

Role of Literature in Moral Development

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Abstract: *This paper is an attempt to search various perceptives on the role and responsibility of literature in giving us moral education. This search will go through general considerations of fiction to more specific issues that are raised by present day writers, like Ruskin Bond such as an individual's behavior towards his or her social surroundings and expected social morality. This paper will also highlight various dimensions of literary works and look in to how it works for an individual's moral awareness and his behavior.*

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1. Literature as a Moral Guide

Throughout the history teaching moral values through stories, poems or literatures has been a very old system of moral education, since the time of Panchtantra, Ali baba or Aesop's fables. It was the time when teaching of the stories was presumed in easy way so that we can go through story again and again.

Learning and development are the formal character of education efforts and direct moral instructions. From the time immemorial, our religious books were the true path shower, full of wisdom and moral instructions. In western world for many centuries, Bible was that book. Both the old and the new testament were sole hallmark to judge one's life and cure from the life troubles. But in fourteenth century Caxton's invention of printing, changed the trend and tremendously increased the role and the responsibility of literature. It was praised by common man as literature then became very easy to approach, read and store for life time in the pages, possibly due to invention of printing. But this drastic change was not brought in one night. It gave rise to a new disagreement that whether literature could be able to found answers in the best possible moral way and to live correctly. Whether the teachings of literature to be believed fully. Whether pip's maturity in the end was result of his self awareness? So, in those early efforts of education to teach right values using literature the approach was direct, method was didactic, and the purpose was to transmit moral knowledge. These old tales of panchtantras and fables are inseparable from life and thought of that age.

And the fictional lives and the fantasies of literature have affected us from time unmemorable and keep on influencing our life and moral sense. Today's educators and critics have increased the wide range of creativity and dimensions of literary work from the basic level of learning. But the question is that, what type of moral value should be taught. Whether this should be religious, democratic, civic, personal, moral or universal. Modern educators are utilizing the literature in a multi dimensional approach for improving society, behavior development, problem solving skills and right attitude to handle social situations. By narrowing it can be said that literature is simply promoting moral literacy.

Perhaps the educator's have realized this moral function of literature which have increased its challenges. As a consequence of it the policy makers are focusing more on educative power of literature and culture awareness through works. Finally doubts can be eradicated through the awareness through literature about our moral values and our actual social conduct.

In my view literature and literary works are playing very crucial role in shaping and cultivating our beliefs, cultural, aesthetic and moral senses. This is among one of the very important key holders of our age old customs and their relevancy in this millennium. Educators adopting now a days a moral development perspective believing that the concept of the growth of moral thinking

develops in stages through various specific sequences. This approach focuses primarily on inculcating moral values from the age of adolescence in which an individual can adapt fairness, justice, equity, and human dignity along with other values constituting social, personnel, aesthetic growth. This helps the students in their development in thinking more logically and socially about moral issues. Educators attempt to stimulate students to develop more complex, moral reasoning patterns and levels through the sequential stage.

In this paper I will examine the role of literature in moral education and will also try to highlight that how these moral developments have met to realize our role in the society, our behavior towards the nature and perfect us to play our key role as better human being so that we can perform well in our own ecological cycle. To illustrate the discussion, I will focus on one of the most famous books, the epic, *Angry River* by most prolific Indian author Ruskin Bond. *Angry River* published in 1992 by Rupa publication, explores a story about a young girl Sita who lives with her grandparents in a small hut on an island. Her grandfather is a skilled fisherman. The theme in *angry river* is manifestation of strong belief of Sita the protagonist and her grandparents with various natural symbols incorporated by author in the story. A river that tumbles down from the melting glacier of snows of Himalayas has a changing relationship with Sita. It is respectful, of deep love, of gratitude as the River is boon for many. The River symbolizes duality of being a friend and supporter for their life on that lonely island and also of its own mystical nature. The simple theme explored by writer teaches us deep philosophical concepts of Hindu scriptures and metaphysical thought of worshipping a river.

It is also presenting a contrast picture with today's highly polluted river Ganges and its tributaries. They are rearing life of about 40% of Indian population in 11 states and around five hundred million or more but receiving in turn waste dumping of ashes and dumping of untreated waste.

As a typical of Bond's stories, *Angry River* is placed in a setting of pre technological age whose inhabitants are still retaining their basic values of faith, honesty, love for family and neighbor and worship of trees and rivers. The central action of the story involves Sita and her grandparent on a small island in the middle of very big river which is supporting numerous lives settled on its bank. This river has intentionally not given any name by the author but just "the river". A close examination of Ruskin Bond's work may draw us to the conclusion that the story might be somewhere around foot hills of Himalayan region in late 1950s or nearby. The atmosphere created by the author is magical and timeless and quickly empowers our imagination for respective view. The island is very specific with its only *peepal* tree in the centre where a single mud hut is build against a huge rock. Sita and her grandparents are living a calm and happy life that is supported by the river, the *peepal* tree, and three goats. Their attitude towards the river is very respectful, practical, revered and loving as it enables them to be self sufficient by fulfilling their needs. So it can be considered as sacred one as that of Hindu religion people share with holy ganges.

