

SYMBOLISM IN THE WORKS OF RUSKIN BOND

Ajiet Ravikant Jachak

Bar. Sheshrao Wankhede Mahavidyalaya,

Mohpa, District Nagpur.

Abstract

Symbols have been used by writers and artists to represent or suggest concepts or ideas. Words, places, persons, objects, or actions can be representative of the writer's intentions. Symbolism occurs very naturally in the writings of Bond. It is not possible to compartmentalise the symbols used by Bond with any particular school of symbolism as such. He has developed his own unique style which consists of both worldly and natural symbols.

Key words:

Bond, symbolism, symbols, mountains, nature.

Higher Education &
Research Society

SYMBOLISM IN THE WORKS OF RUSKIN BOND

- Ajiet Ravikant Jachak

Symbols have been used by writers and artists to represent or suggest concepts or ideas. Words, places, persons, objects, or actions can be representative of the writer's intentions. There are countless examples of symbolism in our day to day lives as well as in the works of art. Writers use symbolism to hint at certain ideas or moods rather than putting it across obviously. Figures of speech like metaphor (Love is a jewel) and literary tools like allegory (Shakespeare's use of monologue in his *As You Like It*) also make use of symbolism extensively. Artists use colours as symbols to convey emotions. For example, white denotes hope and positivity, while black would be used to transmit despondency. The Renaissance period witnessed a lot of art with representation from the Bible in the pictorial form for the benefit of those who weren't able to read. Invariably, those representations had the Devil being represented by a servant, Paradise by beautiful and bountiful gardens, peace by lambs, and the sacrifice of Jesus by crosses. The twentieth century was ruled by great masters of art like Picasso, Chagall, and De Gaulle, who left their indelible marks for the times to come. Paul Klee, the well known Swiss painter, extensively used symbols like stick figures, fish, arrows, and moon faces. His foremost intention was to portray reality in a way which would be much simpler than the complex material world that we are familiar with.

Writers have been known to often use symbolism to enhance their writing. Symbolism enriches a literary work with greater depths of meaning other than what has been mentioned and adds on to the hues already employed by the writer. Symbolism is used by writers in many forms like figures of speech, where an object, person, or situation has implied meanings, or the words or actions of characters or events have deeper meanings in the context of the entire story. Ralph Ellison says, "Man is a symbol-loving and -using animal. Language itself is a symbolic form of communication. The great writers all use symbols as a means of controlling the form of their fiction. Some placed it there subconsciously,

discovered it and then developed it. Others started out consciously aware and in some instances shaped the fiction to the symbols." Ruskin Bond holds a special voice in the hearts of millions of readers with his numerous, fascinating short stories and thought provoking novels. With more than forty novels and short story collections, Bond is an internationally commended author. His biographical tales of acting as a grandfather, tales of unfulfilled love, across the cross cultural dimensions of Indian society, and the contradictory characteristics of nature, displaying the powerful aspect and the haunting beauty reveal Bond's love for humanity in all its variety. This paper examines the various symbols used by Ruskin Bond in his works.

Symbolism occurs very naturally in the writings of Bond. It is not possible to compartmentalise the symbols used by Bond with any particular school of symbolism as such. He has developed his own, unique style which consists of both worldly and natural symbols. Natural symbols like hill stations, cities, bazaar, India and Himalayas form the background of his stories. The very name of Ruskin Bond brings to mind green valleys, walks through the forest, hills, small-town antics, and the inseparable Dehra Dun. Bond spent his childhood in the foothills of the Himalayas, which fascinated him so much that they have not only been referred to, but formed the backdrop of many of his writings. Nature had a deep impact on his life.

Ruskin Bond has lived in India for the major part of his life and is an Indian to the core. He writes stories about the Indian people, the landscape, and the Indian culture. In his writings, India comes across as a land that abounds in love and happiness. There is unity in diversity, which is often celebrated. He firmly believes that India is a mother figure, and accepts everyone with open arms. The various festivals stand testimony to the harmony and feelings of brotherhood among her people— a fact often portrayed by Bond. In his works India is home for everyone. This sentiment is echoed by Rusty (Bond) in "The Room on the Roof". He says, "I have always felt that India is my home." The Himalayas enjoy a special place in the works of Bond. They are symbolic of magnanimity, permanence, and everlasting spiritual bliss. According to Bond, mountains inspire human beings to maintain a calm attitude in the face of storms by taking inspiration from the great, steadfast mountains. Disasters and storms are temporary in nature, and man should take strength from the tough exterior of the

mountains, and wait for the storm to pass over. In "Delhi Is Not Far", the protagonist makes a profound observation: "I don't think man can be complete until he has lived in the hills. There is something about a mountain that adds a new dimension to life." The Himalayas emanate deep emotional influence on the psyche of man. Man is enchanted with the mesmerizing beauty of nature, symbolized by the mountains, which stand for universal belongingness and harmony.

