

Tracing the Cartography of Nationalism: An Interdisciplinary Perspective

Ruskin Bond: Nationalism and Identity

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Abstract: Ruskin Bond was born in Kasauli in 1934, and grew up in Jamnagar, Dehradun, Delhi, and Shimla. He is famous for his short stories that range to more than five hundred along with six beautiful novels and three different collections of verses. He also wrote more than 69 books related to children-friendly tales. He received the John Llewellyn Rhys Prize in 1957 for his first novel, *The Room on the Roof*, the Sahitya Akademi Award in 1992 for *Our Trees Still Grow at Dehra*, the Padma Shri in 1999 and the Padma Bhushan in 2014. He is a prolific writer and has experimented with several genres of sensibility and emotions. Ruskin Bond introduced several stories and different genres to the world, especially in children's literature.

Keywords: Colonial, cultural, identity, nationalism, Ruskin Bond.

I. INTRODUCTION

For more than fifty years, Ruskin Bond has found refuge and inspiration in the valleys of Garhwal. The streams, mountains, and meadows provide the ideal setting for Ruskin Bond's depictions of many parts of life, from humans and other creatures to myths, popular beliefs, perils, and the afterlife. Through his love of nature and creativity, he got the essence of nationalism. Bond describes his formative years in Anglo-India in his book *Scenes from a Writer's Life: A Book*, where he calls them "poor whites" since they couldn't find jobs in England. Colonialism forcibly removed both the colonizers and the colonized indigenous people from their ancestral homelands [1]. Before Independence, several Anglo-Indian and British families began to leave. Ruskin Bond also had to go to Jersey soon after graduating from school so he could pursue a career in literature. Even after coming "home" to Jersey, a new nation, he felt even more out of place, ironically, because of his Anglo-Indian background, which had already made him an alien in India. As a result, many colonial children struggled with questions of self-identity.

The fact that Bond's family tree included anti-Indian "champions of Empire" just made him feel even more out of place. Accusing him of being "too Indian," they scolded him nonstop. Despite his aunt's Anglo-Indian heritage and uncle's South Indian medical background, they insisted he adopt more British traits. He despised the concept of "recuperating" his British ancestry and instead identified as an Indian. He embarked on his journey to become a writer in post-independence India after leaving the West as a young child, motivated by a need to return to Dehra.

Anglo-Indian heritage is quite exceptional when it comes to this individual's life and accomplishments and their strong devotion to India. Everything that the world finds astonishing, including India's enormous cultural diversity, is something that Bond takes immense joy in.

Many of Bond's admirers believe that the actor perfectly portrays India in his flicks. The whole idea of "Indianness" might be challenged. British imperialist writers "constructed" a pre-colonial India. Indian nationalists envisioned a nationalistic India. It was by literature that post-colonial India was able to interact with the Empire [2]. The political parties' "ownership" of contemporary India manifests itself in several ways, including the decline of the country's educational system, and the increase in crime rates. Bond primarily focuses on the northern Indian highlands.

Writers portraying contentious political, social, or any other issues provide a rather negative image of India, whether they want to or not. A nation's literature is one way it is recognized all around the world. Even though many writers have discussed India, the negative elements are often emphasized more than the positive ones. New Indo-English literature expresses the Indian perspective on the modern problem, even as it freely builds on Western sources. Much of the credit for this depiction of India's grandeur goes to Ruskin Bond [3]. Even though much of his work is about life in the North Indian Mountains, his prose is fascinating.

Despite being born into a colonial position, many colonized people reflected the colonists' self-perception by seeing themselves as weak, inferior, and slaves. Contrarily, Bond never abdicates his responsibility to the Indian people or apologizes to the Europeans in his works. He is opposed to any attempt to integrate the two cultures fully or even to bring them closer together. His short story "A Flight of Pigeons" tells the tale of the European exodus. Even though the plot centers on hegemonic interactions in a political and cross-cultural setting, the main point is that it's about how congregation affects people's lives when there's no clear boundary.

II. RUSKIN BOND'S LITERARY JOURNEY: A HISTORICAL AND CULTURAL OVERVIEW

Ruskin Bond was born in the year 1934, in Kasauli, India. He is an exclusive Indian author of the British times. His wide work, for more than six decades, has made him earned a respected place within Indian literature. His life and career were deeply linked with the historical and cultural aspects of India. This is specifically within the context of post-colonial identity along with nationalism.

Early Life and Influences

The writer's early life was marked by different types of confusion. His father was Aubrey Bond, who provided service to the Royal Air Force during World War II. This was a remarkable period that deeply influenced young Ruskin's bond. After the untimely death of his father, he moved to the boarding schools and sometimes also resided in their mother's home [4]. Through this time the experiences of loneliness were infused in his early writing literature, which was mainly oriented regarding the themes of loneliness, displacement, and the search for belonging. In addition to that the event of partitioning of India in the year 1947, also left a significant mark on his mentality. This also shaped his understanding of identity and nationalism.