At beginning of the story we came to know that young Sita is only ten year old and living with her grandparents but her grandmother is extremely ill due to which her grandfather decides to take her to the nearby hospital in the only boat along with the three goats to the town. And this journey may take a week or long. Consequentially circumstances compelled Sita to stay back alone on the island and manage all the situations what may come. As piece of advice her grandfather warn her of rain saying that if rain does not stop it may cause flood and also that if the level of the water further increases she must climb the old *peepal* tree. The old tree has faced many such situation of flood and stood strengthfully against all odds. This imaginative presentation of man-nature relationship is beautiful description from a ten year child perspective and her struggle that leaves a mark on the readers mind.

But the actual turning point arrives when lonely Sita realizes that there is flood that looks like a raging *Angry River*. In her great effort to save everything that forms up their life on that island she tried hard to save her grandfather's favorite *hookah* and her grandmother's sari, some spices, fish and a old trunk but in that effort she could not save her favorite doll *mumta* who was her only companion and friend to share everything good or bad. When everything begins to float on the island she climbed up the old *peepal* tree, who truly stood for the symbol of strength, support and savior. But the greatest misery was yet to come when soon the flood reached the level of old

peepal tree and engulfs it all. Sita lost her all hopes in that moment, but suddenly she realized that a boy in a boat, who appeared unexpectedly, rescued her. The boy introduced himself as Krishna. He offered her very sweet mangos whose sweetness symbolizes the new life Sita got after that disastrous dance of Angry River. She was lucky enough to start a new life on island again with her grandfather but without her grandmother who died away and without her doll mamta.

But the point of concern is that what if Sita is saved? What about the whole mankind as we are not stopping our short sightedness and thoughtless action against nature. The River was angry over man's selfish attitude and ingratitude toward nature, trees, mountains that he has taken for granted and not realizing that their existence is of paramount importance for human survival. And thus the set of customs and beliefs that constitutes our culture passed on from past generation is very logical and scientific and holding on the whole environment. The way Sita escaped was miraculous because even the old *peepal* tree, in whose branches she was taking refuge, had washed away this time in the great anger of nature who had survived before in many such great floods when the whole was submerged in the water.

It was her honest faith when she prayed hard to the god and it was heard-“I've made, how can I expect the god to notice me alone in the middle of the river?”

2. CONCLUSION

So is it possible for us to entertain such expression of emotion, beliefs, thoughts and ideas without connecting it to our daily practical life from which they are constructed? It can be concluded that literature makes us more human as it can be seen as an engaging dialogue with itself, however, moral philosophy has rarely taken story telling for this role. It helps in growth of empathy and moral imagination. For example, 18th century literary works emphasis on “sentiments” celebrates sensitivity related to realities, emotions, and mood-stages of those around us, which in turn shapes our own feeling and responses. Sensitivity growth in an individual indicates a high level of moral imagination.

Through literature we can live more than one life. Our imagination takes us to times, places and realities that personnel we had not faced and experienced. By going through thoughts and viewpoints of other people we can also experience the same as their experience through reading of the concerned work.

Secondly the author reminds us many examples at that particular point when he wants to teach us something and expect us to change our view point.

Thirdly, the relationship between life and literature is not strictly of didactic view, but we use many artful ways to sensitize us on various complex issues and uses educative power that literatures have.

So it is important to consider the role of literature in moral education which is a relevant medium for our learning as it is inspired from our life actions to correct our life actions.

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AUTHOR'S BIOGRAPHY



I am a Research Scholar in the Department of English and Modern European Languages, University of Allahabad. Title of my Thesis is “A narrative analysis of Ruskin Bond’s work” under the guidance of Assistant Professor Dr. Jaya Kapoor. I have presented different papers in International and National Seminars. Recently I have presented a paper in the International seminar on **Understanding Fiction in Contemporary Times** held at Department of English, BHU, Varanasi, on the paper titled ‘**A narrative analysis: Author as a Narrator as well as a Character in Ruskin Bond’s MAHARANI**’.

My Research focuses on the investigation of various Narrative techniques in which fiction is being narrated. Its various kinds and its impact on the readers. It also investigates that how the contemporary fiction especially how reading and writing has build up a great challenge for today's writer to present their text in innovative narration that can be accepted by readers so that new experiments can take place in this genre.