

**THE MANIFESTATION OF NORTH INDIA IN SELECT NOVELS OF RUSKIN
BOND****Mr. Yatharth N. Vaidya (M.A., M.Phil.)***Lecturer in English, Sir B.P.T.I., Bhavnagar.***Abstract**

The present research paper proposes to study the most acknowledged Indian writer, Ruskin Bond, for his unique representation of North India. If the credit to portray South India goes to R. K. Narayan, Ruskin Bond takes the credit for North India. Ruskin Bond is true Indian in very sense of portrayal of North India with all the aspects. Ruskin Bond, himself, has said, "I am as Indian as the dust of plains or the grass of a mountain meadow." (Bond, VII – IX). The paper aims at studying his style of portrayal of North India and his keen observations of North Indian elements.

The researcher has taken into account select fictions of Ruskin Bond to ponder his love for India. The researcher proposes to study the social, cultural, economic and geographical image of North India in the novels. This paper revolves around the concept of Race, Milieu, and Moment of Ruskin Bond and the reciprocal effect of North India on his Psyche.

The 'Novel' was originated in England during 18th century by *Samuel Richardson*. Compared to other forms of literature the novel is modern. Within short span it became famous in many countries. The novel is a long narrative containing a great variety of characters, and complicated plot construction. The form has wider scope than the other forms of literature. The novelist is free to make detailed exploration of characters or his own thoughts and sentiments.

The term novel is now applied to a great variety of writings that have in common only the attribute of being extended works of prose *fiction*. As an extended narrative, the novel is distinguished from the *short story* and from the work of middle length called the "novelette"; its magnitude permits a greater variety of characters, greater complication of plot (or plots), an ampler development of milieu, and more sustained and subtle exploration of character than

do the shorter, hence necessarily more concentrated , modes.

(Abraham, 110)

In India the form made its way in the later 19th century. The first novel appeared in India is Raj Mohan's wife by *Bankim Chandra Chatterjee* in 1864. The other forms of literature already have their deep roots in India but this new form soon finds root and settled.

“The ‘novel’ as a literary phenomenon is new to India. Epics, lyrics, dramas, short stories, and fables have their respectable ancestries, going back by several centuries, but it is only during a period of little more than a century that the novel- the long sustained piece of prose fiction- has occurred and taken root in India.” (Iyengar, 314)

In the hands of Indian novelists the form soon became popular and novels started to be published in many Indian languages including English. As soon as the 20th century begins, we observe that the novel flourishes to greater out come. *Rabindranath Tagore* emerges as notable novelist during the first decade of the 20th century. The other well known novelists, whose contribution is remarkable during the pre-independence period, are *Mulk Raj Anand* and *R.K. Narayan*. The former reflects the evils of Indian society; the latter describes the life of the people of south India. After independence the ‘novel’ undergoes a change in themes and outlook. The writers like *Bhabani Bhattacharya*, *Manohar Malgonkar*, *Kamala Markandaya*, *R.P. Jhabvala* and *Anita Desai* are engaged in their literary creation during this period. *Ruskin Bond* appeared in the field of Indian novel in 1956 with his *The Room on the Roof* and won the *John Llewellyn Rhys Memorial prize* in 1957. Generally, *Ruskin Bond* is considered as the writer of short stories but he has left behind four novels besides *The Room on the Roof*, The other novels are *Vagrants in the Valley*, *Delhi is not Far*, *A flight of Pigeons* and *The Sensualist*. His novels are like travelogues and full of autobiographical elements. *Ruskin Bond* is also labeled ‘a regional novelist’ as he always discusses about a particular region and locality i.e. north India. In this case he resembles *Thomas Hardy* who always writes about a particular region “Wessex”, and *R.K Narayan* who always writes about an imagined town of south India “Malgudi”. In his novels *Bond* describes the setting, speech, and customs of north India.

The Room on the Roof was written by *Ruskin Bond* when he temporarily shifted to Channel Islands in 1951. *Ruskin Bond* traveled physically to Channel Islands but his mind and soul remained in India. He nostalgically remembered people and places of India that he

had known and loved. In this emotional exile Bond felt like expressing the emotions in a novel form. He converted the ideas that he had collected in the diary earlier. Thus the novel *The Room on the Roof* got its birth. The novel centers around Rusty, the persona for Bond himself and his belongingness to India. The novel looks very subjective and autobiographical in details.

