

VIVID PICTURES OF INDIAN SOCIETY AND CULTURE IN THE WRITINGS OF MANOJ DAS AND RUSKIN BOND: A STUDY

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Abstract: This paper aims at discussing Indian society and culture as the central elements in the literary works of Manoj Das and Ruskin Bond. Both the writers present a distinct, yet balanced approach and visions of a multi-layered culture of the Indian society. To start with, it portrays how Manoj Das's works are deeply rooted in the ethical, spiritual, moral and sentimental settings of Odisha representing entire India, the people, their moral values and cultural heritage. The narratives of Das also distinctly interweave myth, mysticism, humour, human pathos and realism demonstrating the co-existence of innocence and irony as present in Indian village life. In addition, his works reflect the conflict between tradition and modernity. Although, they are a subtle comment on the effect of modernisation, they glorify the logical, ethical and emotional values that lay the foundational base of Indian identity. In contrast, Ruskin Bond's thought-provoking and realistic depiction of the Himalayan valleys, offers a tender and life-like portrayal of India's socio-cultural and ecological landscape. The short stories of Bond present the characters from natural kingdom and capture the profound relationship between mankind and nature at the same time. They narrate the simplicity of rural life. Synthesizing Anglo-Indian origin as well as Indian influence on him, the paper portrays his love, compassion and exploration of India's social milieu and atmosphere. Das's literary compositions engaged with the metaphysical yet realistic aspects of Indian culture. Bond's works deal with its everyday life and spiritual connections. Both the writers articulate an artistic vision of Indian social life that balances tradition and modernity, simplicity and grace, individuality and communal harmony. Through their aesthetic and socio-cultural concern, both the writers understand and personify the natural beings to express the moral and cultural awareness of India.

Keywords: Culture; Ethics; Social norms; Spirituality; Tradition.

INTRODUCTION:

The social and cultural fabric of India have been clearly depicted and interpreted in various literary forms and genres. From ancient oral folk traditions to contemporary writings based on postcolonialism, feminism, ecocriticism etc. Indian literature in any language not only serves as an artistic expression but also as a living representation of social hierarchies, moral values, and cultural evolution. Through literature, one can map India's journey from its very beginning of mythological and mystic approach to the complex realities of modern society, revealing literature's role both as a mirror and a transformer of what is viewed as Indian. Each literary era starting from the Vedic hymns to modern novels, captures the essence of its time and system including its spiritual awakening. The ancient forms of Indian writing, comprising Vedas, Puranas, Upanishads, Ramayana, and Mahabharata, scriptures, set the philosophical, social and moral foundations of Indian heritage. These philosophical, spiritual texts, are not simple religious scriptures but also cultural manuscripts that present minute portrayals of human behaviour that is essential for a disciplined life, family structures, gender roles, and inner conflicts of individuals. The Ramayana vindicates the necessity of ideals of dharma and righteousness in familial and societal understanding of human relationships, while in the Mahabharata there is the evidence of exploration of the complexities of greed, hunger for power, spirituality and human emotion and above all justice. These epics symbolise the confusion between personal desire and moral cooperation, revealing how social system and universal norms were correlated and highlighted in ancient India.

The next phase in the evolution of the Indian society is the medieval period. During this phase literature became the reason behind social reform and self-realisation. As Ronad (2024) comments, "Indian civilization and society have always preserved their distinctiveness; however, foreign culture and habits have a big influence on it" (Ronad, 57). During the colonial period, India marked a significant transformation in both social and literary platforms. With the introduction of English language learning, a new group of literary figures came to the forefront. For them, Literature became a means of expression of reformations and protests against British rule as well as sense of patriarchy. Social realism entered Indian English writings when authors sought to expose the injustices and

