



Research Paper

## A Comparative study of Ruskin Bond and Rudyard Kipling in a Post-Colonial Light

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**ABSTRACT:** Post-colonial literature primarily constitutes two types of discourse one it is the in the voice of the natives and second it is in the voice of the oppressor class who are in a way themselves colonized. English authors like Rudyard Kipling, George Orwell, Ruskin Bond etc., are few of the authors who through different narratives criticize the colonizers.

Received 07 May, 2023; Revised 16 May, 2023; Accepted 19 May, 2023 © The author(s) 2023.

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Ruskin Bond is famous for his writings for children. His novels like *Rusty* and *The Room on the Roof* are novels of childhood and adolescence. He is famous for his creation of fantasy in his stories. The ghosts emerging from the mist and the hills reverberate with the remembered voices; the deathly experiences are echoed with a blurred vision of the incident that might have occurred several years ago are all the settings of his fantasy. But all these imaginations are the result of the lack that he faced in his childhood. Thus, his writings are a psychological quest to fulfill his desires that remained incomplete. Moreover, Bond belonged to the Anglo-Indian community which was isolated, as the natives never saw them gracefully. All these contributed to his writings.

My paper intends to concentrate upon the two stories written by Ruskin Bond- *Wilson's Bridge* and *Night of the Millennium* and using the Post-colonial and Psychoanalytic theory we would be able to relate the dual purpose of Bonds writing. Firstly, he shows how the Britons who lived in India always tried to nativize themselves, which Bond himself wanted as well and secondly, he like Kipling criticizes the colonizers strategy of ruling, as there is a gap between their thought and its implementation, and this duality upend the role of the colonizer and the colonized.

Ruskin Bond in his autobiographical story *The Room of many Colours* tells of a conversation between himself and his father. His father asks the young Ruskin if he would ever like to go to the sea. What ensues is an exchange in which the father instructs his son in matters of family history. The boy says:

“‘have you been around the world?’ I asked.

‘No only as far as England. That’s where your grandfather was born.’

.....

‘Is India like England?’

‘No it’s different.’

‘Well what does “different” mean?’

‘It means things are not the same...’

‘Will we always be in India?’ I asked.

‘No, we’ll have to go away one day. You see it’s hard to explain, but it isn’t really our country.’” (17).

The question never resolves as the Anglo-Indians are neither Europeans nor wholly Indians, they are always in a threshold of existence. They are not fully accepted by the Indians as natives nor can they go back to their roots where they have nothing of their own. Bond always wanted to stay in India and wanted to be the native of this country, and like Rudyard Kipling writing serves him as a way to fulfill his desire. As for Bond his

father was everything for him, what mattered the least was his “mother who was hundreds of miles away with another husband. He hadn’t seen her since he was four...” (*The Funeral*, 11). Thus, the lack that Bond suffered all through his childhood made him turn to writing for children. It was a psychological quest to be his “Other”. According to Jacques Lacan, “the unconscious is the discourse of the Other” (Fundamental Concepts, 172).

Lacan explored how the Other is what defines the self not only by being what the self is not, but by being only what it lacks and therefore what it fears as well as desires. The setting of fantasy and supernatural elements in Bonds stories is therefore a device which according to Zizek “functions as an empty surface, as a kind of screen for the projection of desire” (Zizek, 87).

This paper intends to concentrate upon the two stories written by Ruskin Bond- *Wilson’s Bridge*, *The Night of the Millennium* and his most renowned novel *The Room on the Roof*. Through these stories and by referring to his novel *The Room on the Roof* we will see how every story serves to the quest to be his Other and comparing his stories to Rudyard Kipling’s *The Phantom Rickshaw*, which Aubrey Bond, Bonds father told him when one day he and his father were on a walk around the Jakko Hill<sup>1</sup>; which clearly explains the effects of the British Raj upon their own employees.

*Wilson’s Bridge* is a story about an Englishman Wilson who primarily engaged himself in hunting but later like other Englishmen he found “it more profitable to trap the region’s great forest wealth” (16). So, he started making his fortune with the thick deodar and oak forests of Tehri. The hunting or shikar that the Englishmen practiced was a sort of compensation that Englishmen like Lt. Col.R.C.McWatters practiced in order to “hide their bitter feeling and loathing of the system they were part of.” (Bandopadhyay, 64).

The narrator of the story who can often be taken as Ruskin Bond himself narrates how in his short vacation on the hills of Tehri with few of his friends, strolling on the iron bridge their one evening he saw a woman “emerging from the mist... wearing plain dhoti... climbed over the railing [of the bridge] and threw herself into the river.” (14). On calling the watchman, Ram Singh; he narrates the story of Gulabi and Wilson. Gulabi was a beautiful hill bride living with her husband Wilson and their children. But few years later Wilson under the mask of his business trips started keeping an adulterous relation to an Englishwoman, Ruth. Anglo Indian community was primarily of a hybrid construct, the relation between Wilson and Gulabi was also of this nature and their children suffered the most; like any other children of the Anglo-Indian community. Bond shared a kinship with these children though he was not of hybrid origin, as his mother; though she had her lineage evolved in India for a few generations but his father was from England. Yet his mother can be compared to Wilson as both shared an adulterous relation outside their marriages and Bond shared a strong affinity to the children of Gulabi, as Wilson like his mother shirked his responsibility of parenting.