The mountains symbolize an immense source of primeval innocence in several of Bond's works. The central character of his novella "The Sensualist" discards his ego in the mountains when he falls for the charms of a woman from the hills. He says, "Hers was the overpowering innocence of the mountains... we who have grown in the cities cannot understand the innocence of mountain people, because we cannot understand the innocence of mountains..." The opening scene of "The Sensualist" sets the uneasy tone of the plot, bordering on an atmosphere charged with ghostly trepidation. There is an uncanny feeling of being driven by some unseen presence. The sensualist's inner darkness is symbolized by a strange landscape highlighted with dreary rocks, sharp hills, short grass, eagles circling high overhead, and the sun burning down, yet not a ray entering his cave. The lifeless surroundings emphatically connote the wrong choice made by the protagonist. However, the sudden emergence of a path of tender green grass at the feet of the traveller, with a silver line of fresh water trickling through it reiterates the fact that life springs out of rocks. Brilliant descriptions of landscape appear in Bond's writings in powerful roles that help in the development of plot, while at the same time providing a picturesque backdrop to his stories. S. Mohanraj opines with reference to "The Room on the Roof", "Rusty's room always remains incomplete without a description of surroundings or Somi's house without a proper description of path and terrain, this also comes in sharp contrast to the house in which Rusty lived with his guardian...." The description of the playground referred as the maidan is suggestively symbolic of the darkness, desolation, loneliness and rebellious nature of Rusty. The bazaars of Dehradun are symbolic of the real India, of an utter sense of freedom, with all types of people interacting uninhibitedly. Daytime brings with it life and attraction, and the night ushers in feelings of awe and repulsion. The bazaar is symbolic of two phases of Rusty's life.

It acts as the unifying link, helping him in overcoming the challenges and adventures that life throws at him.

An abandoned church in "Vagrants of the Valley" is symbolic of the loneliness of neglected, unkempt boys Rusty, Kishen, and Goonga. These uncared for boys find solace under the vaulted roof of the church. The river and island in the story "Sita and the River" symbolize loneliness and conveys the fact that man keeps drifting like an island until he becomes familiar with others. Sita was happily living with her grandparents and could not envisage the life beyond the island. When the island was submerged in the flood and everything was swept away, could she fathom what the real world is.

The forest is another natural symbol frequently used by Bond. The forest acts as a backdrop and as a unifying theme. The romantic liaison between Rusty and Meena in his novella "The Room on the Roof" finds a vibrant expression in the tranquil surroundings of the forest. In the forest, they are transported to a world, free from social taboos and they are able to voice their feelings, their deep passion. The forest helps the lovers to find out the peace and composure in love. In his other stories like "Tiger and Panthers Moon" forest symbolizes an attitude towards life, a protected place where man learns to coexist alongside animals and birds. The guard in the story "The Tunnel" remarks: "It is safer in the jungle than in the town. No rascal out here. Only last week, when I went into the town I had my pocket picked! Leopards don't pick pockets."

Trees hold great significance in the stories of Ruskin Bond whether they are in the forest, in the hills, or in the house. They are depicted as the life giving source symbolizing friendship, refuge and an all-pervasive power. Ruskin Bond seems to have researched about the trees thoroughly, like a botanist and then put forth his personal views about them and also highlighted their mythological importance. In his short story "The Coral Tree" the tree symbolizes the enthusiasm of childhood. In the story "Handful of Nuts" the exhilarating scent of Raatki Rani conjured up the spirit of the characters. In "When You Cannot Climb the Trees Any More" the tree is a symbol of the vitality of youth. A grandmother considers having a tree at home a blessing, as seen in "Where Falls the Shadow of a Tree". The huge jackfruit tree becomes a secretive place for a young boy, as while exploring the tree he discovers that

he can use it to conceal his treasured items like catapult, marbles, twigs, and coins. The Cherry tree has the power to withstand the odds, and so is a symbol of existence. The glorious Banyan and Peepal trees, symbolize generosity and magnanimity, as they become the dwelling place of many creatures. Bond earnestly believes that trees are his true friends, as they have never failed him. For him trees are the embodiment of companionship. They have always stood by him, providing him shelter from the outside world, motivating him to endure the storms he had faced in his life. He envisages different qualities of different trees. His writings broadly describe various attributes of several trees, at times depicting their mythological importance as well; like the Peepal tree, in Indian mythology is considered most sacred representing the physical form of Lord Krishna. The tree is said to have mystical powers in itself. The leaves of Mango trees are considered holy as it is generally believed that they fulfil the wishes of those using them. Bond personally feels that Deodar, a sacred tree in the Himalayas has beauty and majesty. The Oak signifies coarseness and strength whereas the Pine is musical and symbolizes togetherness when the wind softly passes through them. Symbols constitute an important part of Bond's works. They can be extensively found throughout his entire literary corpus. Bond can be called a symbolist who uses a variety of symbols to enrich his writings.

Works Cited

- Bond, Ruskin. *The Complete Stories & Novels*. Delhi: Viking by Penguin Books India (P) Ltd., 1966. Print.
- Ellison, Ralph. *Invisible Man*. New York: Penguin, 1952. Print.
- Mohanraj, S. "Eco-Phile: Ruskin Bond." *The Creative Contours of Ruskin Bond*. Ed. P.K. Singh. New Delhi: Pencraft Pub., 1995. 122. Print.