Cultural Context and Nationalism

The cultural context within which Bond used to write his novels is important as it demonstrates his perspectives regarding nationalism. Few of his works often reflected the tension regarding the overcoming of the colonial past along with the desire to integrate as a unique national character. The majority of his stories are based on the small towns and hill stations of North India, which also captured the day-to-day living of the ordinary people [5]. Through his detailed demonstration of Indian landscapes along with their communities Bond tried to integrate a sense of national identity that is inclusive and diverse. Therefore, Bond's narratives mainly focus on the plurality of Indian culture. Thus, the characters also demonstrate diverse backgrounds.

Writing Style and Themes

Ruskin Bond has a significant style that is often characterized by their simplicity along with lyricism. This also makes his work accessible to readers of different age groups. The proper descriptions regarding nature and deep empathy for his characters are also markers to align with the ethos of Indian life. The frequent themes of Ruskin Bond include childhood, nature, and the passage of time. All of these are interlinked with reflections on national identity.

Another significant contribution to Indian literature is considered as the ability to capture the essence of rural and small-town India. This approach also challenges the urban-centric narratives of nationalism. This also provides a more profound sense of belonging.

III. THEMES OF NATIONALISM IN RUSKIN BOND'S EARLY WORKS

The early literary works of Ruskin Bond provided a rich consideration for the exploration of the themes of nationalism followed by identity along with belonging. The narrative style and thematic obsessions look very simple from the surface. However, they also engage with the complexities of Indian nationalism during the post-colonial era. The initial writings like "The Room on the Roof" followed by its sequel "Vagrants in the Valley," acted as a lens through which these themes can be easily explored.

"The Room on the Roof" is considered a semi-autobiographical novel that contains the experiences of a young Anglo-Indian boy through the navigation of life in Dehra (Dehradun). The novel was mainly written when Bond was at the age of seventeen. This also reflects the personal struggles along with his identity within the independent India. The journey of the character in the book is a metaphor for India's search for identity during the aftermath of colonial rule [4].

The protagonist's friendships with local Indian boys mainly highlight the cultural exchange along with breaking down the colonial barriers. These relationships also signify a move towards a more inclusive nationalism that moves beyond racial and cultural divisions that were imposed by the British Raj. Through the character, Bond mainly developed an image of an India that is vibrant, diverse, and also united considering the multiplicity. The bond the character forms with his Indian friends along with his gradual immersion regarding the way of life suggests a specific vision related to the nationalism of Indians that focuses on the hybridity along with the cultural fusion.

Furthermore, the sequel of the novel "The Room on the Roof," continued the exploration of the themes of identity against the social backdrop [4]. The novel includes characters that have encountered different people along with their experiences that mainly shape their understanding of themselves followed by their place in the world.

This journey has the potential to be interpreted as a small-scale version of India's post-independence journey. The physical and emotional dimensions of the protagonist in the novel also are symbolic of the country's efforts to forge a cohesive national identity regarding the diverse cultural and social elements. The specific depiction of the acceptance and appreciation of Indian culture by the lead characters was observed as an endorsement of a variable meaning of nationalism that respects every individual's contribution.

Exploring Cultural Integration

Bond's early works emphasize the theme of cultural integration is important to understand the perspectives within nationalism. The main character's experiences demonstrate the life of Bond. In addition to that, this also includes the integration into Indian society despite his British heritage. This personal and literary journey mirrors India's struggle to integrate its colonial past with its independent present.

Bond portrays cultural integration not as a loss of identity but as an enriching process. Rusty's transition from an isolated, uncertain boy into a confident individual deeply connected to his surroundings mirrors the broader national narrative of India finding its voice and identity [5]. The friendships and relationships formed by the protagonist act as evidence of the possibility of unity in diversity. This was the core principle of Indian nationalism.

Nature as a Unifying Element

Another significant aspect of his early works was the portrayal of nature as a unifying element. The aspects of the hills, and forests followed by the rivers were depicted with a sense of admiration and belonging.

IV. PORTRAYAL OF IDENTITY AND BELONGING IN BOND'S FICTION

Ruskin Bond's fiction properly explores the themes regarding identity along with their belonging. This also presented a nuanced portrayal of these concepts regarding the context of post-colonial India. Through these characters along with the evocative narratives the writer mainly investigated the personal and collective struggles of

the individuals who are in search of a sense of place in this rapidly changing society. The works are specifically marked by their simplicity along with depth [6]. This also resonates with the complexities of national consciousness within a diverse and fragmented nation.

The central nature of Bond's fiction is the characters who are on a journey to find their place in the world. This demonstration matches with the characters, like Rusty in "The Room on the Roof" and "Vagrants in the Valley." They have faced the challenges of adolescence and the transitional space between different cultures. The journey of the lead character from isolation to integration properly reflects the broader post-colonial struggle to link with the inherited colonial identities followed by the evolving national identities [6].