When Gulabi came to know about his husband’s adultery, she “voiced her resentment, demanding that he [must] leave the other women.” (16). But Wilson did not pay heed to her words. Gulabi turned frenzied and taking a pistol “fired one shot at him”, but the “bullet missed him and shattered her looking glass.” (17). Gulabi soon ran out of the house towards the bridge and threw herself down in the river. The narrator after listening to the whole story of Wilson and Gulabi returns back to his rest house. There he narrates the story to his friends, the Rays and the Duttas. The story reaches its climax when one evening (the last evening before the narrator returned back) strolling on the bridge the narrator found a young woman running towards the railing in a similar fashion as did Gulabi’s ghost and jumps down into the river. To his amazement he saw Mr. Ray running towards the part of the railing and shouting to him “Did you see my wife” (19), the narrator was totally perplexed. Though they tried to rescue Mrs. Ray, but to no avail. After cremating her they returned to their respective destinations.

The question arises as to why Gulabi commits suicide at frenzy? It may be interpreted that Gulabi was not ready to share the love of her husband she wanted his undivided love. It is not only Gulabi’s wish to be desired by Wilson but Wilson too desired to be a desirable object in Gulabi’s eyes. With the breaking of the mirror both of their desire suffers a setback. Thus, Gulabi’s death is the result of her misunderstanding of Wilson’s words as well as his gaze. This misunderstanding is brought about by the “cultural and linguistic divide between the Englishman and Gharwali Woman” (Bandopadhyay, 66). Mrs. Ray too commits suicide by throwing herself down the bridge is a clear suggestion of Mrs. Ray’s misrecognition; she falsely connects her ego to that of Gulabi which ultimately serves to the act of her suicide. As a second reading to her act Prof Bandhopadhyay suggests that it is: “a characteristic intrinsic to colonial schemes, then Mrs. Ray’s mimicry of Gulabi is a representational act explicating the position of the new woman as subaltern.” (Bandopadhyay, 67).

“The old wooden bridge has gone, and today an iron suspension bridge straddles the Bhagirathi...”, but one can “still hear the hoofs of Wilson’s horse as he gallops across the bridge” (13), the narrator cleverly ends his narrative saying “Or you might see the ghost of Mrs. Ray and hear her husband’s anguished cry. Or there might be others. Who knows?” (20), a supposed question thrown to the oppressor class, a metacritical

device used by Bond in criticizing the critical parameter that the colonizers employ to review the east. A similar metacritical device is used by Kipling in his *The Phantom Rickshaw*, where Jack Pansay describes his vision to the doctor saying: "...to my unutterable horror, horse and rider passed through men and carriage as if they had been thin air" (126).

Prof. Debashis Bandopadhyay in his essay explains how "Francis Hutchins has described the late nineteenth century attempt by British imperial discourse to represent English rule over India as natural or "Orientalized rule". If British rule is "natural", anything like the Supernatural stands as a surrogate Other, a form of allegorical subversion. The counteraction then might legitimately be represented as Supernatural" (Bandopadhyay, 63). The Westerner's knew only one reason, born out of "enlightenment"; they followed rule by consent and not rule by power. This created a gap between their thought and their work. Their thoughts were to rationalize the East whereas the pressure they created in work produced irrationality in their action. This duality of the colonizers is very well focused by Kipling in his *The Phantom Rickshaw*.

As Dr. Heatherleigh advised Jack Pansay's sickness symptoms as the consequence of over work. Dr. Heatherleigh describes; "Overwork started his illness, kept it alight, and killed him, poor devil. Write him off to the system that uses one man to do the work of two and a half men" (*Rickshaw*, 127). Kipling not only criticizes the working nature of the colonizer which "dehumanizes the colonizer and reduces him to a 'craft'" (Bandopadhyay, 59), but he also talks of the weather which being unsuitable for the Englishman puts them into more stress and ultimately, they became the victims of Malaria, Jaundice, which Bond too experienced when his father died of similar malaise. Jack Pansay's vision of the "Phantom Rickshaw" and Mrs. Wessington sitting inside it was not the result of overwork or the sultry weather it was because of the guilt that Pansay developed in his heart. The guilt was born out of his betrayal towards Mrs. Wessington. Dr. Heatherleigh dismisses Pansay's vision as a mere superstition. Kipling's metacritical device works upon this duality of the colonizer, as superstition is an irrationality that the natives practice and thus Jack being a colonizer himself becomes the victim of this irrationality. Christiane Hartnack in his *Psychoanalysis in the colonial India* writes not only overwork and the tropical weather but the physical torture that the colonizers inflicted upon the natives made them undergo a feeling of guilt. (Hartnack, 24). Frantz Fanon in *The Wretched of the Earth* describes how the colonial war in Algeria brought about "Mental Disorders" in both the Algerians as well among the Colonizers. He states in Case5: A European police inspector who tortured his wife and children, there the policeman admits that for a few weeks he cannot stand any kind of noise, he even suffers "fits of madness" when contradicted and as a result beats his wife and children. On further questioning he says that in order to acquire the information from the Algerians he sometimes tortured them even "for ten hours at a stretch..." as he thought at any time the victim would speak and then he says: "it's a question of personal success. You see, you're competing with the others." (Fanon, 216).

