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AWAY FROM THE NORM: A CRITICAL STUDY OF RUSKIN BOND'S WOMEN

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ABSTRACT

Indian Writing in English has a special status in English Literature owing to its treatment of women characters. Short stories help the writers to project select characters in an impressive way to the readers. In Indian context the status of woman in a society and her treatment is very different from those of her European or American counterparts. Women are depicted both as a good and evil in literature by various writers. However, in no literature is a women stereotyped as was done in Indian literature. Away from the mythical stereotyping of women, Ruskin Bond portrayed his women in a different way. The female characters of his short stories range from a small child to a grandmother. These characters are as powerful as men and have left a strong impression on the readers. I have chosen following eight short stories for the critical analysis of Ruskin Bond's Women in this paper.

Key Words: Victims, Feminism, Classification

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Ruskin Bond is a master creator of characters and he has left behind a whole galaxy of characters. Characters are very central in his art. Bond's stories are peopled with big and small men and women. Bond's world is the world of the poor and the middle class people. His stories are like pan-vision films with hundreds of people suffering, acting and moving all the time. He is a short-story writer who recognized that a character may not remain the same throughout the story but he or she can grow or develop or deteriorate as a result of what happens in the short story. Bond's women form in a different classification. He presents a convergence of the eastern and the western precept in the portrayal of his women. They are not shown as victims of male predominance but they are happy to confine themselves to domestic tasks. His impressive female characters are the aunt Mariam, Madhu, Ulla, Rani, Susanna, Sita, Sushila, Puja etc. I have chosen following eight short stories for the critical analysis of Ruskin Bond's Women in this paper.

- "A Guardian Angel"
- "Chachi's Funeral"
- "The girl from Copenhagen"
- "The Room of Many Colours"

- "Susanna's Seven Husbands"
- "Sita and the River"
- "Time Stops At Shamili"
- "Panther's Moon"

Bond sometimes recollects his past and projects it in his stories. "A Guardian Angel" falls under this category and she is a younger sister of his mother. She becomes his guardian when he is deprived of mother. She calls him Ladla with her affectionate voice. She takes care of him moderately but she wouldn't ensure any command on the boy. Her sacrifice had left a profound impact in the heart of the boy and because of that he called her with adoration 'guardian angel'. He states:

"But in spite of the broken wing and the smile, it was a very ordinary stone angel and could not hold a candle to my Aunt Mariam ,the very special guardian of my childhood". (Bond: 1994:31)

Madhu is a generous character created by Bond in the story "Chachi's Funeral". She understands Sunil's nature and comes over there to consoles him with a solution to his problem.

You'll be caught by the C.I.D. officers. Because they are very clever.

Do you want to go to jail ? Then better do not kill your Chachi. At least not this way. I'll show you how. (Bond: 1988: 29).

She makes a rough image of Chachi on a piece of paper and gives him pencil. Then she draws a picture of heart with red sketch in the stomach of Chachi's portrait and says to stab her. Sunil fierce three time his knife into Chachi's heart. By this method, Madhu able to transfer Sunil's attention and offers an outlet to his emotions.

Bond does not believe in modern version of feminism. So, hisromantic heroines are in their teens. "The girl from Copenhagen" is a modern Danish girl. She is a feminist dressed in tight jeans and travels with all her closeness necessities in a small bag.

Ulla was wearing tight jeans and an abbreviated duffle coat and as she had brought little else with her ,she wore this outfit to the theatre. It created quite a stir in the foyer, but Ulla was completely unconscious of the stares she received. (Bond:1994:103)

She perfectly fit into the concept of a new woman who lives her life in analogy with her own codes. She belongs to the class of liberated women and lives a decent life after two days of delightful togetherness she disappears without making any assurance to meet again. At the end the narrator articulates:

"But I kept the window open all through the summer and the scent of the honeysuckle was with me every night".(Bond:1988:106)

Rani's role in the story "The Room of Many Colours" is as an artifact of circumstances. She appears impractical; her disagreeing talks, fascination for bright glasses and dazzling jewellery in contrast to the dark room where she sits, impart her bizarre shade. She is nameless; perhaps her state of being Rani has dwarfed her individual self. The pall of mysteriousness surrounds her, being confined to her rooms situated at the top of the ruined palace. It is further intensified by repeated references of ghost, snakes and lizards. Being cut off from the main stream of life, she affects pathetically her state of being Rani through gems and pearls in all her fingers. She placed the insect on the palm and took it into the house to show her father. Her fantasy to protect snakes in the garden projects a light on her nature.

