

Animal Kingdom in the Fictional Works of Ruskin Bond

Uttiya Sarkar

Assistant Professor

English

Dream Institute of Technology, Kolkata, India

Abstract : The world of animals is abundant in the fictions of Ruskin Bond. They are characterized by their behaviour which represent human like behaviour in close relation to the author himself and other characters created by him. Yet visitors visiting the author at his home in Mussourie feels disappointed not to find any bats hanging from his ceiling or any mice under the mattress. This proves that all the animals in the fictions of Bond are basically mere creations of his imaginations framed from his observations of the landscape in the lap of the Himalayas. The present paper proposes to discuss some of the animal characters from Bond's selections and their characterizations.

Keywords – Nature, child, insects, animals, birds, grandfather, zoo.

1. Introduction

BOND, himself is a lover of nature, and it is in his works that nature, landscape, flora and fauna finds abundance. His home in the lap of the Himalayas has given him the opportunity to closely observe the wild. His fictions have immortalized through the presentations of these. Bond skillfully handles the issues of man's harmony with his environment including animals. In his stories he portrays this passion for pets and animals and related adventures. In "Our Tress Still grow in Dehra", for which Bond has received the prestigious *Sahitya Akademi Award*, has the nostalgic touch and smell of the wild. His famous story "The Tiger in the Tunnel", is a composition which thralls the sinewy existence of a tiger and its closeness to human life. In "An Island of Trees", we find multiple animal characters that are domesticated and identified with the author and other human characters surrounding him in close existence. He composed stories for children with animals in them, so that visitors to his small flat in Mussourie feel disappointed at having no flying foxes on the ceilings. Bond admits that he loves animals but as their bowel movements is different from humans, so their real home is in the wild. Bond describes the behaviour of birds, animals in such a way that sometimes they seem human.

2. Some Animal Characters of Bond.

Bond has presented a panorama of animals in his fictions ranging from tigers, leopards, and wild animals to domesticated animals like goats, donkeys, monkeys, birds and even bats and lizards.

Henry, the Chameleon: A chameleon is of course not a character to be represented in a story. But Bond's ways are wonderful. Young children find it interesting chasing lizards and chameleons in the villages. Of course that is why we find Henry an interesting example. After all a child is more likely to be acquainted with animals and insects than an adult.

*"When I first visited Henry, he would treat me with great caution, sitting perfectly still on his perch with his back to me. The eye nearer to me would move around like the beam of a searchlight until it had me well in focus. Then it would stop and the other eye would begin an independent survey of its own. For a long time Henry trusted no one and responded to my friendliest gestures with grave suspicion."*¹

The author as a child had his first intimation from his grandfather that a chameleon is a harmless fellow. This is once again a part of Bond's imagination as he had actually no interaction with either of his grandfathers and that is evident from his biography. Assured by the harmlessness of the chameleon he had put his finger in the mouth of the chameleon. Henry knew well that though he had, yet his teeth were there for the sole purpose of chewing food, not fingers. So

probably he didn't bite the author. Yet at times if he was provoked, Henry would scare people just by changing its colour or opening its mouth wide to squint. Henry had a close acquaintance with the boy author, and he took his food directly from his hands, his tongue acting like a boomerang in the course to bring back the food to his mouth.

Tutu: Tutu was a monkey and was bought from a street entertainer for a sum of ten rupees by the author's grandfather. Bond makes a note to his readers on the habit of his grandfather for keeping different kinds of pets in his home. Once again we can assume that this is imaginative. Bond chooses to call the creative animal kingdom of his own observation as "Grandfather's Zoo".

In our country children and folk are attracted by street entertainers who entertain by the clowning gestures or dances of a monkey. Monkeys are our nearest primates and their intelligence equals to average children, who are naughty. Tutu was a girl-monkey. She was pretty. She was a complete mischief and pranky. She wore Aunt Ruby's coats and took Benji's hair-brush. Once even Tutu had to be taken to Meerut by grandfather. There she had been charged a sum of five rupees for being a cat or a dog. Tutu loved bathing. One day she nearly boiled herself in the kettle while trying to bath in the warm water when the kettle was over fire. Tutu did many other mischiefs. She even went after in the car for Aunt Ruby's honeymoon.

*"She was a pretty little monkey. Her bright eyes sparkled with mischief beneath deep-set eyebrows. And her teeth, which were pearly white, were often revealed in a grin that frightened the wits out of Aunt Ruby, whose nerves had already suffered from the presence of Grandfather's pet python in the house at Lucknow."*²

All the adventures of Tutu just simply add to the mischief of a naughty child. The monkey's attitudes are similar to the mischief of a boy. Whatever the situation of the mischief was, the narrator enjoyed it. For he might not have been able to create it but Tutu did it for him. On the other hand Tutu was a pet and she was a continuous source of amusement to the boy. The boy not only enjoyed her mischief, but he appreciated them as well. Tutu is presented by Bond as logical and rational in her behaviour to those who were different.

