used to exaggerate the power and position of the minister. As it says, with his coming, it is said that, the sun blushes and birds start to sing. Das here uses simile to narrate Moharana's feelings when Virkishore puts his hand around former's neck. "And I still remember the look of Shri Moharana when the minister's long round arm rested on his shrunken neck, a look which I have seen only once or twice on the faces of dying people who have lived a contented and complete life" (Das, 3). When the wicked monkey Jhandu steals the minister's cap, everyone is fear-stricken and Moharana manages the situation by lying to everyone. He says that a noble villager has taken it in exchange of one hundred and one rupees to honour the minister's cap. Unluckily Jhanu brings that cap to minister's sight and every secret is revealed and here lies the irony. Both of Das's characters start weeping and the villagers think it is tear of separation. All these are clear reflections of life with all its flaws as well as amazements. Firstly, everyone is found happy and excited, but then there comes the twist and irony plays its role.

Second story *Catching a Thief* too portrays the irony of human fate. The story is based on a draught scenario and its impact on a village, how people are starving and doing anything and everything for food. Our protagonist Raghunath, his family, his daughter Annapurna and her family, all are in urgent need of food. One day when Raghunath finally finds a sack of rice from the landlord in exchange of one acre of field, his family eats a contented meal after long. He gives his daughter Annapurna some rice for her husband and children, but that is not enough and she wants more. In order to have more of it she comes in the darkness of night to steal some. She is beaten by the villagers, who think her a thief. When they all left, both Raghunath and Annapurna cry for their tragedy. Her parents had named her Annapurna, which means the goddess of abundant. Das uses irony in this way,

How much dream was there behind naming the girl as Annapurna, meaning the bountiful goddess! ... Then Raghunath, raising an earthen lamp, asked in a frightened voice, “Did you leave your child at your home and come again all the way alone in this rainy night?” Anu fell down, trembling, at his feet. There was blood on her back. Raghunath too sat down, weeping. This was once his sweet cherub, Anu, whose full name was Annapurna (Das, 23-24).

### **Conclusion**

All four stories are different in theme, structure, location, character and presentation, but the only thing that is similar among them is their Aesthetic approach. In almost all of their writings, they have mentioned every beautiful element such as river, mountain, rural landscape, its culture, spirituality and so on. Both have seen these things and experienced all of them. Those experiences have been expressed through appreciation of art and beauty in their artistic way of writing. In the first story recollects Indian mythology and its beautiful instances found in Mathura. The second story displays beauty of human life as well as in the life of crows. Though it is a little creature, still it gives life’s lesson to the speaker. Likewise, Das in his stories highlights India in its true colour. The social and political issues of the then time are presented by using various literary devices. Through this true picturization, one can get the idea of finding beauty in every available objective of this world. These two writers create concern among their readers by such writings. They give the message that beauty can be found in every ordinary place and thing and not in museums or palaces like places only.

### **Works Cited:**

#### **Primary Sources:**

Abrams, M.H., and Harpham, Geoffrey Galt. *A Glossary of Literary Terms*. 10th ed., p. 4.

Bond, Ruskin. *The Best of Ruskin Bond*, Penguin Random House India.

Bhutani, Anchal. “Ruskin Bond – A Man of Imagination”. Vol. 8. No. 3. Aug 2021.

Das, Manoj. *Mystery of the Missing Cap and Other Stories*, Sahitya Akademi, New

Delhi. 2018.

Dwivedi, A.N., *Indian Writings in English*. Published by M.S. Juneja, Lawrence Road, Delhi. p. 135.

*Indian Aesthetics*, EIILM University, Sikkim.

*Literary Criticism: A Reading*, edited by B.B. Das, and Jatindra Mohan Mohanty. OUP, New Delhi, India. p. 191.

Mukalel, Benny M.J. Joseph, *Vistas (A Study on the early writings of Ruskin Bond)*. 1st ed. 2013.

**Secondary Sources:**

Bhoi, Mahendra Kumar. "Narrative Techniques in the Stories of Manoj Das". Vol. 6. No. 4. April 2018.

Jaiswal, Monika. "Quintessence of Indianness in the fiction of Manoj Das". Vol. 7. No. 4. 2019.

Nayak, Santosh Kumar. "Manoj Das: An Incredible Bridge between Literature and Philosophy". Vol. 3. No. 4. 2019.

Panjwani, Diya. "Recollecting the Migration Memories of Ruskin Bond". Vol. 7. No. 5. 2020.

Sahoo, Prafulla Kumar. "Treatment of the Child in the Short Stories of Ruskin Bond". Vol. 2. No. 1. Feb 2014.

Sen, Monaram. "An Ecocritical Exploration of Ruskin Bond's Selected Short Stories". Vol. 7. No. 1. 2019.