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The Artistry of Language in Ruskin Bond's 'The Kite Maker'

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ABSTRACT: Ruskin Bond as a short story writer occupies a prominent place in the realm of contemporary Indian English writers. He has a deep love and affinity for the mountains and hills; he feels the very pulse of the Indian life and very sensitively registers the social Indian habits through in a uniquely simple, functional idiom. His language gives one the true flavor of India. He uses simple syntactical structures, which are short and unambiguous. He does not resort to periphrasis. His language reflects the clarity of thought and cleared conscience both of his characters as well as himself. The simplicity of dialogue and tone is symbolic of the milieu and the background of characters. The characters' minds are always swinging between the past and the present, between pleasant and painful memories. This gives a rhythmic oscillation to the narration. Entire episodes in the story, "The Kite Maker" convey new perspectives which bring forth the Indian ethos. It also projects the period of transition between the human being's experiences, whose sensibility becomes a sensitive measure of the inner reality, as it seems to responds to the stimulus of change.

KEYWORDS: Use of Imagery, Simile, Idiom, Personification, Myth, Use of Hindi Words.

Ruskin Bond is a short story writer par excellence. He occupies a distinctive place in the realm of contemporary Indian English writer. In his short stories, Bond creates a world of warmth and compassion, within which eccentric individuals polish their absurdities. His short stories are a true presentation of the art of characterization and harmonious development of plot that gives the true flavor of Indian-ism. In this way Bond achieves the ground of excellence, the verisimilitude is the test of the art of writing. This paper will make a deep study of the language used by Bond in his short story "The Kite Maker". In the story Mehmood, the old kite-maker and the banyan tree were taken for granted and looked at the same insouciance. These stories also record the passing away of a world in which things were slow-moving and people closely knit, when sharing in each other's joy and sorrow was an integral part of living. But now in the fast-moving society the time has changed, the leisure has shrunk. The young generations are more inclined towards the movies, gadgets, and sports. His grandson's name Ali is a ray hope of hope in the midst of alienation and gloominess. The kite maker made a new kite for little Ali. He had nothing to give his grandsons, as his legacy after his death. At the end, the old man image is compared to the string-less kite which lifted it in the air, carrying it far away from the struggling city into the blue sky to a deep eternal world.

Bond's language is in consonance with the cultural and traditional background of the character. Bond shears away that is not necessary either to the plot or to the revelation of character. He deals with ideas and expressions which directly capture the heart and mind of the reader through the soft spoken language. The story is told in a direct and simple language without any ambiguity. His language satisfies the readers' demands on two counts: authenticity and artistic merit. Here, Bond's use of Hindi words like "Zindagi" "Mehmood" "Gali" "Ram Nath" "Ali" "Garuda" "Vishnu's" add flavor and color to his characters and storyline

Bond's language describes the mental set up of his characters, and their situation. In "The KiteMaker", the kite maker looks and muses upon the string-less kite struck in the branches of an old banyan tree. He feels that he is standing in between the past and the present where his situation makes him appears like the stuff between a sandwich. The changing face of the city has gradually eroded the old crafts and artistry and it has created a sense of negligence and vacancy that surround an old kite maker. The kite becomes a symbol of human consciousness, also emotion, and experience. One can say about Bond what is said about Wordsworth, who probes deep into the working of human mind and believes that,

man and the objects that surround him as acting
and reacting upon each other, so as to produce
an infinite complexity of pain and pleasure; he
considers man in his own nature and in his

ordinary life as contemplatinglooking upon
this complex scene of ideas and sensations, and
finding everywhere objects that immediately
excite in him sympathies.
(Wordsworth, cited in Owen, 80)

In this way writers see an object and create art out of it because of the feelings that the object inspires and lends itself to so that it is transformed and brought forth a new manner of seeing and feeling the world. "The Kite Maker" exquisitely registers the feelings of Mehmood when he becomes nostalgic about those past happy days, when he was well known in the city for his kite making and people had care and respect for him. Bond has made use of the flashback technique for narrating the golden days of the old man because they give the background of the protagonist. The emphasis in the storytelling is on the past per se, as in its influence on the present, foreshadowing gives an allusion to the future.