"Look, Dad, I said, I haven't seen an insect like this before. Where has it come from? It must have come down from the sky; he said. It must have come down with the rain". (Bond: 1994:81)

Her insistence to be treated as normal one is pathetic and for a normal womanhood. Whatever seems unusual about her is only an illusion, or heavy force of Situations.

The story "Susanna's Seven Husbands" is about a woman of obscure traits. Susanna, the lady of seven husbands, is centre of attraction of city youth. She is sought after for her wealth and beauty. Seven out of them marry her to die within the year of their matrimony. The lady is generous in her bounties, but rigorous

towards her menials. Highly unpredictable Susanna becomes a prodigy of fear and fascination. Bond portrays her character on three possible lines – first, she kills her husband's for some bitter childhood impressions that prompt her to dominate the opposite sex, second, it is simply her nature to hunt for new adventures, third and sheer chance is responsible ultimately for deaths in succession. But for the people of her town she is an enigma, a lady of supernatural expertise.

“Sita and the River” is both a regional story and an adventurous story as it is the tale of two children and their bravery during the flood. The story portrays the girl Sita and her spirit of adventure to save herself from the angry river and her intimacy with nature. Bond captures his readers through his vivid description of the island and the village and people. The girl ‘Sita’ embodies adventure, humanity, preservation of trees and courageous mind in times of tribulation and loneliness. She is an inspiration for the young readers. Sita and her Grandfather’s return to the island represent their attachment and adjustment to live in the same land irrespective of the troubles and loss she faces.

For three nights they slept under a crude shelter made out of
Gunny –bags. During the day Sita helped Grandfather rebuild
the mud-hut. Once again, they used the big rock for
support. (Bond:1988:207)

Sushila in the story “Time Stops At Shamili” leads the class of practical wives. She is an average middle class girl depends on her parents. She does not protest not just for lack of spark, but she seeks her bliss in the consent of elders. Like an Indian wife she married life serenely. For an Indian women reputation of parents and husband is above all considerations, so she says:

I am not happy and I do not love him, but neither am I so
unhappy that I should hate him. Sometimes for our sake,
we have to think of the happiness of others. (Bond: 1989: 57)

So Sushila signifies the traditional manner of woman who balances her distinctiveness within traditional circumstance. We can conclude Bond’s female characters come from lower and middle class but they are not forgettable. Most of his female characters reveal woman’s nature in the stories.

In the story “Panther’s Moon” Bond created a gallant character called Puja. She is a lovable sister and helps her mother in her household works.

“I am coming with you, said Puja. No, you cannot go, said her mother.
It’s bad enough that Bisnu is in danger. You stay at home with me. This is work men. I shall be safe
with them, insisted Puja. I am going mother! And she jumped down the embankment into the field,
and followed Sanjay’s father through the village”. (Bond: 162: 1988)

She pleads before God for the safe arrival of her brother. Moreover she follows the group courageously for the rescue of brother. She is perfect blend of Indian culture and vigor.

Conclusion

Therefore, this paper exposes that Ruskin Bond’s characterization of woman. He also deals with the themes like nature, childhood apart from the delicate subject of oppression and woman perception in the society. He openly criticizes the dominance of man and rude notions of woman in the society. He genuinely draws the present patriarchal society, but clearly exhibits his strong feminist viewpoint. Bond, through the illustration of patriarchy, supports women inherently. He clearly captures the psychology of women, and their innate desires which are suppressed by men. Therefore, he creates female characters like Mariam, Sushila, and Puja etc to extend his supporting hand to all the females in the dominating society. Some critics may say that he failed to comprehend the ideology of woman as he is a man. But his sympathetic representation of woman in writing reveals his greatness and touches the heart of the reader.

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