Rusty, who is a person of double inheritance like Ruskin Bond, is brought up in Dehra by his British guardian Mr. Harrison. The pages at the outset describe Dehradun of 1950's. After India's independence most of the British people had gone back to their native country but few people like Mr. Harrison stayed on because of their physical and financial compulsions. There were clear differences in the European community and the Indian community in Dehradun at that time.

Mr John Harrison's house, and the other houses, were all built in an English style, with neat front gardens and name plates on the gates. The surroundings on the whole were so English that the people often found it difficult to believe that they did live at the foot of the Himalayas, surrounded by India's thickest jungles. India started a mile away where the bazaar began. (Bond, 552)

The difference is not only conveyed in terms of houses and locality but also in the mind set of the two communities. The European community of Dehra comprises of strict and callous people like Mr Harrison who communicates the image of dominating colonizers. Whereas Indians portrayed in the in the novel like Somi, Kishen, Meena Kapoor and Ranbir are friendly and open minded. It is not that the limitations of Indian characters are not shown. Mr Kapoor and Suri are described as having lot of weaknesses, but even then one can not but notice the gentler satire used for the Indian people in comparison to the criticism of Mr Harrison.

John Harrison believes in the superiority of the British people over the Indian society. He believes in having the last say. He does not encourage questions. As Bond writes, "Mr Harrison did not reply. He seldom answered the boy's questions, and his own were stated, not asked; he probed and suggested, sharply, quickly, without ever encouraging loose conversation. He never talked about himself, he never argued: he would tolerate no argument."(551)

The way Indian bazaar is described, brings lively action in the novel. The Indian bazaar starts with a clock tower without the clock which indicates 'timelessness' of India. The noise and confusion of the Indian bazaar stands in sharp contrast to the clock tower without the clock. The road was hot and close, alive with cries of vendors and the smell of cattle and ripening dung. Children played hopscotch in alleyways or gambled with coins, scuffling in the gutter for a lost anna. And the cows move leisurely through the crowd, noising around for paper and stale, discarded vegetables; the more daring cows helping themselves at open stalls. And above the uneven tempo of the noise came the blare of a loud speaker playing a popular piece of music.

Rusty moved along with the crowd, fascinated by the sight of beggars lying on the road side: naked and emaciated half-humans, some skeletons, some covered with sores; old men dying, children dying, mothers with suckling babies, living and dying.(Bond, 555-556)

Although, the description of the Dehra bazaar conveys confusion but Ruskin Bond like Rusty is 'distrustful of anything smart and sophisticated'. (555) The way Bond describes the Indian Bazaar shows his knowledge of small town Indian bazaar. Bond goes on to describe the community of the beggars which is 'a natural growth' in the bazaar. There are different shops selling green and wet vegetables, fruit, tea, betel leaf and colourful trinkets. The use of the word 'leisurely' for the Indian bazaar reemphasizes the timelessness in Indian society.

Rusty's crossing the European community defiantly becomes a symbol of writer's growing affinity with the Indian locality of Dehradun. The way nature is described at the start of the chapter also indicates the new beginning of life for Rusty, "It was a cold morning, sharp and fresh. It was quiet until the sun came shooting over the hills, lifting the mist from the valley." (Bond, 554) Affiliation of Rusty with the Indian people starts with his ride on Somi's bicycle. When both Somi and Rusty fall down; Rusty experiences for the first time the odour and dirt of the Indian bazaar.

Accustomed as Rusty was to the delicate scents of the missionary's wife's sweet-peas and the occasional smell of bathroom disinfectant, he was nevertheless overpowered by the odour of bad vegetables and kitchen water that rose from the gutter.

‘What the hell do you think you’re doing?’ he cried, choking and spluttering.

‘Hallo’, said Somi, gripping Rusty by the arm and helping him up, ‘so sorry, not my fault. Anyway, we meet again!’(Bond, 556)

It does not remain ambiguous to the reader that Bond tries to communicate that dirt and squalor of the Indian bazaar are much preferable to the mental dirt and snobbishness of the European people who preferred to live in clean and neat houses.

