



INFLUENCE OF THE HIMALAYN HILLS ON HUMAN BEHAVIOUR: A CRITICAL STUDY OF SELECT SHORT STORIES OF RUSKIN BOND

Yatharth N. Vaidya, Ph. D.

Lecturer in English, Government Polytechnic, Rajkot.

Abstract

Ruskin Bond is a prominent Indian writer of English who has always preferred to live by hills as he has a special fascination for hills. Whether it is nature, people, places, or animals, he is keenly observant of all forms of life and activities in the hills. As he mentions his preference for hills in 'The Leopard',

I had lived in cities too long and had returned to the hills to renew myself, both physically and mentally. Once you have lived with mountains for any length of time you belong to them, and must return again and again. (147-48)

Bond is such a writer who prefers solitude of hills that is suitable to his profession, rather than social life of big cities. The company of hills and his writing is enough for him. He can write almost everywhere and he chooses hills for the purpose of living rather as affable place for writing. He expresses this feeling in 'The story of Madhu' as,

I preferred the solitude of the small district town to the kind of social life I might have found in the cities; and in my books, my writing and the surrounding hills, there was enough for my pleasure and occupation. (99)

The current research paper aims at exploring critically how Bond has delineated in his short stories the influence of Himalayan hills on human behavior and how hills transform human beings.



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The ecological setting of hills has the direct relationship with the behavior of the characters in short stories of Ruskin Bond. The people in the hills are simple, rustic and less educated. They are content with what they have and do not aspire more. Their activities take place in natural surroundings. Such people are less ambitious, jealous and greedy and hence they are happy. Whereas people who live in cities are highly ambitious, greedy and jealous and never satisfied with what they have; rather want to obtain more. Material pleasure is everything to them. Hence, they are not happy and suffer more than the people who live in hills. When plains men visit hills, they notice these qualities of hill men. The natural beauty of hills and the company of people who live there do affect plains men who visit hills. If they stay for few days, transformation automatically begins.

In 'Death of a Familiar' Bond describes the effect of hills on the behavior of characters. The story is about a young college boy named Sunil who is a friend of the narrator. He lives in Shahganj- a small town in the plains of north India. Sunil is involved in tarnished activities like theft and sexual offences. When a fruit-seller who had been cheated by Sunil threatened to report to the police, he threw a brick at the man's head. He nearly killed that man. And once he was beaten by some fellows as he was flirting with a sister of one of the fellows. He is interested in girls and often has fun with them. Considering his criminal activities, the narrator suggests Sunil to come with him to Simla for a couple of weeks for a pleasant change from Shahganj. Sunil immediately agrees to the proposal. The boy does not behave well as long as he was in Shahganj but as soon as he reaches Simla a hill station of north India, to great surprise of the narrator, he starts behaving well. Sunil, in the hills for the first time in his life, has realized that hills are wonderful. He started taking interest in exploring remote valleys, forests and waterfalls, and seemed to be losing some of his self-centeredness. He quite forgets the attraction of the town. However, he falls in love with a lady in Simla and wants to marry her. He comes back to Shahganj. His plan of marriage does not materialize as she has married a teacher. Previously Sunil was not serious about love but only interested in flirting with girls. Finally, he is murdered by his two friends as he has seduced their wives. Bond always believes that the atmosphere of hills does transform human beings. He expresses this belief in the story through the narrator as,

I believe that mountains do affect one's personality, if one can remain among them long enough; and if Sunil had grown up in the hills instead of in a refugee township, I have no doubt he would have been a different person. (67)

Thus, hills can be the greatest transformer of human behavior. Sunil of Shahganj becomes completely different Sunil in Simla. If Sunil had been born in Simla (hills), he would not have become a lufanga (a notorious). The crime rate in our cities is increasing day by day but in hills the crime rate is very low. As Bond comments in "A Case for Inspector Lal",

Nothing much ever happened there. There were few cases of theft and cheating, and an occasional fight during the summer. A murder took place about once every ten years. (91)

According to Bond, ecological setting of Himalayan hills has the capacity to remove bitterness and cunningness from human beings and make them behave in dignified manner. Like a mother's love and care that shape a child to become virtuous, the entire atmosphere of hills also remove self-centeredness from human beings.

