

The use of myths in Ruskin Bond's short-stories

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Abstract

Ruskin Bond has used myths in his short stories. Myths of Ruskin Bond present different religions. His myths also convey the message of protection of environment and natural life. He is proponent of Indian tradition and environment. Myths of Ruskin Bond are conveying the message of India's religions, mentality of people and their respect for creatures and environment. Indian people worship creatures as the essence of God.

Keywords: myths, environment, protection, tradition, social phenomenon

1. Introduction

The present research paper is an attempt to study the myths used by Ruskin Bond in his short stories. The researcher has selected four short stories of Ruskin Bond entitled as 'A Little World of Mud', 'Sita and the River', 'To the River' and 'The Trouble with Jinns'.

The word myth is derived from the Greek word 'mythos' which means story (Abrams 70). Myth means story which embodies a belief regarding some fact or phenomenon of experience, and in which the forces of nature and soul are personified; a sacred narrative regarding a God, a hero, the origin of world or of a people, etc. It was the product of man's emotion of imagination, acted upon by his surroundings. Myth can be defined as "A story that originated in ancient times, especially one concerning the early history of a people or explaining natural events such as the seasons." (Crowther, 770)

All people in all the ages had their own mythologies or collection of myths. Mythology is the collection of tales, socially and individually symbolic. The culture of the people embodies their myths. Myths are reflection of social conditions around them. Myths are observed in various forms like paintings, architecture, literature and folk literature.

Myths are occurring in literature, many writers' present myths of their surrounding areas. The world famous writers and poets like T.S. Eliot, Eugene O'Neill, James Joyce, and W. B Yeats have used myths in their literature. The Indian English short stories are not exception to it. Indian short story writers like Rabindranath Tagore and R. K. Narayan have used myths in their short stories. Ruskin Bond is prominent Indian story writer whose short stories present the myths of Indian different religions.

Ruskin Bond is a well-known Indian short-story writer. His characters and themes are borrowed from the life of jungle. 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. Like nature poet William Wordsworth, Ruskin Bond looks at nature as friend, philosopher, teacher,

preacher and guide. William Wordsworth says in his poem 'The Table Turned' that,

"And hark! How blithe the throstle sings!
 He, too is no mean preacher:
 Come forth into the light of things,
 Let Nature be your Teacher."

(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 blended myth as literary device which help in introducing the culture and tradition of India. The purpose of using myths is not only to relate people with tradition and culture but also to convey the message of conservation and protection of animals, birds and many natural creatures and environment.

Myths used by Ruskin Bond in his short stories are meaningful; and enrich the narration of his stories. Some myths of Ruskin Bond help to underline the meaning of plot. He shows his interaction with self and highlights the crucial issues of his life. In this regards Amita Aggarwal rightly says that, "Myths are means to transmute personal destiny into the destiny of mankind. Through this aesthetic means of expression Bond has reflected complex interaction of the self and the world. Some of his myths highlight the meaning of the plot." (Aggarwal, 151)

In 'A Little World of Mud' Ruskin Bond has used myths of Lord Shiva and Lord Krishna. He has presented the character of tribal boy, Ramu who compares a bird, bluejay with Lord Shiva. Tribal people are well familiar with the local folk tales and myths. Ramu informs to narrator that both bluejay and Lord Shiva are called as 'Nilkanth.' Ramu tells that both bluejay and Lord Shiva have blue throat and Lord Shiva swallowed the poison for the well being of human race. He himself faces agony and saves human race. That incident makes blue throat of Lord Shiva. Ramu narrates to narrator that, "The bluejay and god Shiva were Nilkanth. Shiva had a blue throat like the bird, because out of compassion for the human

race, he had swallowed a deadly poison which was meant to destroy the world. Keeping the poison in his throat, he had not let it go further.” (A Bond with Nature, 197)

Ramu has compared Lord Shiva with bird bluejay due to its blue throat. Shiva is supposed as the angry God in Hindu culture, but for the cause of humanity he himself makes sacrifice. This myth shows devotion and sacrifice of Lord Shiva for the survival of entire human race. It is an example of tribal people’s deep knowledge of Indian culture and myths.

Ruskin Bond has presented the myth of Lord Krishna. Krishna is supposed as naughty and mischievous God in Hindu culture. The colour of Lord Krishna is black. Lord Krishna is lover of animals and small natural creature. There is peacock feather on his headgear and he is always accompanied by cows. The love of Lord Krishna for small creature is reflected through the myth told by Ramu to Narrator. When narrator asks Ramu,

“Are Squirrels sacred?” He replies that, “The god Krishna loved them,” said Ramu. “He would take them in his arms and stroke them with his long fingers. That is why they have four dark lines backs from head to tail. Krishna was very dark and lines are the marks of his fingers.” (Bond, A Bond With Nature 197)

In the poem ‘The Rime of Ancient Mariner’, S.T. Coleridge focuses on the importance of love of animals and creatures. According to him God has made entire universe and one should love all the cratures. In the same way we have to love all the creatures of God. Coleridge expresses that,

“He prayeth best, who loveth best
All things both great and small;
For the dear God who loveth us,
He made and loveth”

(Fifteen Poets, 275)

In the same manner Ruskin Bond conveys the message that God loves all the creatures whether they are small or big. The God is also interested in nature and creatures. The company of God makes natural creatures pious. When Lord Krishna touches squirrel his fingers make marks on its body. It shows the touch of God make natural creatures sacred. Squirrels are worshiped in Indian culture due to Lord Krishna’s company.

