

Reflection of 'Himalayan Beauty' in Ruskin Bond's Short Stories

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Abstract

One comes across the exquisite beauty of the Himalayas in the untamed and unperturbed mysterious deep gorges, serpentine rivers flowing with crystal vibrant water, high peaks, and sun-soaked stunning mountain ranges where there is impeccable serenity and tranquility. Adults as well as small children get fascinated by mesmerizing Himalayan rustic beauty. Ruskin Bond, a famous Indian writer of British origin, wrote some of his heart-touching stories against the backdrop of the gorgeous Himalayan mountain vicinity. The present paper is devoted to the study of Himalayan beauty as reflected in the short story, 'How far is the River?' by Ruskin Bond.

Keywords: *The Himalayas, beauty, untamed, unperturbed, gorges, peak, serpentine rivers, serenity, tranquility, heart-touching, rustic beauty, vicinity*

The present paper entitled "Reflection of Himalayan Beauty in Ruskin Bond's Short Stories" explores the writer's passion, compassion, trust, faith and deep love for nature in his short story 'How far is the River?' which is a representative of his short stories. Many of his short stories are set in the hill stations and at the foothills of the Himalayas. His works glorify the Himalayan land filled with tranquility, serenity and beauty in abundance. He has written over three hundred short stories in which he brings out the vivid picture of the Himalayas involving different aspects of nature's flora and fauna. He talks about the two human stages- the children's thoughts and adult's reactions in this story. Children instinctively love nature, birds and animals. They never do harm or exploit them as they are naturally innocent. Compassion, kindness, trust and love mean everything to them. On the other hand, the cruel selfish attitude of adults causes harm to and chaos for other creatures on the earth.

Ruskin Bond, an Indian author of British descent, is well-known for his novels, short stories and poems. He has extensively written children's literature for which he was awarded Padmashri and Padma Bhushan by the government of India in 1909 and 1914 respectively. Ruskin Bond in his formative years had to undergo struggles, failures, setbacks and tragic incidents but he would never lose hopes as he was very optimistic about

life. This positive attitude always kept him in high spirits as it is evident from the reading of his stories and autobiographical writing.

'How Far is the River?' narrates an episode of a 12 year old nameless boy who happens to live in a small village in a picturesque valley surrounded by lush green high mountain ranges and a dense forest. There was a river flowing at its own sweet will with crystal clear water which was about seven miles away from the village in which he lived and the solitary path to the river was through the mountain and valley thriving with dense forest, dangerous rocks, rough boulders and thorny shrubs. Ruskin Bond unfolds the psychology of a twelve year boy who was longing to go to the river and discover the treasure of nature. The river was far away and beyond the mesmerizing mountain which was full of shrubs, tall lush green trees and thick grass. The boy had never seen the river beyond the mountain in his life but he had heard about its beautiful description from the elderly people that it had plenty of and diverse rocks. Therefore, he had a strong desire to touch and dabble in the clean water of the river.

One day, he decides to go and experience the undiscovered nature when there was no one at home. His parents had gone to one of their friends' house and he knew that they would return late in the evening. Bare foot, he started his journey carrying with him a loaf of bread. On the way, he happened to meet a woodcutter, a girl, a milkman and mule drivers to whom he asked the direction in which he should go so that he would reach the river bed. But no one provided him the proper direction. Nevertheless, he kept on asking how far the river was to whomever he met on his way. After crossing some distance, he met a village boy with whom he had his lunch. The village boy provided the right answer to his question, "How far is the river?" Nevertheless, the village boy also abandoned his company as he took another road that divulged to his village. Though lonely and frustrated, the boy kept on waking without losing hope. He thought that if he returned from that point, it would be a shameful experience for him. Therefore, he continued walking with the hope that he would find out the river even though he slipped

and tumbled occasionally. Finally, to his great delight, he heard the roaring sound of water and rushed in that direction. As soon as he saw the steady flowing river, his joy knew no bounds. He experienced the ankle deep crystal clear cold water gushing down from the nearby mountain as he jumped into the river with joy. Finally, after a long trek, he was able to fulfill his coveted dream of experiencing the beauty of a river.