After the Indian bazaar the, another stage of Rusty’s baptism into Indianness is the episode of the chaat-shop which sales north Indian delicacies like the *aloo tikkees*, *aloo chaats* and *gol gappas*.

At first nothing could be made out; then gradually the smoke seemed to clear and there in front of the boys, like some shining god, sat a man enveloped in rolls of glistening, oily flesh. In front of him, on a coal fire, was a massive pan in which sizzled a sea of fat; and with deft, practised (sic) fingers, he moulded and flipped potato cakes in and out of the pan. The shop was crowded; but so thick was the screen of smoke and steam, that it was only the murmur of conversation which made known the presence of many people. (557)

Here Bond is able to describe the typical north Indian chaat shop in all details. Even the manner of the service provided at these chaat shops is captured minutely.

“A plate of banana leaves was thrust into Rusty’s hands, and two fried cakes suddenly appeared in it” (557)

Typical north Indian food comprises of *aloo chaat*, *aloo tikkee*, *jelibi*, *gol-guppa*, *rabari*. An item like *aloo tikkees* which is hot and spicy tastes normal to a north Indian but to a European it may create disorder in stomach.

‘Eat!’ said Somi, pressing the novice down until they were both seated on the floor, their backs to the wall.

‘They are tikkees’, explained Somi, ‘tell me if you like them.’

Rusty tasted a bit. It was hot. He waited a minute, and then tasted another bit. It was still hot but in a different way; now it was lively, interesting; it had a different taste from

anything he had eaten before. Suspicious but inquisitive, he finished the tikkee and waited to see if anything would happen.

‘Have you had it before?’ asked Somi.

‘No,’ said Rusty anxiously, ‘What will it do?’

‘It might worry your stomach a little at first, but you will get used to it the more often you eat. So finish the other one too’. (Bond, 557-558)

After describing the difference between the European community and the Indian community of Dehra Bond describes the Indian boy Somi whose appearance becomes a foil to Rusty’s look.

Somi wore a cotton tunic and shorts, and sat cross-legged, his feet pressed against his thighs. His skin was a golden brown, dark on his legs and arms but fair, very fair, where his shirt lay open. His hands were dirty, but eloquent. His eyes, deep brown and dreamy, had depth and roundness. (558)

The third phase of Rusty’s transformation into an Indian is marked by Holi.

In Room on the Roof Bond portrays the festival of Holi which is very famous in Hindu community of North India. Holi is the festival of colour. This is the day, on which people celebrate the coming of spring by throwing colours on each other and shout and sing in order to forget their misery. Bond also mentions the significance of the festival of Holi, as Ranbir who invites Rusty to play Holi with him says, “You do not know about Holi! It is the Hindu festival of colours! It is the day on which we celebrate the coming of spring, when we throw colours on each other and shout and sing and forget our misery, for the colours mean the rebirth of spring and a new life in our hearts... You do not know of it!”(561)

As the festival is of Hindus, many people celebrate this festival with different names and at different times, Hindus burn cow dung and wooden pieces calling it the festival of Holi, but Sikhs celebrate this festival in January with the name of Lohri. There are many myths associated with this festival, but the original purpose of this festival is to make people forget class and caste. As in a camp fire, people tend to socialize, similarly, during Holi; people forget the ‘social sophistication’ and freely mix with other people. Perhaps, the rich virtue of India, having ‘unity in diversity’ is maintained and strengthened by such festivals. The cultural and social image of north India, celebrating these festivals stands as a microcosm of the macrocosm.

It is interesting to note that people in India relate each festival with nature and worship nature in all forms. Bond describes in *The Room on the Roof* how people enjoy the festival. Children and young men of the town form groups, well- equipped with stock of colours. They also use bicycle pumps and bamboo stems and squirted liquid colours. Children come out of their homes the whole day, shouting and making noise in the streets. Generally, if anybody does not come out of his house to play Holi, his friends reach his house and try to make him play Holi by any means. As Bond mentions:

“Suri is hiding” cried someone. “He has locked himself in house and won’t play Holi!”(568)

This day people forget their homes, work and all problems of life as Rusty who also forgets at least for one day his guardian and his home. Thus, Bond describes the significance, purpose and the way of celebration minutely in this novel. His description is quite realistic and interesting. The festival of Holi transforms Rusty as a complete Indian. When he reaches home very late after playing Holi with Ranbir and other Indian boys, Mr Harrison is terribly angry seeing the appearance of Rusty. Displeased with Rusty’s behavior Mr Harrison beats him but to his greater surprise, Rusty, who is now no more a little boy, counter attacks by hitting Mr Harrison a vase violently till he is brought to his senses by the missionary’s wife. Finally, Rusty escapes forever from the British community and transforms himself into an Indian completely.