inequalities resulting from colonialism and traditional social hierarchies prominent in Indian countryside mainly. The pioneering trio of Raja Rao, Mulk Raj Anand and R.K. Narayan is considered as the base of Indian English fiction. They portrayed the everyday lives of common folks of India with compassion and transparency. Mulk Raj Anand's *Untouchable* (1935) and *Coolie* (1936) displayed the plight of the marginalized class, revealing the brutal behaviour of the upper class and cruel realities of caste system and poverty. In R.K. Narayan's *Malgudi Days* an intricate presentation of Indian social life, with its humour, irony, pathos and empathy. The same way Raja Rao's *Kanthapura* (1938) presents itself as a mythic narrative symbolizing India's political rise and growth through the Gandhian philosophy. Meanwhile, in provincial folk literature, writers like Premchand in Hindi, Sarat Chandra Chattopadhyay in Bengali, and Subramania Bharati in Tamil language addressed issues of social reform, class distinction, gender inequality, and socio-cultural identity. R. N. Tagore, the renowned literary figure of the early 20th century, imagined India as a country rooted in its traditions and culture but open to the influence of cross-cultural phenomena of the world. His most famous works like *Gora* and *The Home and the World* deal with the crucial themes of nationalism, modernity, patriarchy and individual liberty both in physical and psychological terms, signifying the intellectual and moral conflict that was witnessed in Indian society of his time. The struggles and movements for independence further intensified the connection between literature and society through which all possible emotions got their form of expression. Writing became a part of showing resistance and blending art with social campaigning. Many Indian poets and writers used their pen to support the movement and demonstrate the sufferings of the Indian people. However, these works were not limited to the theme of political rebellion or patriotism only, they also examined the cultural condition of the Indian society during that pre-independence or early-independence era, such as caste divisions, gender bias, communal issues and class-based dominance.

Indian literature got a new shape after independence and started to focus more on the realities of nation-building, modernization, new political agenda, partition and identity crisis. Novelists like Khushwant Singh, R.K. Narayan, and Manohar Malgonkar brilliantly highlighted the trauma of Partition, which was associated with religious and communal riots within Indian and Pakistan societies as well. Later writers like Anita Desai, Kamala Markandaya focused on ecological, postcolonial, feminist perspectives in Indian English literature that redefined the values and understanding of India's social and cultural concerns. The same way writers like Salman Rushdie, Arundhati Roy, Amitav Ghosh, and Vikram Seth represented Indian identity in the idea of diaspora, identity issue as well as cross-cultural significance.

At the next level, Manoj Das and Ruskin Bond have distinct and unique qualities in their discussion of Indian cultural setting. Their first-hand experiences of Indian societies, they have lived in and understood the cultural heritage as well as people of those regions have shaped their thoughts and narratives for which they express them subtly and authentically.

LITERATURE REVIEW:

Agrawal (2020) studies Ruskin Bond as a moral and cultural commentator whose writing appreciates simplicity, empathy and ecological balance through fictional settings and characters. Referring to Bond's major works, it mirrors his nostalgic tone and emotional attachment with small-town. It summarises that Bond's clear appeal lies in his gentle social commentary and humanistic optimism, expressing his more focused representation of identity, gender and ecological understanding in contemporary literary genre.

Pati (2021) explores Das's transparent representation of human psychology through simple and innocent characters trapped between tradition, modernity, and moral choice. Using psychoanalytic approach, the article interprets Das's protagonists as symbols of humans' inner conflict and self-realization formed by rural values and spiritual ideologies. Pati highlights the author's excellence in bringing realism with mysticism together to glorify the true emotions of ordinary individuals.

Jena (2022) in his work highlights eco-critical aspects focusing on Manoj Das's treatment of nature in his fictions. It investigates that his portrayal of rural landscapes and ecological sentiments reflect both environmental concern and spiritual belief rooted in Indian tradition. A thematic analysis of Das's idea of ecology and social justice is highlighted here.

Sharma (2022) examines the very evident theme of childhood in Bond's short stories, mainly noticing the innocence, curiosity and emotional sensitivity. Using a psychological approach, the study argues that Bond's way of treating childhood as an innocent yet imaginative space that restores faith in human values. His child characters often bridge the gaps between nature and different social disappointments. The study explores Bond's depiction of childhood, identity crisis and cross-cultural impact of child psychology.

