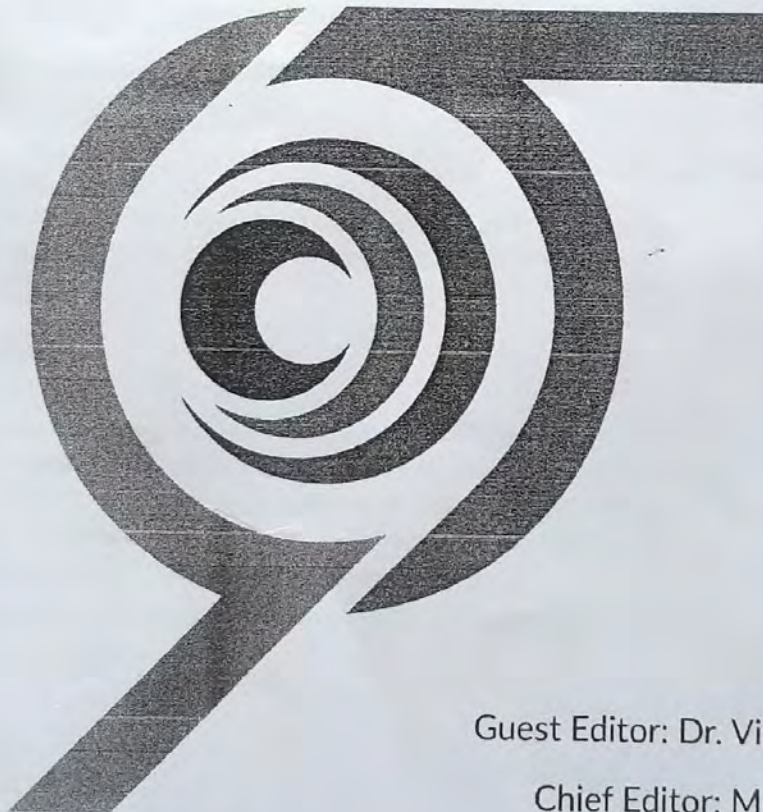




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Ruskin Bond: Thematic Analysis of Select Short Stories

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Abstract

Ruskin Bond is a well-known Indian short-story writer. His characters and themes are borrowed from the life of jungle. Bond handles the range of various themes in his short stories. They are from nature, peaceful co-existence, human values, love for freedom, Positive attitude towards nature, continuity of life, and social problem during period of partition between India and Pakistan.

Keywords: *Environment, continuity of life, partition, nature, optimism, peaceful co-existence, human values*

Ruskin Bond: Thematic Analysis of Select Short Stories

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The present research paper is an attempt to analyze the selected short stories of Ruskin Bond thematically. The researcher has selected four short stories of Ruskin Bond entitled 'The Pool', 'An Island of Trees', 'No Room for a Leopard' and 'The Crooked Tree'. Ruskin Bond is a well-known Indian short-story writer. His characters and themes are borrowed from the life of jungle. Bond handles the range of various themes in his short stories. They are from nature, peaceful co-existence, human values, love for freedom, Positive attitude towards nature, continuity of life, and social problem during period of partition between India and Pakistan. He conveys the message of conservation of environment through his literature. It is the need of an hour to concentrate more on the protection of environment and tribal life around us because it is national heritage of any country. Ruskin Bond is an ambassador of the jungle life. His ideas are completely associated with animals, birds, tribal people, mountain, hills, valleys, wild animals. Ruskin Bond looks at nature as friend, philosopher, teacher, preacher and guide like William Wordsworth. William Wordsworth says in his poem 'The Table Turned' that,

One impulse from a vernal wood
May teach you more of man,
Of moral evil and of good,
Than all the sages can. (Editors 32)

Ruskin Bond believes in the philosophy of William Wordsworth. He depicts the characters from forest, island and foothills of Himalaya. Some of the characters are the representatives of tribal life. The myths are the root of social and cultural life of any particular region. Bond has skillfully introduced different themes through his short stories in simple and lucid manner. He presents culture and tradition of India. The purpose of short stories is to make aware the people about threats to the nature and natural animals and to convey the message of conservation and protection of animals, birds and natural creatures and environment.