In 'Mother Hill' Bond compares hills with 'Mother'. Hills, here, symbolize as the lap of mother. Like mother's lap, hills provide a great comfort and rest to humans who live by hills. As a child is safe in the lap of mother, people who live in the lap of hills are also safe. A mother always feeds and looks after her child. Similarly, mother hill also feeds and looks after her children.

'Who goes to Hills, goes to his Mother', wrote Kipling, and he seldom wrote truer words. For living in the hills was like living in the bosom of a strong, sometimes proud, but always a comforting mother. And every time I went away, the homecoming would be tender and precious. It became increasingly difficult for me to go away. (12)

In the same story Bond also demonstrate permanence of mountains. Compared to the life of mountains, human life is very short. They are so stubborn that even if humans blast holes for minerals or make tunnels for transportation, they decline to move. Bond sarcastically remarks that in spite of all these destructive activities, humans cannot easily get rid of mountains.

In his story, 'The Man Who was Kipling' Bond talks about effect of surroundings of Himalayan hills on humans who live there. Men who have lived in Himalayan hills cannot escape from puff of day wind and true smell of Himalayas. In the story, Bond quotes words of Rudyard Kipling,

And last puff of the day wind brought from the unseen villages the scent of damp wood-smoke, hotcakes, dripping undergrowth, and rotting pine-cones. That is the true smell of the Himalayas and if once creeps into the blood of a man, that man will, at the last, forgetting all else, return to the hills to die. (23)

Bond firmly believes that the ecological setting of hills not only affects the behavior of human beings, but also affects the behavior of the animals like the monkey. Monkeys are considered mischievous animals. However, the monkeys of hills are polite and dignified in

their behavior unlike the monkeys of plains. Bond describes the behavioral difference among monkeys in 'The Monkeys' as,

They leapt gracefully from tree to tree, and were very polite and dignified in their behavior towards each other—unlike the bold, rather crude red monkeys of the plains. (80-81)

Again in 'Panther's Moon' Bond describes the same behavioral difference between monkeys of hills and plains. "A dignified community, the langoors did not have the cheekiness or dishonest habits of the red monkeys of the plains; they did not approach dogs or humans."(125)

We are creatures of circumstances. If our genes have shaped our biological make-up, our environment has shaped the development of our nature. Nostalgia is an attempt to preserve that which was good in the past. But Bond's tales are not simply about nostalgia. They are about how the process of growing up has made us what we are today. In introduction to 'When Darkness Falls and Other Stories' Bond puts it,

Would I have been a different sort of person if I had grown up in Scotland or Zanzibar instead of Dehra Dun or the Simla hills? Perhaps not, but the people I'd met along the way would have been very different, and it is other people who often influence our development and the directions our lives take. (vii)

Thus, Ruskin Bond prefers the life of hills and recommends simplicity and beauty of hills to his readers. Hills and plains are complementary to each other. Hill men need plains and plains men need hills. But Bond shows superiority of hills. As Bond mentions in 'Panther and Moon', "The plainsman looks to hills for the needs of his spirit but the hill man looks to plains for a living."(125) It is also not possible to settle in hills for the people who live in plains. Hills provide little opportunity for development in the field of industrialization, agriculture and education. Even many people of hills have to migrate to plains for employment or academic purposes. But time to time they return to their native to celebrate festivals with their family members. As people of rural areas who have settled in urban areas for the purpose of employment or education, frequently return to their native place. Similarly, people of plains must go to hills at regular interval like a son (who has settled in urban areas) of a mother who comes to meet her mother (who lives in rural areas) for great comfort and rest. The same comfort hills will provide to persons who visit hills and a great transformation

will automatically take place. When they will return to plains, they will return with sweet memories and Himalayan smell. If Himalayan smells once creep into the blood of these persons, transformation will automatically take place and will return again and again to hills.

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