Dubey (2024) conducts an examination of Bond's prose, focusing on his lucid diction, simplicity in tone and rhythm, and evocative imagery. The paper reveals Bond's child-centred perspective that evokes emotional inclination and moral touch. Through a detailed analysis, Dubey highlights Bond's brilliance in making his fiction universally appealing. The study narrates Bond's craftsmanship and recommends a stylistic study to compare his linguistic expression with those of other Indian children story writers.

Manoj Das and Ruskin Bond: An Authorial Sketch:

Both Manoj Das and Ruskin Bond are the two most beloved and admired figures in modern Indian English literature. Each has their own unique way of writing, yet when it is about human vision of life, they are quite similar in their thoughts. Even though they belong to two different linguistic, regional and cultural atmospheres

i.e., Das from Odisha and Bond from the Himalayan hills and valleys, their writings share a deep and common empathy for human sufferings, conflicts and experience. They share an intimate connection with environment and a thorough philosophical understanding of the world, which is reflected in their literary creations. Manoj Das, a bilingual writer, wrote in both Odia and English. He bridge the gap between regional and universal approach to different things. His short stories, poems, essays and novellas often explore human emotions and deep-rooted values by blending fantasy, magic realism and subtle emotions. Das's fictional characters, belong to the simple innocent folks of villages having deep bond with nature. His use of gentle irony, simple yet thought-provoking language and creative imagination, treatment of themes like moral dilemma of a society, traditional and cultural shifts and compassion for the characters make his writing extra-ordinary. His style of highlighting every moral concern and metaphysical ethos of Indian philosophy, turns the common events of everyday life into a reflecting and awakening one.

Likewise, Ruskin Bond's literary world is a mirror of the everyday beauty of the Indian hills and forests that celebrate simplicity, innocence, and human sentiment. Though a man of European origin, he has made India his home forever. Bond's numerous writings revolve around the charm of small villages and townships of India. The innocence of childhood he portrays, somehow shows his own shattered childhood due to his parents' separation. But it is only nature that has healed him up and freed him from all the broken phases of life. His prose displays the fleeting moments of joy, pain, trauma, identity issue, solitude, and human connection. Bond's excellence comes from his tender observation of ordinary lives, his characters such as birds, animals, children, old men, shopkeepers and wanderers, symbolise emotions of love, nostalgia and belonging to different forms and contexts. Bond's focus doesn't remain on the human emotion or nature only, rather on the philosophical, spiritual and social dimension of India. His language is clear, simple, yet rich in its meaning and expression, that showcases the art of Indian storytelling traditions. Both Das and Bond, in their ways of narration and discussion, remind readers that literature's deepest purpose is to educate, create consciousness and reveal beauty in simplicity, dignity of natural objects, and grace of artistic presentation. Through their insightful vision Manoj Das and Ruskin Bond admire literature's enduring capacity to sooth, awaken, and interlink the human heart with language, culture and time of a particular region.

DISCUSSION:

In Manoj Das's short story, "The Brothers", the plot line displays the sibling love between Bhuvan and Saroj, familial bond, authority, and moral responsibility, revealing how deeply social and cultural traditions can shape an individual's behaviour and identity. Deep down the story is a study of familial conflict between two brothers presenting a reflection of social hierarchy and communal expectation. The relationship between those two brothers highlights the struggle between value of social norms and the modernist approaches to human life. The elder brother stands as the symbol of moral responsibility and patriarchal authority, carries out the rules of the family structure and believes that harmony within the family comes from submission and dependency. His sense of duty, comes with affection and dedication, keeping social customs associated with self-realisation. On the other hand, the younger brother represents the modern sensibility, raises a voice against the stereotypes of the family. The conflict between these two brothers mirrors the ongoing conflict between tradition and comfort across the globe. Culturally, the story highlights the family as a representative element of Indian society, exposing how cultural acts and relationships respect and value rooted emotions. In many traditional societies, familial obedience and obligation are seen as an extension of disciplined nurturing; to disobey an elder is like defying and ruining the cultural order itself. The story's emotional approach arises from the younger brother Saroj's internal conflict where his moral awakening and rebellion acts as a social and cultural disagreement and opposition. In this context, "The Brothers" calls out the stereotypical tradition that somehow try to control human emotion. Das's use of subtle and realistic dialogue and domestic setting shifts the readers' ordinary vision of household into a symbolic battlefield of moral values. In fact, the story exemplifies the traditional portrayal of moral structures and its impact on society in a realistic manner. Ultimately, "The Brothers" seeks attention of the readers in a more compassionate and understanding way rather than an authoritative view. Das suggests that the truest bond between individuals in a particular community lies not in obedience, but in empathy, togetherness, emotional reciprocity and mutual respect. This respect of Saroj for his elder brother is seen in the incident where Bhuvan teaches him life lesson by giving him a slap. "He had lowered his head and, unmindful of Bhuvan's speech, was lighting a cigarette. He neglected to wonder why Bhuvan had suddenly fallen silent in the middle of a sentence. Suddenly he received a slap... Saroj threw away the cigarette and stood thunderstruck" (Das, 189).