‘Sita and the River’ also presents the myth of Lord Krishna. Lord Krishna is supposed as naughty God and his mischievous nature creates confusion among other Gods. He is responsible to make other Gods angry. Sita is the protagonist of the short story. She is innocent and nature loving girl. Her grandmother used to tell her tales of Lord Krishna and his friendship with birds and animals and his mischievous activities. Grandmother once tells her that young Lord Krishna makes God Indra angry by shifting a mountain without the permission of God Indra. She tells Sita that,

“He made Inrda angry by shifting a mountain without permission. Indra was the god of the clouds and, who made the thunder and lightning, and when he was angry he sent down a deluge such as this one.” (Bond, Dust on the Mountain, 226)

This myth of Lord Krishna shows the naughty activities as well as his mischievous nature of Lord. The old people are generally acquainted with the myths. Sita’s grandmother relates her with mischievous activities of Lord Krishna. It indicates that myths are carried forward generation to generation through mouth publicity as well. Grandmother also gives the information of God Indra. It is believed in Indian culture that God Indra brings clouds and shower of rain.

In ‘To the River’ Ruskin Bond has used myth for children. The myths of Yeti and Lidini as well as myth of Sagpa and Sagpani are described. The people of snow mountain areas especially Himalaya believes in these myths. Some boys are eager to see the glacier they pass from narrow path and out of curiosity make enquiry of the glacier to Nepali Watchman. Nepali watchman informs them about Snowman Sagpa and snowwoman Sagpani as natural creatures found in Himalayan Mountain areas. The watchman gives the physical description of snow couple Sagpa and Sagpani. When Anil, one of the boys, asks watchman about the characteristics and different activities of another supernatural creature, Lidini he informs to them that,

“She is of the same height as the Yeti-about seven feet when her back is straight—her hair is much longer. She has very long teeth and nails. Her feet are face inward, but she can run very fast” (Bond, A Bond with Nature, 125)

Narrator has also introduced the myth of Sagpa and Sagpani. Bisnu, one of the boys knows about these Sagpa and Sagpani. He describes the couple sagpa and Sagpani. Bisnu makes aware to children that this couple loves sleeping and if anybody awaken them from the sleep, they become more furious and try to attack on such people. He shares to other boys that,

“Their favourite pass time was sleeping, and they became ferocious, annoyed and did not give one such time to start running uphill.” (Bond, A Bond With Nature, 126)

Narrator has described the ferocious nature and negative aspets of the these supernatural creatures. At the same time he has concentrated on the good snd caring nature poas well as their co-operative actiuvities, especially for children. It is believed that these Sagpa and Sagpani take care of children and give them important things to eat.

Bisnu tells his other friends that,

“The Sagpa and Sagpani sometimes kidnapped children, and taking them to their cave, would look after the children very carefully, feeding them on fruits, honey, rice and earthworms.” (Bond, A Bond With Nature, 126)

Ruskin Bond has not only presented the myths of Hindu religion in India but also other Indian religions. He presented supernatural creatures like Jinn and their myth. These myths make balance between both Hindu and Muslim traditions and culture.

The story ‘The Trouble with Jinns’ depicts the character of Jimmy who has lost his hand. He has misused his gift of elongate hand. He troubles people by stretching his hand. The Jinn especially has weakness of long hair. The Jinn love long hair and falls victim of these long hairs. It is myth that woman who has long and free hair haunted by Jinns. Once she is haunted by Jinn she loses beauty and her physical strength but her hair remains black, long and lovely. Narrator in this story presents that,

“Now the trouble with all the Jinns is that they have a weakness for women with long hair. The longer and blacker the hair, the better for Jinns. And should Jinn manage to take possession of the woman he desires, she goes into a decline and her beauty decays. Everything about her is destroyed except for the beautiful long black hair.” (Bond, Dust on the Mountain 78)

This myth of Jinn try to presents that Jinn likes women with long and black hair. In this short story once Jinn sees the long hair of woman and Jinn cannot control himself. The essence of his body entered in the woman body. Next day the woman distraught, feversih and excite. She does not eat and goes in the

condition of coma, after some days girl becomes skinny and dies. when she dies her hair remain lovely.

2. Conclusion

Ruskin Bond makes use of myths in his short stories. His myths comes from different sources. Myths of Ruskin Bond offers the message of conservation of environment, animals, creatures and birds. It the sign of his intense love for nature. The myths of Ruskin Bond reflect the mentality of Indian people. They believe in supernatural world. His myths are the reflection of good and evil forces in the society.

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