Thus, Fanon and Hartnack's analysis complements Kipling's story where Mrs. Wessington's pleadings to Jack were in total correspondence to the native's pleadings to the Empire. Jack's increased guilt paves his way to death and thus he voluntarily allows Mrs. Wessington to kill him, and in the process nativising him as Mrs. Wessington is now a native. Pansay's story is an exact similarity to the myth of Pahari Wilson, where Wilson too undergoes the same guilt of being a colonizer and his desire to nativize himself goes hand in hand.

In Bond's gothic tale *Night of the Millennium* Pasand, a "young computer whiz-kid" (67) is out in the midnight to calm his sexual pleasure through the widow who lives with a brood of ugly children. Pasand being a "patriotic multinational" (67) takes the stance of colonizer. The widow who is in utter need of money to provide food for her children does not stop Pasand and any such visitors to satisfy their lust, but at the end we find the real twist. Pasand "cried out in pain and astonishment, and tried to sit up, but a number of hands, small but strong, thrust him back against the tomb stone" (70) and tears him into pieces of flesh. Thus, "the neo-imperial force is over powered" (Bandopadhyay, 60). Therefore, Bond's story can very well be related to what Eric.S.Rabkin thinks fantastic literature has the ability to – "contradict perspectives" (4). This upending of power can also be seen in Bond's Magnum Opus *The Room on the Roof*, where the boy Rusty on the day of Holi goes to the bazaar which was a forbidden place for him and gets drenched in colours with his native friends coming back that night, he for the first time while hitting his guardian Mr. Harrison realizes that: "he was a child no longer, he was nearly seventeen, he was a man." (30). Prof. Debashis Bandopadhyay wonderfully connects how the boy's "forceful assertion stems from an Oedipal drive to resist the prohibitive injunctions of the father figure." (57). So, in a way this Oedipal drive can be reinstated in *Night of the Millennium*, where the children gorge upon Pasand in a symbolic act of castration<sup>1</sup>, the act of erasing the father figure to become the desirable object of the mother.

In Bond's story *The man who was Kipling* the ghost of Kipling says; "I have been abused for harping on the theme of the White Man's Burden but my only aim was to show off the empire to my audience" (32). Kipling's attempt to unveil the cruelties of the empire has been all throughout very successful. But Ruskin Bond remains popular only in children's literature. He is very rarely thought or read as a post-colonial author. But his novels like *The Room on the Roof*, *Rusty*, and *The Flights of Pigeon* and many of his short stories repeatedly

connects his own personal and political sufferance, due to the absence of his parents and the many departures that he faced in his life with the constant consciousness of being a part of Anglo-Indian Community and isolation from the natives created in him a sense of fear and desire, that could only be sufficed through his writing.

Homi.K. Bhaba in his essay *Of Mimicry and Man* quotes Jacques Lacan that: "...the effect of mimicry is camouflage..." (121), in the act of being one with the natives Rusty in the story *The Room on the Roof* mimics the natives by playing with colours. As Bhaba explains "colonial mimicry is the desire for a reformed, recognizable Other, as a subject of a difference that is almost the same, but not quite. Which is to say, that the discourse of mimicry is construed around an ambivalence..." (122) and this ambivalence create the difference between the Self and the Other. Bond shows how Rusty soaked in colours identify him as one with the natives. When he returns to his guardian he tries to hide in darkness and thinks that he might be mistaken as the sweeper boy or someone else's servant. Thus, Bond's autobiographical novel shows his desire to stay within and not without the social construct, not to remain as an alien rather to become one with them. Prof. Debashis Bandopadhyay in his book entitled *Locating the Anglo-Indian Self in Ruskin Bond: A Post-Colonial Review* points out in his Introductory chapter how Rusty is against "his guardian's communal designs", in choosing to make a "living independent of the socio-economic privileges of ghettoized existence. For him 'Home' is India." (7). For Ruskin Bond his writings remained to be a self-reflective medium, though his writings cannot exhaust all his being. He remains to be a delightfully illuminating children's author.

#### **End Notes:**

1. Bond in his autobiography- *Scenes from a Writer's Life: A Memoir* writes about his deep relation to his father and how his father told him stories and he remembered Kipling's story the most.
2. Castration anxiety was first used by Freud in his explanation of the oedipal complex, where the child in its unconscious feels that it will lose the power over its mother.

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