Another famous story by Das is "The Dusky Horizon" where the liminal space between tradition and modernity is explored, portraying a society on the verge of transformation at the cost of every individual villager's struggle to find meaning in the fading light of old native land and emotions. The story's very title 'dusky horizon' serves as a metaphor for a world which is trapped between darkness and dawn, between the decline of inherited customs and the vague and risky hope of progress. Through its thoughtful style and evocative imagery, the story examines how social change influences a complete scenario from different angles as well as the inner lives of those who inhabit them. The protagonist here deals with nostalgia and hope, which become a symbol of the conditions and emotions he goes through. The time of dusk in the story, represents a contradictory situation like both an ending and a beginning like a period of confusion in which custom, old values and relationships get a specific form. From

a social perspective, the story engages with the issues of industrialisation and its after-effects on nature and human. It highlights the struggle of villagers who experience postcolonial progress that becomes a threat to indigenous traditions and spiritual foundations. Das in this story portrays modernization as a challenge for human-nature relationship and fails to provide a sense of security to even mankind. In a similar light, Émile Durkheim expresses sociological concept of anomie, as the moral confusion arising from rapid social change. The storyline represents a warning and the protagonist's alienation and moral uncertainty as symptoms of a society undergoing cultural instability. Literally, the story explores how progress, while material in form, can affect human life and psychology. The clash between old and new individual mindsets and cultural values produces both hope for freedom from rigid social norms and customs, as well as loss of the shared moral and regional language that once united people. Manoj Das's subtle language, mystic treatment of different things and almost poetic narration transforms this social documentary into a meditation on the human search for identity, address and meaning of life. "The Dusky Horizon" does not only focus on social context to address a universal truth, rather make every civilization realise that it is important to confront the dusk of his own ideals before moving toward a new dawn.

Another short story by Das is "Mystery of the Missing Cap", which presents itself as a humorous and light-hearted tale from the very surface level, but beneath the upper layer lies a profound reflection of the social systems and orders of judgment, morality, and perception. The story revolves around the theme of disappearance of a trivial object like a cap. It serves as the central motif through which the author humorously expresses the then society's hierarchical status and explores the larger social incidents of prejudice and the fragile nature of human reputation. In the story 'the missing cap' becomes a metaphor for lost respect, harmony or the presumed guilt that societal limitations too easily assign to individuals based on their appearance or social status. The narrative reveals how political and moral structure were back then and it had little to do with truth and reality. The humour, therefore, is double-edged as it not only entertains the readers but also exposes the flaws of mankind in various ways. The story holds a critical view towards communities sustaining themselves through mediums of gossip, suspicion, and moral understanding. The central character and the character of the minister, shows a contradictory analysis. The story shows moral authority and social phenomena in a traditional indigenous society. In this sense, "Mystery of the Missing Cap" shares affinities with social satires in modern literature revealing realities. The author's use of irony in a humorous way allows readers to recognize their own association with ethical shortcomings. The story's trivial incidents and innocent characters often expose the deeper psychological and ethical dimension of a society. Different characters' reactions and emotions at different times create curiosity among the readers and mirror the psychological dependency and moral confusion. As the story suggests mystery, the narrative structure follows the detective or investigative form, but it does not display the mystery of the cap only, rather becomes a missing sense of justice, psyche and understanding within human communities. By the end, the resolution of the missing cap, both comic or ironic, restores balance in a very dramatic and unexpected way. "Mystery of the Missing Cap" ultimately teaches that social life is not limited to finding truth through accusation but through empathy and self-examination. As Das at the very beginning of the story asks the readers to have an empathetic insight for both the characters. "It is certainly not my motive, in recounting this episode of two decades ago, to raise a laugh at the expense of Shri Moharana or Babu Virkishore, then the Hon'ble Minister of Fisheries and Fine Arts of my State. On the contrary, I wish my friends and readers to share the sympathy I have secretly nurtured in my heart for these two gentlemen over the years past" (Das, 1). He has made it a timeless reflection of human emotions and activities through his excellent tale-telling.