After that Rusty meets Somi, Ranbir and Kishen and develops friendship with them. Somi takes Rusty to his home where Rusty finds comfort and meets Somi’s kind hearted mother. The family of Somi is from Sikh community. It belongs to Panjab, the homeland for Sikhs. After the partition, the state of Panjab was divided between India and Pakistan. As a result of this partition some part of the state went to Pakistan. The Sikh and Sindhi communities had to migrate to India. Somi’s family is one of these migrant families. Now Somi’s father is at Delhi where he has found work there. Somi lives with his mother at Dehra. Unlike his contemporaries, Bond does not lament the aftermath of partition, but instead portrays the resilience and ‘never say die’ spirit of the Sikh community. Thus the same theme finds different treatment and message in the works of Indian English writers.

Bond, like *Mulk Raj Anand* describes the social stigma of untouchability in *The Room on the Roof*. He shows the problem of untouchability through the description of the sweeper boy who belongs to a low caste untouchable family. Rusty is not allowed to play with him

because the sweeper boy is an *untouchable*. The missionary's wife explains: "Even if you were an Indian, my child, you would not be allowed to play with the sweeper boy" (551)

The above statement of missionary's wife clearly indicates the class barriers among the people of India. The people, who belong to lower caste, are treated as untouchables. People of upper class do not want to include these untouchables in the main stream. Although Bond does not hide the deplorable concept of untouchability, it must be observed that the concept of untouchability has more to do with the age, than with the nationality. If Bond had to criticize the Indian society then, he would not have shown racial bias from the European community also. The fact that Rusty disagrees with the notion of untouchability proves the point.

Bond then describes Somi's house which is small and covered by a crimson bougainvillea. This symbolizes peace and rest where Rusty is able to sleep for a long time. Bond's description of the house of Somi gives us some idea of the socio-religious nature of a north Indian house:

The room was cool and spacious, and had very little furniture. But on the walls were many pictures, and in the centre a large one of Guru Nanak, the founder of the Sikh religion: his body bare, the saint sat with his legs crossed and the palms of his hands touching in prayer, and on his face there was a serene expression. (579-80)

From this description we conclude that Somi's house is of a middle class family and has a religious atmosphere. Somi symbolizes most of the north Indian community which is friendly and informal. Rusty knows that thanking Somi for his hospitality is of no use as 'gratitude is taken for granted' in such community.

People, in small town north India, do not feel shy of bathing in public. Rusty feels very hesitant to bath at the public water tank, but Somi pulls him under the tap and icy cold water does the rest. Somi also finds out a job for Rusty as a tutor of English, which promises him no pay, but food and shelter. Rusty agrees to Somi's proposal of teaching Kishen Kapoor English.

Many Indian people, especially the north Indian people worship cow as a holy animal. People give food to cows regularly and apply 'tika' on the forehead of the cow. Hindu scriptures also advocate the worship of the cow. Sometimes this attitude of the people pampers sturdy cows and they invade the bazaar at their will. The portrayal of Maharani in the novel gives the readers an idea how a cow can turn wild and demolish the bazaar.

In the course of the novel, Bond writes about the favourite sport of the north Indian people. For urban India, cricket may have been the religion, but wrestling still remains favourite sport in small town north India. In many towns of north India, there are 'akharas' which teach the ancient art of Indian wrestling. In such 'akharas', people wrestle in mud. They massage oil on their body before starting a fight. Bond writes about Ranbir in the novel who is good at wrestling and riding buffaloes, both the sports which require physical stamina, "Ranbir wrestled. That was why he was so good at riding buffaloes. He was the best wrestler in the bazaar; not very clever, but powerful; he was like a great tree, and no amount of shaking could move him from whatever spot he chose to plant his big feet." (588)

Indian small town of 1950s had very few theatres. Generally English comedies were shown. Bond writes about one such theatre of Dehra. One had to fight to get into this cinema. There was no organized queuing or booking. People went into the theatre with umbrellas because the roof leaked. People also carried food with them because they knew about long breaks which occurred due to frequent power failures.