The writer through his creativity tries to dissolve the boundary between the mind and the exterior world. It is viewed that dreams occur at a deep level and connect all human consciousness and experience. Dreams constitute the arena in which people move beyond their environment's constricting forces, and engage again with their deeper selves, which society has long suppressed. Here, the vast vista of past experiences and thoughts flashes across his mind that how at the request of the Nawab he had made a very special kind of kite, the "Dragon Kite", the phrase denoting that it possessed supernatural powers. By the skilled use of the narrative technique and the suggestive language, and the use of folk-superstitions about the distorted shape and appearance of "Dragon Kite", Bond creates a sense of an eerie atmosphere which feels natural. A large crowd had gathered in the open to watch his launching of the Dragon kite in the presence of the Nawab because kite flying was then the sport of kings. Here, the vivid description strongly implies the similarity between the two, the kite and the supernatural, and is rendered powerful rhetorically:

"The Dragon Kite soared into the sky,
wriggling its way higher and higher,
the sun still glinting in its devil eyes.
And, when it went very high, it pulled
fiercely at the twine, and Mehmood's
young son had to help him with the
reel.....Still the kite pulled, determined
to be free, to break loose, and to live a
life of its own. And, eventually it
did so." (210).

The Kite maker and the old tree share a rare bond, they blend into each other. The community is bonding and sharing, with Mehmood at the centre, under the shade of old banyan tree, is no one is willing to sit now. "No longer did people gather under banyan tree to discuss their problem and their plan; only in the summer months did a few seek shelter from the fierce sun" (210) Mehmood has a deep nostalgia for the slow-paced life, of the warmth and affection of the days of yore. "Now everyone hurried, hurried in a heat of hope, and delicate things like kites and daydreams, were trampled underfoot". (210) One can find Bond natural poetic prose is felt palpably in the above line through the natural alliteration that quickens the pace of the line and reflects the sentiment it seeks to convey.

In the modern commercialized world, people are so engaged in their work that they have hardly any time for the kite maker. The people callous attitude is depicted through their short memories. People quickly use to forget the achievements of kite makers. "Kite makers, like poets, once had their patrons; but now nobody knew Mehmood, simply because there were too many people in the Gali, and they could not be bothered with their neighbours." (211)

One can see what shines forth in the writing of Bond is loved for small towns and their innocence which forces him to settle down in the Garhwal hills because the city life is full of hustle and bustle. The industrial urban culture inspires materialism and results in distancing man from man; from values, from culture; and social relations that existed in times of sensitivity when the society was close-knit. The fast pace of city life is responsible for indifference, dissatisfaction, apathy, animosity, withdrawal, and the function of cruel economic order. The fast-paced society has no time for Mehmood to share his old memories. The city which once had a lively atmosphere, with kite flying at its

height, is now a crowded city and children are more interested in watching movies and playing cricket. People do not prefer to spend their money on buying the kites. The old man remembers the past days on “how the Nawab himself would come down to the riverside with the retinue to participate in this noble pastime. There was time, then, to spend an idle hour with a gay, dancing strip of paper” (210)

Here, Bond raises the rhetorical question of the apathetic approach of the contemporary, competitive, industrialized world through the changing scenario towards the suffering masses. Even the Nawab had died years ago, and now his descendants were almost as poor as kitemaker Mehmood himself. “The city had swallowed up the open grassland that had stretched from the old fort’s wall to the river bank.”(210) One must be aware of ecological and environmental imbalance and the chaotic changes are playing in one’s lives Due to the selfishness and greed of human beings rapid deforestation had upset the ecology, and resulted in the disappearance of the green world. The use of the verb, “swallowed” is powerful in its portrayal of man as a predator. Ecological degradation forms the theme in many of Bond’s stories.

Bond has immense sympathy and understanding for people who are neglected in society:

“When Mehmood was young and had fallen sick everyone in the neighborhood had come to ask after his health; but now when his old friends were dead and his sons had grown up: one was working in a local garage and the other, who was the Pakistan at the time of the Partition, had not been able to rejoin his relatives” (211).

Bond’s story is a record of actual life brought into form social, political, economic condition of India. In the changing social atmosphere, the same children, who have grown up now, have no time for kite makers. They looked at the old kite maker and the banyan tree with the same indifference. Long ago there is a great affinity between the tree and the old kite maker. Both are isolated and ignored, and both are lonely. The tree stands stretching its brittle limbs in the sun, waiting for people to come under its shade, and the old kite maker waits, with a ray of hope, for someone who would come and hear and share his memories of old days. Sadly both are neglected; they blend unnoticed into the sights of the city, their presence taken for granted. Nostalgia, a deep longing for something that is lost, is the central theme of the story.