Belonging and Community

A recurring theme in Bond's work is the search for belonging, often depicted through the formation of close-knit communities. In the small towns and hill stations where many of his stories are based the developed characters often find comfort and identity in their connectivity with others. The majority of the narrative highlights that belonging is mainly based on mutual respect along with shared experiences [7].

The depiction of community life also acts as a small part of the broader national context. His stories also suggest that true belonging is mainly achieved through understanding and acceptance of cultural diversity. This perspective also puts limitations on the monolithic views of national identity.

National Consciousness and the Everyday

The portrayal of national consciousness is also turned into the material of everyday life. His narratives are based on the experiences of ordinary people which, also reflect a form of nationalism that is specific to personal beliefs. In stories like "A Flight of Pigeons" and "The Night Train at Deoli," the writer also captures the flexibility along with the endurance of the spirit of communities [7].

Through the eyes of Ruth Labrador, who is a young girl who faced significant conflicts Bond demonstrated the complexities of identity followed by loyalty regarding the time of national disturbance. The story also demonstrated the idea that national consciousness that not only demonstrated by the grand historical events. However, this is also led by the intimate and personal experiences of those who have lived with those experiences.

Ruskin Bond has explored the nationalism that remains profoundly relevant regarding the time of contemporary India. This also resonates with the current nationalistic sentiments along with the treatises in India.

Ruskin Bond has also different types of work that are mainly characterized by their focus on identity, belonging along cultural plurality. This also provided a counter-narrative to the more exclusionary and monolithic forms of nationalism that have achieved significance in recent years [8].

Inclusive Nationalism

In addition to the vivid nature of the writer. The stories also consistently celebrate the diversity along with the plurality of Indian society. Considering the era, within which the nationalist theories often lean towards homogenization and exclusion, the demonstration of the multifaceted identity through the developed novel acts as a reminder of the inherent diversity. His characters mainly originate from different backgrounds and regions, which also reflect the rich diversity of Indian culture [8]. This inclusivity is also considered a critical aspect of his work which promotes a sense of nationalism that highlights the differences instead of avoiding them.

The important relationships developed highlight the main concept that true national unity is achieved through the understanding and incorporation of diverse cultural elements. The establishment of such friendships

suggests that nationalism needs to establish connections between different communities followed by nurturing a sense of collective identity that is inclusive and respectful of diversity.

Everyday Nationalism

The main focus of Bond regarding the daily lives of ordinary people provides a foundational perspective regarding nationalism. His stories also highlight significant ways in which individuals contribute to the national context [9]. This approach also is considered to be a more aggressive forms of nationalism that focus the grand narratives and political ideologies over the practical experiences gained by the citizens.

In contemporary India, there was rapid modernization along with the political changes restructured the societal dynamics. Regarding this, the emphasis on the everyday resonates efficiently. His works make the readers understand that the strength of a nation is oriented on its ability to nurture and support its citizens. This also helps to ensure that everyone, irrespective of their background, feels a sense of belonging.

Timeless Values in Modern Context

The exploration of themes such as kindness, community along empathy remains timeless. This also provides valuable lessons for modern readers. In a world that is increasingly marked by division and conflict the stories written by the author advocate for values that nurture social cohesion and mutual respect.

These values are highly relevant considering contemporary India, where there is the existence of social and political tensions. These often challenge the fabric of national unity [10]. Moreover, the narratives also encourage the readers to look beyond the superficial differences along recognize the shared humanity that binds them.

The works of Ruskin Bond also engage with the current nationalistic discourses which provide a reflective and critical consideration regarding the issues of identity and belonging. Considering the author's time when there was uncertainty regarding who belongs to the nation his stories provided a more detailed understanding regarding the national identity. They highlight the importance of cultural heritage along with the personal narratives to shape the nation's identity this also challenges the reductive and exclusionary definitions of nationalism.

Moreover, the demonstration of nature along with the environment followed by the numerous works based on the Indian countryside properly aligned with the contemporary ecological concerns.

V. CONCLUSION

Ruskin Bond explored nationalism and metaphorically demonstrated the meaning throughout his works of literature. These are profoundly relevant regarding the contemporary era which also offers a vision of national identity that is inclusive, compassionate, and based in the everyday lives of ordinary people. His works mainly challenge the exclusionary forms of nationalism and they also promote values of diversity, empathy, and community. As India continues to navigate the complex national identity the Bond's stories provide an important reminder of the enduring strength and beauty of its cultural divergence. These offer important lessons that are as pertinent today as they were when they were first written.

In addition to all these, the fictions of Ruskin Bond's fiction provide a significant exploration of identity along with belonging in post-colonial India. Through the established characters and narratives, Ruskin Bond mainly acknowledged the multi-dimensional nature of identity, this also highlights the importance of cultural integration and community. He also portrayed daily life which acts as a powerful commentary regarding the national consciousness. This also suggests that belonging is also found regarding the acceptance and celebration of diversity. In overall consideration, it also contributes to a deep and more elaborated understanding of what it means to be part of a nation. Also, the novels highlighted the relevance of these themes in contemporary diversity.

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