"How Far is the River?" is set in the serene beauty of the Himalayas. The readers come to know how Ruskin Bond was fascinated by the picturesque beauty of the Himalayas. Nature played a prominent role in rejuvenating the spirit of Ruskin Bond in his childhood and boyhood. How nature made his mind pristine in disturbed situation is reflected in his short stories. He manifests a mesmerizing description of his surrounding through his imaginary inner world in his fictional works. Some of his short stories and essays seem to have mirrored his life. A natural scenic hill of Dehradun and Missouri always revitalized his mind and gave him a healing power for his lonesome journey in life. Through his short story, he conveys the significant message to the readers that nature has been a great companion for the all creatures on the planet earth. He conveys the tranquil beauty and glory of heavenly Himalaya through his imaginary words and tries to bring out the sight of the Himalayan landscape such as mountains, rivers, hills, plants, animals and the surface of the earth with a panoramic view. He uses ornamental words to describe the Himalayan beauty.

It was the Himalaya's foothills that he had made his home. He was living with his grand-parents in their house with a garden where he used to play, sit on the trees and watch the birds chirping and making their nests on the trees. The branches of trees were bent on over his window. He used to sit under the shade of the trees and write his stories. His father had so many pet animals and treated them as friends. He felt that nature had unconditional love for him and it soothed his mind. The young boy starts his adventurous journey fulfilling his coveted dream of touching and splashing the pristine water of the river. Here, narrator illustrates the land of Himalaya and take delight the readers of enjoying sweet company of the nature. The following extract vividly depicts the idyllic appearance of nature:

It was a dizzy, winding path, and slipped once or twice and slid into a blush or down a slope of slippery pine needles. The hill was covered with lush green ferns, the trees were entangled in creepers, and a great wild dahalia would suddenly rear its golden head from the leaves and ferns.

So I walked on, along the hot, dusty, stony path, past stone huts and terraced fields, until there were no fields or huts, only forest and sun loneliness. There were no men, and no sign of man's influence only trees and rocks and grass and small flowers-and silence... (How far is the River? 70). On his maiden journey of the discovery of the river, the narrator boy vividly manifested the Himalayan beauty such as tall mountain ranges full of fresh shrubs, lush green trees, stony path, enchanting mystery, rushing water, murmur of the leaves, chirping birds and dense forest. The young boy kept on walking in the dense forest without caring for time and suffering because he had a deep love for nature.

Ruskin Bond expresses his heartfelt feelings in this story and says that there is a strong relationship between man and nature as both are interdependent and interrelated. The readers come to know through his famous story, 'How Far is the River?' that he had deep love for nature and how he treated nature. Bond feels pity for the cruel and unsympathetic behavior of the humans toward nature. His empathy for animals, birds, trees, rivers, mountains and rocks is depicted in the present story. He allows the birds, flowers, and trees to speak and convey their own messages. He not only takes delight in listening to their sounds but also penetrates into their hearts. Bond wants the readers to inculcate value of sincerity, selflessness, honesty, loyalty, love, and concern for nature through this short story. In his famous book *The Book of Nature* (2016), he articulates his experience with nature. Bond says: "Instead of having brothers and sisters to grow up with in India, I had as my companions of pets, a tortoise, a python, and a great Indian Hornbill." (15)

According to him, we must appreciate our environment. On the contrary, the behavior of the humans has been cruel towards the nature. He feels relaxed and comfortable in the lap of nature. Nature gives many things to the human beings such as wealth, health, happiness, food and protection that we desire for but nature does not receive a reward from the human beings. We have to appreciate nature and understand the unconditional love it showers on human beings. Trees give us everything; food, shelter, water and air but we take it for granted. Therefore, nature is a good friend of human. It only expects love and affection from the human beings. It gives hopes to all the creatures and rejuvenates their lives.

A mesmerizing beauty of the Himalayas is reflected in Ruskin Bond's short story, 'How far is the River?' Bond's thoughts, behavior and emotions are reflected in the story under consideration. The nature brings the light of hopes in his life and provides relief for his weary soul. The

Himalayas has been like an old friend for Ruskin. As the age passes, memories flash in his inward eye and make him blissful in solitude.

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