Bond’s use of natural speech or figure of speech as a narrative technique stimulates interest and personal involvement in the story. Bond’s literary style gives musical sounds to inanimate objects, “He (the Kite maker) presented to the Nawab a musical kite, one that made a sound like a violin when it rose into the air” (211) Bond descriptions are impressive by the use of similes. He says, “This kite will fly like a bird”. In the story, a peculiar sort of idiom is used giving life and character to the kite: swerving and swooping in the sky; wriggling higher and higher; the sun trapped in the little mirror; making the kite a living, protesting sound; Dragon Kite; dancing strip of paper; in a heat of hope; the Sun glinting in its devil eyes; and so on.

The interesting aspect of the short story in Indian mythology is that they are meant to convey subtle fact, values, culture, rules and maxims to guide our daily lives. While using myths as raw material the writers are capable of transporting the fictional world into status of a living myth. “The Kite maker is just like a Kite, whose string lies in the hand of destiny. The kite becomes the symbol of freedom from earthly bondage and flies towards the eternal deep. The image of Kite reflects the eternal truth of life, where the kite maker dreams to get freedom from earthly bondage and surpasses toward divinity” (Bhatt, 181) The kite resembles “God Vishnu’s Garuda, famous steed “In the Hindu mythology, Garuda is considered a bird and the vahana (mount) of the god. Vishnu is the Supreme God who takes avatars across ages to save humanity from evil beings, Asuras. Vishnu governs the aspect of preservation and sustenance of the universe, so he is called "Preserver of the universe"” (Wikipedia, Vishnu)

“Namah pannaganaddhaaya vaikunta vasavardhineh |
Srutisindhu Sudhothpaada-mandaraaya Garutmathe ||

"I bow to Garuda, the One with the beautiful wings, whose limbs are adorned by the mighty serpents, who he has conquered in battle. I bow to the One who is forever in the devotion of his Lord, Vishnu. He is as adept as the Mandara Mountain, in churning the ocean of the Vedas, capturing the very essence of their wisdom."

Garuda Gayatri

Om Thathpurushaya Vidhmahe
Svarna Pakshaya Dheemahe
Thanno Garuda Prachodayath.

Om, Let me meditate on that great living being,
Oh, Bird with golden wings, give me higher intellect,
And let the God Garuda illuminate my mind

Bond's narrative technique for the natural world is somewhat similar to Wordsworth's in quality. He successfully makes use of the idiom, the simile, the rhythms, personification, imagery, and the tone of the natural speech of the characters. Bond has a proven mastery over "craftsmanship" to show emotion and verbal intensity of words. Bond's work is good and explores the world through his narrative, using symbolic richness; flawless style; intensity and compactness; through the skillful collaboration of fact and fiction reflecting the theme of the story. The scene where Mehmood leaves the world is painted with artistic sensitivity and very deep symbolism. "The voice in the street grew fainter, and Mehmood wondered if he was going to fall asleep and dream, as he so often did, of a kite so beautiful and powerful that it would resemble the great white bird of the Hindu- Garuda, God Vishnu's famous steed"

Suddenly a voice seemed to come from very far calling his grandfather, but Mehmood was silent. Ali, his grandson, came near and touched his shoulder, and he met no response. The boy heard a faint sound, just as the rubbing of marbles in his pocket. By the skill of using language in simile in a special way that attests the attention of the reader immediately. Suddenly Ali sounds loudly....? "The butterfly left the old man's beard and flew to the mimosa tree, and a sudden gust of wind caught the torn kite and lifted it in the air, carrying it far above the struggling city into the blind blue sky" (212).

At the end, from the struggling city life and its bondage, the stringless kite flies towards the attainment of deeper truth. Bond's vision like the sunshine in his short stories through English language is typically Indian. Bond writes in precise language. He borrows characters from real life, and sets them in everyday events. He portrays them with beauty and significance, and makes them appear so real that they are not easily forgotten. Their problems appear to be genuine and absorb the reader's attention and grab his sympathy. The kite and kite maker project the images of cultural, social, and political change. Bond has an uncanny gift of inhabiting the shifting landscapes of the reader's mind. The outer reality, painted in his stories, becomes a measure of the inner reality as it responds sensitively to the stimulus of change. Bond's simple and easy style comes with superb story telling skills.

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