'The pool' is beautiful short story of Ruskin Bond which takes us to the world of innocent childhood. It celebrates innocence of childhood and reminds us innocent and naughty activities of childhood which are the source of pleasure forever. This short story focuses on the positive attitude as well as continuity of life. The three childhood friends took pledge to meet after ten years whatever and whenever they are the pool discovered by them. In this short story narrator has presented innocence of childhood.

Children are real environmentalists and scientists. The stages of our life are change but childhood we see in the form of others. Our present childhood activities can be enjoyed by other children in future. Children play and smile without any tension is presented in the story. Their freedom and innocence is temporary and in course of time we lose it. Though it is temporary but we can enjoy in other children's activities. Children are innocent. They enjoy their childhood without any problem and difficulty. Even the physical problems and worries do not make any adverse effect on their pleasure of childhood. In their childhood games they forget severity of that physical problem. Piggy, in the novel 'Lord of the Flies' says that "I was the only boy in our school what had asthma," said the fat boy with a touch of pride. "And I've been wearing specs since I was three (Golding 13-14)

This is the basic difference between adults and children Adults unnecessarily spoil their pleasures due to unknown worries. Change is the rule of nature and the same applies to children. It is the fact that child which is smart today will not remain same in his adulthood. They can change in the course of time. Narrator states that, "Those who are wild when young often grow up to be responsible citizens." (Bond 30)

Narrator keeps his pledge which he had taken before ten years and comes on the same place. He observes his words in his adulthood. He finds that few other half a dozen children playing near the pool. It satisfies narrator and he thinks that though my friends did not turn up but others enjoying and he visualizes his childhood days through children's activities. Ruskin has handled the theme of continuity of life through the story 'The Pool'.

The Short story 'An Island of Trees' deals with the theme of nature. Nature is an integral part of life and it plays an important part in the life of everyone. Trees are our best friends and supporter in every walk of life. The short story moves around a forest planted on river bed by Koki's grandfather. The conversation between Koki and her grandmother is presented in this story. The story develops in the form of dialogue. The story contains all the feature of the short story. It has good beginning, middle and end. In the beginning of story grandmother shares her experience of forest with Koki and plantation of trees on river bed by Koki's grandfather and grandmother. At the last the visit of grandmother to the same forest or island of trees planted by grandmother and her father is beautifully described. Finally grandmother gets great joy and feels like her father's dream of moving trees proved to be true.

It presents the mutual relationship between forest and human being. If we plant and love trees they can be our best. Grandmother's attraction and involvement in forest is source of life for her. The idea of maintaining forest ultimately nature is developed by narrator in this short story. Narrator presents the philosophy that trees are preserver like almighty God. They heal the injuries of man. Grandmother says to Koki that, "The tree protects the temple, and the temple protects the trees." (Bond 52)

It is observed in the Hindu culture, trees and temples are generally worshiped simultaneously. The Nature which is generally nourished by us gives us immense pleasure. In this short story Koki's grandmother planted trees with her father gives her

pleasure and sense of contentment when she visits that island of trees. The world without trees or is the world without eternal source of pleasure because trees are our best friends. Nature is permanent source of company. It helps to remove boredom and loneliness of the life. The Grandmother in the story always seems lonely without the company of nature. Grandmother says that, "the thought of a world without trees became a sort of nightmare for me. It's one reason why I shall never want to live on treeless moon" (Bond 55)

Nature is given due respect in the literature of every language. Man is social animal and he cannot live without the company of nature. Nature is friend, guide, philosopher and caretaker. Man has been living in the natural surroundings from the ancient times. He used to live in caves, forests or on the mountain. In this respect veteran Marathi poet and saint, Tukaram says that "Vrukhsavalli amha soyiri, vanchare" (Lad 422) Presentation of nature and its positive aspect is the crucial elements of Ruskin Bond's short stories. Bond has handled the theme of nature in this short story and describe nature as permanent source of joy and contentment.

'No Room For a Leopard' is about the selfish and greedy nature of man. He has destroyed forest and turned it into colonies. It also presents professional behaviour of man. The present short story focuses on the selfish attitude and behaviour of human being. It also presents the difference between animals and human beings. Animals are nature loving and better than human beings. We are responsible to occupy jungles, the dwelling places of animals. Forest is also dangerous place for animals but not for human being. The paradoxical picture is presented man can freely wander in the nature but innocent animals do not move freely in the jungles.