Ruskin Bond has been at a similar, high level while representing Indian social context. In "The Funeral", he delicately examines the social and emotional depth and complications surrounding loss of a dear one, shattered childhood, death, mourning, and human relationships within a traditional community. The story though from surface level seems to be, yet does not treat the funeral merely as a ritual or social custom, but as a cultural mirror that reveals the age-old phenomena prevalent in a social structure, priorities, and values it depicts. Through the incident of the death of narrator's father, the story captures the cross between personal loss and systematic custom, showing how grief, suffering and emotions of an individual, become a public performance, shaped by cultural expectations where everyone is involved. The story and the protagonist's silence become a medium of expression of his grief at the same time the reactions, gestures, rituals and words of others define how people are expected to grieve for someone else. In Indian rural societies, a funeral is more than a farewell to the dead; it is a reassurance of the togetherness, social order and emotional support. However, the story also presents a harsh truth of the society, when the son is kept away from his father's corpse and there the author subtly questions whether such mourning and empathies are only ritualized or comes out of genuine emotion. The characters' responses starting from genuine respect to a sense of formality reflect the tension between sincerity and obedience that often comes with communal ceremonies. Looking at the story from a cultural perspective, suggests how societies use death as a social event only. The customs including the burial of the dead body, mourning, prayers, processions and last rites expose the hierarchical structure of the community the dead person belonged to. Not only that the story also highlights the role of women during the mourning process, where they are confined to emotional and familial expression only, whereas men occupy the authoritative and dominant spaces. Such portrayals of different dimensions on gender biasness, showcasing of grief and social responsibility make the story an excellent one. Yet, surpassing the frame and ideology of cultural discussion only, its characters speak up volumes by revealing their silent fears and inner thoughts, while reminding readers that every ritual represents the struggle and individual consciousness. The burial scene has its own emotional impact, "A few more words from the Padre, and then some

of those present threw handfuls of earth over the coffin before moving away. Slowly, in twos and threes, the mourners departed” (Bond, 79). This story not only serves as a record of some social incidents happening in the narrator’s life, but also a study of human emotion. “The Funeral” exemplifies a writer’s intention to use ordinary events to highlight social truth and relevance. Bond has portrayed death as both a communal event and a personal realisation. The story also asks readers to consider the cultural and traditional approach of a particular setting to understand different psychological aspects of life even when losing a near one.

Another story by Bond is “The Kite Maker” which displays the themes of change, memory, and the fleeting nature of life during the time of postcolonialism in India. The story revolves around an old kite maker, who was once renowned for his artistry and craft, loses relevance in a rapidly changing modernised society. Through this aging dilemma, the author captures the grief of cultural dilemma and loss of social identity along with the fading of traditional craftsmanship and on the name of modernization. The kite, here is used as a symbolism of joy, creativity, simplicity and freedom of a human in this gradually vanishing world. The old kite maker’s nostalgic recollections of a past time when he was highly valued for his skill and his kites soared high in the sky, admired by princes and children alike becomes a sharp contrast to the present reality of indifference shown towards him. His art, was once considered beyond any communal boundary, is now dismissed and looked down upon as outdated amusement. The story’s emotional vibration lies in Bond’s juxtaposition of memory and modernity, tradition and decay as well as individual and a group. From a social and cultural perspective, “The Kite Maker” reveals the cost humans have to go through for the sake of progress. The decline of kite making with the passing of time is not merely the loss of a craft but also a disappearance of an entire cultural and social standard based on patience, beauty and human connection. The old kite maker, who now survives the tough phase of life in poverty, is sustained by memory, which becomes a cultural part that society has forgotten. However, his grandson who is fascinated by kites, suggests a faint appreciation of that old thing as a reminder of that cultural heritage which can never entirely die. The story also reflects different postcolonial conditions and events. The transformation of the city represented in the story mirrors India’s transition from a mere feudal setting to a modern nation and there the old customs coexist uneasily with the new systems. Bond gently reminds his audience this social transformation, letting his readers experience both nostalgia and discomfort. The story here serves as both an elegy and a social criticism, a lament for lost values and a comment on the rigid culture. In literary terms, the story exemplifies mankind’s capacity to transform cultural degradation into moral viewpoints, inspiring the idea of beauty and meaning in an increasingly industrialised and materialistic world.