The Owls: Though it is evident from the biography of Bond that he has no interaction or intimacy with either of his grandparents. May be that is why he longed their presence and it is exhibited in his works. His grandmother generally hated the animals and birds that were kept in the "Grandfather's Zoo".

But these twin owlets were dear to her. She fed them. Even when grandfather had to feed them, he wore grandmother's petticoats. Bond makes a nostalgic remark:

*"Looking on those owlish days, I carry in my mind a picture of grandmother with a contented look in her rocking-chair. Once, on entering her room while she was having an afternoon nap, I saw that one of the owls had crawled up her pillow till its head snuggled under her ear. Both grandmother and the little owl were snoring."*⁵

Harold, the Hornbill: Harold, the hornbill, for instance, is expressed as a beautiful creature, not as a Hollywood figure but a creature amusing in its own actions. The narrator as a child along with his grandfather had found him fallen in the verandah, when attacked by a civet cat in its nest in the flame-tree. It seemed to both of them that Harold would not survive on its own. So, the narrator and his grandfather took their duties to nurse him. Harold stayed the next twelve years with the narrator and his grandparents. Harold used to swallow everything including once a live cigar and a coin. He learnt to toss tennis balls with his huge beak, like a slip-fielder. He was mostly fascinated by rains same as the child-narrator. Whenever it rained, he announced its approaching an hour before. He danced in the rain with spread wings like a clown. The narrator's grandparents and the narrator himself joined in his merriment in the verandah. The narrator then a child, now grown-up misses the voice of Harold, still date, and wishes summers full of rains.

*"Having no family, profession or religion, Harold gave much time and thought to his personal appearance. He carried a rouge pot on his person and used it skillfully as an item of his morning toilet."*³

3. Representation of Birds and Beasts in his poems

"If Mice could Roar", could be called an absurd poem. But the poem contextually rises out of a child's fantasy about animals. Rather it spells out as an impossible poem. It exhibits a child's 'Utopia'.

Contradictory things show similar qualities. From childhood we are taught about the story of a ‘Lion and a Rat.’ Hence the lines, “If mice could roar”, appear to be practically a fantasy on a child’s part. Elephants are big and heavy animals, so they can’t fly. The story of “Hare and the Tortoise”- hence ‘Tortoise can run’. In the ending- a gun grew a flower. As a child’s ‘Utopia’, it is the imagination of a beautiful world. Impossible things might happen but it fit other things in place. Fantastic animal images are chosen by Bond to exhibit the naturalness of a child.

“The Bat”: To a child, loneliness is the greatest pain. A child’s loneliness makes him different. In the poem “The Bat”, Bond speaks about a bat unlikely to other creatures. It flies low, stays at the door, stunts beneath the furniture. Yet, it is not disturbed by the author, as a boy. The author gives his assertions for not doing so in the last two lines. Even if it is a bat, it is a company on lonely nights. A child cannot live on its loneliness. Even animals and insects, who fail to give him any communication, still gives him company. The presence of a living thing is much more emphasized on a child’s brain than an adult. It reflects the phenomenon of a living ecosystem where all animals, human beings and insects are linked together in small bonds. Bats are not worth of being pets but the need of a companion on lonely nights satisfies the pathos of being alone for the author.

*On lonely nights, even a crazy bat
Is company²*

4. Animals in the Short Stories

In the story of “*Panther’s Moon*”, the presence of a man-eater in the forest hinders the survival of a young boy named Bisnu. Due to the panther the boy is unable to attend the school and fears that he might fail in the exams. . But the determination of the boy gives him success and forces the man-eater to finally leave the region.

In “*The Tiger in the Tunnel*”, once again , the railway worker on the tunnel who lights the signal lamp for the trains to pass the tunnel, encounters a tiger and kills it with his axe though fatally wounded. His small boy, continues his job form the next day, but the fear had gone as the tiger had been killed.

5. Animals and Religion

Sometimes Bond tries to represent the animals in a sacred form. As we know that in our Hindu religion the animals have been given a pious place for example the Garuda, the Monkey, Blue jay, squirrel, cow, lion and many more. In this way Bond gives us a different outlook towards pets and animals. He writes in the story “*All Creatures Great and Small*”:

“Many birds are sacred,” said Ramu... He told me that both the blue jay and the god Shiva were called 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 intended to destroy the world. Keeping the poison in his throat, he did not let it go any further.⁶

6. Conclusion

Thus we find that Bond is a true artist in the portrayal of the Animal Kingdom. He writes about the animals and they form a major part of his creation. Due to its naturalness, Bond’s Animal Kingdom is widely popular among his readers. His readers visualize the animals as real.

References:

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4. Ibid. p. 29.
5. Ibid. p. 68.
6. Ruskin Bond, “All Creatures Great and Small”, short stories, p. 434.

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