The growing urbanization and industrialization is responsible for the loss of jungles. The destruction of jungle brings danger to the wild animals. They lose their dwelling places. The greedy nature of man causes loss or extinction of animals like lion, tiger and leopard. To maintain the balance of environment, we have need of more wild animals but deforestation has brought wild animals into danger. Narrator in the story has warned us about extinction of wild animals like leopard. It is deforestation that brings wild animals in civil areas for the search of food, water and shelter. Narrator says that,

The leopard like other members of cat family is nearing extinction in India and I was surprised to find one so close to Mussoorie. Probably the forestation that had been taking place in the surrounding hills had driven the deer into this green valley and leopard naturally had followed. (Bond 110)

In the modern age man is accumulating wealth. He is making material progress by. He has forgotten nature and value of natural elements. Man has become selfish and professional. He runs after money. He sells the things which he gets from forests. Even he sales animals and its organs for earning money. It is his lust that forces him to more cruel with the animals and nature. Wild animals like leopard, tiger, elephant and panther have more demand in the market. Their organs like skin, teeth skeleton are in great demand. Narrator says that, "They said they knew there was a leopard in the

forest. Leopard skins, they told were selling Delhi at over a thousand rupees each.” (Bond 108)

According to Ruskin Bond animals are better than human being. They are not selfish and greedy like man. They are generous and loyal. Animals make sacrifice for man and man kills them out of his selfish attitude. We can fully trust on animals but not on man. In this story narrator blames himself for the death of leopard because leopard believes in him and trusts every human being. It is fatal for animals to trust too much on man. He says, “Perhaps I had made him confident- too confident, too careless, too trusting of the human in his midst.” (Bond 109)

Man is treacherous but animal is trustworthy. Ruskin Bond has skillfully shown the selfishness of man. He makes satire on the professional and selfish attitude of man at the same time he appreciates the generosity and loyalty of animals. At the end of the story Ruskin becomes upset and laments over the loss of forest for the animal like leopard and himself. He mentions that, “There was no room in the world for a mountain lion and me.” (Bond 110)

The story ‘The Crooked Tree’ deals with the theme partition. The social problem partition during the year 1974 has made long lasting effect on the people of India. It disturbed the mentality of people and made them homeless and orphans. It also shows company of good and positive people inspire us to be optimistic and more efficient in their life and work. Kind human treatment to the patient is the best medicine for recovery from the mental or physical disorder.

The story is about the relationship between narrator and an orphan boy who is suffering from the problem of epileptic fits. The narrator and orphan boy meets suddenly. Kamal is the name of orphan boy. Kamal’s sudden meeting turns into friendship between both of them. Narrator wants become writer and Kamal wants to pass his tenth examination. The story shows optimistic attitude of Kamal. He becomes happy. It also deals with narrator’s success in writing story. Social aspects of people like partition and problem of patients are also discussed in the story.

The issue of partition has made long lasting effect on the Kamal but it has not made him negative. The friendship with narrator inspired him to develop positive attitude. The hardships and struggle in the life make someone strong and optimistic is presented by narrator. Kamal positively says that he will get success one day. He says “Never mind, said Kamal eventually, ‘I will pass next year.’”(Bond 120)

Optimistic nature is also the core part of this short story. We should be optimistic in our life. Failure in exams does not mean end of life or our career. When people get failure in life they get upset and take extreme decisions. Narrator believes that man should not afraid of failures and take extreme decisions’. Story opens with the lines, “You must pass your exams and go to college, but do not feel that if you fail, you will be able to do nothing.”(Bond 111)

Material and scientific progress has made man lonely and melancholic. He lives in I in present with the worries of future. Narrator thinks that living in present is the best.

We should not think too much about future because nobody can predict about the future results. It is also wrong to regret over the past. Past is past we should forget bitter memories and remember only the sweet memories. Those who live in present they are always happy and satisfied with their life. Kamal, the orphan boy, in the story tells to narrator that "Yesterday I was sad, and tomorrow I may be sad again but today I know I am happy. I want to live on and on."(Bond 120) Kamal is very optimistic and prefers present to past.

Ruskin Bond is lover of nature. He respects nature and reflects it throughout his stories. He handled various themes in his short stories. The themes of nature, love, selfishness of man, and destruction of nature are prevalent in his stories. Man should protect nature is the conveyed by his through his stories. The life of man is impossible without nature. The three short stories conveys the message of love for nature and animals and continuity of life and the last short story presents Ruskin as an environmentalist and optimist.

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