“Angry River” is another short story by Bond that explores nature, spirituality, and feminist concept within the wider platform of cultural and mythic tradition. The story is about the protagonist Sita, a little girl. This immediately relates to some spiritual sentiments of the Hindu epic Ramayana with the name of Sita, yet here the story doesn’t portray Sita as a passive or dependent figure but as a symbol of harmony between woman and nature in a situation of real turmoil. Bond presents it in this way, “Sita climbed the tree to get a better view. She had climbed the tree many times and it took her only few seconds to reach the higher branches” (Bond, 123). This shows a different side of woman that Bond could see. The river, described with intensity as well as calmness, signifies the contrasting features of life itself: calm yet powerful, nurturing yet destructive, timeless yet ever-changing and generous yet unpredictable like nature. From a cultural insight, the story challenges patriarchal narratives by portraying feminine energy and bravery as source of wisdom. According to Ramayana, Sita’s purity and feminine side is defined by obedience and suffering, whereas in this story, she showcases her identity through self-awareness, cheerfulness and spiritual unity with nature. The river not only acts as a component of nature but also becomes a metaphor for her inner life that is unaffected by gender and social boundaries. Bond’s portrayal of Sita as an active character, an appreciator of nature and the river as an unpredictable tells a different story altogether. Being closely associated with nature, he understands the good and threatening impact of nature. These stories lay emphasis on nature and in some way demonstrate that both women and the nature are interlinked and are vital parts of a society.

CONCLUSION:

The short stories of Ruskin Bond and Manoj Das showcase the richness and complexity of Indian society, its norms and cultural belief systems. Both the authors’ portrayal of different elements and aspects, though they vary in style and way of presentation, deal with the rural social backgrounds, which are deep in humanistic concern and socio-political boundaries. They present quite a similar idea. Ruskin Bond’s works are generally set in the calm serene environment of hills of Garhwal, displaying his own life through the innocence of childhood of his characters, the simplicity of rural life, the captivating beauty of nature, projecting the side and beauty of India that many people fail to see. His portrayal of India does not depend on the luxurious or ever-charming part of a country or society, rather it is based on the lives of commoners, their emotions of love, loss, nostalgia and nature’s role in every individual’s life as well as the connection between ecology and culture of a particular region. Manoj Das, on the other hand, takes Indian literature in English and Odia to another level by adding folklore, mysticism, philosophy, fantasy and realistic character portrayal in his writing. The background of his stories is the coastal villages of Odisha and the characters belong to the group of common folks in Odisha. His narration of different celebrations and events happening in such rural parts of the country reveals the moral and spiritual systems of Indian life. He shows how tradition coexists with culture, compassion and emotional beliefs to shape human destiny. Through humour,

irony and moral depth, Das not only glorify the good side of Indian society, but also exposes social contradictions and flaws. Studying both Bond and Das together illuminates the cultural essence of India, the moral and traditional values, respect for nature through their creative writings. Their works create a sense of concern and emotion beyond any social barrier of caste, class, and community. Both the writers have contributed immensely to the genre of Indian short story, compelling readers to understand life and art. Their literary works are deeply social and culturally expressive across time and generations.

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