In the novel Bond describes the leisure activities of the middle class north Indian families of the 1950's. Rusty, who falls in secret love with Meena Kapoor, mother of Kishen in whose house he stays, gets excited when a picnic is proposed. They carry food, camera, gramophone and other accessories with them to the picnic. The picnic spot is changed as the car gets stuck in the river bed. The peaceful setting of the forest provides Rusty and Meena secret freedom.

Meena and Mr. Kapoor go to Delhi to find out a new job for Mr. Kapoor. They leave Kishen in Company of Rusty at Dehra. Their car meets an accident and Meena dies. Rusty receives a telegram directing him to send Kishen to Hardwar. When Kishen goes to Hardwar and Somi goes to Amritsar, Rusty decides to go to Delhi and to arrange for his journey to England.

On the way to Delhi Rusty boards the Hardwar mail. With minute precision, Bond describes the Dehra railway platform.

On the station platform the coolies pushed and struggled, shouted incomprehensibly, lifted heavy trunks with apparent ease. Merchants cried their wares, trundling barrows up and down the platform- soda water, oranges, betel nut, halwai sweets. files (Sic) swarmed around the open stones, clustered on glass covered sweet boxes; the mongrel dogs, ownerless and unfed, roved the

platform and railway lines, hunting for scraps of food and stealing at every opportunity. (647).

Bond also describes rural north India as seen by Rusty from the window of the train.

The train sang through the forests, and sometimes the child waved his hand excitedly and pointed out a deer, the sturdy sambhar or delicate cheetal. Monkeys screamed from tree-tops or loped beside the train, mothers with their young clinging to their breasts. The jungle was heavy, shutting off the sky, and it was like this for half an hour. Then the train came into the open, and the sun struck through the carriage windows. They swung through cultivated land, maize and sugar-cane fields; past squat, mud-hut villages and teams of bullocks ploughing up the soil, leaving behind only a trail of curling smoke. (649)

North India is considered to be the religious centre of the entire country. Places of pilgrimage like Vaishnavi Devi and Raghunath temple in Jammu, the Golden temple of Amritsar, the Tibetan abode in Dharmshala, the Mosque of Hazrat Bal in Kashmir, and the holy shrine of Amarnath, Haridwar and Rishikesh provide religious inspiration to the Indian people. Haridwar (the divine gate of Lord Shankar is a major pilgrim place in north India. It has its religious, cultural, social and geographical importance. Bond describes Haridwar as,

Children were shouting at each other, priests chanted their prayers, vendors with baskets on their heads—baskets of fruit and chaat—gave harsh cries, and the cows pushed their way around at will. Steps descended from all parts of the hill—broad, clean steps from the temple, and narrow, winding steps from the bazaars. A maze of alleyways zigzagged about the hill, through the bazaar, round the temples, along the river, and were lost amongst themselves and found again and lost. (655)

At the end of the novel, Rusty gets reunited with Kishen who has escaped from indifferent Mr. Kapoor and plans to come back to Dehra.

The novel projects the true image of north India. Cultural diversity is emphasized through Rusty, Somi, Ranbir and missionaries wife. People are shown as gentle and caring, free of all inhibitions. The social set up may have some limitations, but overall the benign ambience pervades. The leisurely, careless, boisterous temperament of small north Indian

town charms the readers. Perhaps life, to Bond, is valued not in terms of comforts, luxuries and discipline, but in terms of the simple joys it offers.

In short, In the course of the novel, we get to know about the dialect of Uttar Pradesh Muslim community. Words like *firangi*, *kafir*, *bibiji*, *Lalain*, *purdah*, *kothiwali*, *kalma*, *meana*, are drawn elaborately. In no other novel has Bond utilized so many Urdu words. It is creditworthy of Bond to have gained so much knowledge of the activities of the jananas, which even remains inaccessible for most of the Indian people also. Bond also describes the clothes worn by Muslim people of north India during the 19th century.

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