

Indian Folktale: A Discussion in the Works of Manoj Das and Ruskin Bond.

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ABSTRACT

The present study encompasses selected works of Manoj Das and Ruskin Bond vis-à-vis the folktales of India serving as a powerful medium for promoting the richness of Indian history and culture. Thus, encouraging readers to engage with and focus on the age-old norms and heritage in the modern world. The select authors' short stories focus on the rural scenario, cultural traditions, people of those places and intimate human relationships among themselves which demonstrates as an expression of folk lifestyle. The simplicity of rustic life, themes of fantasy, appreciation of beauty in the ordinary and occult practices in specific Indian provinces is expressed in both Bond and Das's works. The present paper explores folk narrative style of India as presented in the writings of Das and highlights Bond's deep interconnections between local history and values. The paper also studies how these five short stories: The Crocodile's Lady, A Turtle from the Blue, One Who Lifted the Mountain, The Ganga Descends and Tales of Tunganath provide a medium expressing the traditional culture. Thus, this study, through a close reading of Manoj Das and Ruskin Bond's five short stories extricates the transformative idea of promoting and prioritizing folk literature in the field of Indian English writing

Keywords: Indian Culture, Folktale, Rurality, Fantasy, History

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INTRODUCTION

Folktale includes everyday life events of common people, their way of living, dilemmas, problems, pains, happiness, mysteries, celebrations and all other things possible. Every part of the world has oral form of folk tales and folk songs. The word 'folk' means 'people' and 'tale' means 'stories'. Through folktales we get a clear-cut image of a particular region and society. There are various forms of folktale available in the field of literature, such as; fantasies, fairy tales, mythologies, fables, parables, narrative tales, ghost stories and so on. Generation after generation we get familiar with such stories from our parents, grandparents and relatives by which we know the values of life and at the same time a sense of amusement starts to peep within us. "The word folktale means story passed on in spoken form from one generation to next (Hornby 456)." Children are mostly attracted towards fairy tales and fantasies. The simple yet relatable characters, engaging themes, and beautiful settings captivate young minds. Writers don't forget to include meaningful and important ideas in their works in quite amusing way. "This type of folktale has exciting story proceedings with an imaginary world that contains wonders from supernatural power and miracles of non-human characters such as giants, angels, or the kings of Nagas. As such, this kind of tale is sometimes known as 'tales of wonders'" (Hamral 19). The concept of folktale is one of the best inventions of literature. It is the pertinent medium to make the world aware of the moral messages of the past in a lighter vein. As short story is the best medium to derive pleasure in less time, in fact in a single sitting. Only by reading ancient mythological stories and fantasies, we can perceive a kind of unique creativity. Dahal and Bhatta (2021) opine, "Folktales are shared to entertain,

educate people and protect the culture in every society. They are considered valuable both for national and universal culture. Folktales should be regarded as good instruments for understanding and increasing the exchange between diverse culture" (Dahal & Bhatta 32). The way folktales focus on various elements and factors of a particular locality are enough to build a clear picture of it on the minds of the readers. There are discussions on geographical, regional, cultural, class and groups, accent and language, belief and superstition, communal and educational; every bit of thorough presentation and picturisation. Different languages have their own tales and songs to let the rest of the world know and one of such language-example is Kabyle language, spoken in the north-east part of Algeria. Giving an example of Kabyle folktale and plot twist, Gilet (2017) writes, "They reflect more accurately a tribal and not a feudal mentality, an isolated, agricultural world rather than the more sophisticated one of the twelfth century" (Gilet 42). In the same way many writers across the globe like Madame d' Aulnoy, Joseph Jacobs, Howard Pyle, Charles Perrault from British literature as well as Charles Skinner and others from American literature mainly highlight the mythological fantasies of their regions.

In this context, Indian hasn't remained far behind. It enlightens the readers with folktales and has explored such stories in their writings. Indian history and cultures are replete with age-old tales and mythologies. The temples, caves, statues and places in India offer their unique stories and are enough to amaze the tourists, visitors and listeners. Especially, writers have the most beautiful and astonishing tales to tell and have heavily contributed to preserve this age-old tradition. Ruskin bond and Manoj Das, have been

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the teller of folktales with a difference. They felt and experienced the beauty of rural nature and culture, tradition and values, life-style and above all the ancestral stories of their region and locality. As a children story writer, their narration has innocence, humour, and fantasy. As Sharma & Balhara opine, "India has one of the most celebrated oral traditions in the world. It is deeply rooted in oral and written narrative heritage. It has been serving as a powerful tool for transferring knowledge related to human values, morality, deep philosophical explorations, cultural heritage, and statecraft. Indian storytelling traditions range from ancient epics to regional folktales (Sharma & Balhara 231)". In this respect, Manoj Das and Ruskin Bond, have achieved different place as short story writers among the Indo-Anglian writers. Their stories called the attention of his readers across the globe to his narration of folk stories. Though both the authors Manoj Das and Ruskin Bond have produced a number of short stories, yet there are some specific one highlighting the folktale aspect more transparently just as the five stories discussed in this paper. The stories expressing fantasy mixed with humour and sarcasm, there is the narration of spirituality and religious belief system of particular localities. There are the presentation of magic realism and the discussion of human-nature connection in a realistic manner too. As well as the stories also highlight the rustic social life through folktale element.

1.2 Literature Review

Deepa Rani (2015) in "A. Folklore Tradition in Manoj Das's Selected Fiction" opines that the presence of oral and traditional narrative styles and supernatural elements in Das's fiction are extraordinarily presented. She argues that Manoj Das's fictions are deeply rooted in folklore custom, utilizing mythic ideologies and supernatural themes to present moral and metaphysical insights. The study highlights the excellence of oral storytelling in modern literature through Das's work.

Manoranjan Behura (2016) in "Folk elements in the short stories of Manoj Das" explores Manoj Das's method of incorporating Odia folk traditions into his English and Odia short stories. He highlights Das's use of folk tradition, oral narratives, and traditional settings, prioritising Das's role in preserving and popularising regional folklore. The paper unveils the cultural significance of Das's works in keeping the relevance of folk literature intact in contemporary times. Dharmapada Jena (2022) in "Environmental Consciousness in the Writings of Manoj Das" focuses on the ecological concept in Manoj Das's writings, proving that his narratives often highlight environmental degradation and celebrate traditional ecological knowledge. The critical work positions Das as an early eco-conscious bilingual Indian writer, emphasizing the moral and environmental dimensions of his work.

Malichakar and et al. (2017) "The Use of Myths in Ruskin Bond's Short Stories" analyses Ruskin Bond's treatment of local myths and broader mythic heroes into his short stories. The discussion finds that Bond uses myths transparently and domestically, transforming them into modern parables that relate with contemporary readers. The study also

highlights the writer's expertise in shifting traditional to modern storytelling.

Pandey and Dixit's (2017) "Ghost and Supernatural in Ruskin Bond's Work", examine the illusory and eerie elements in Bond's short fiction, implying that his supernatural tales are marked by restraint. They argue that spirits in Bond's stories often act as an ethical device, evoking memory, moral discomfort or childhood trauma rather than terror. The study deals with the writer's unique style to portray the mystical through literature.

Verma and Dhar's (2019) "A Study of Nature in Ruskin Bond's Writings" delve into Bond's presentation of natural world and the Himalayan landscape in his stories. They find that Bond's setting in his writings is realistic and the plot is always ethical, presenting nature not only as a backdrop but as a true companion. The work portrays the writer's input to eco-literature through his observant lens and sensitive depiction of the natural world.

1.3 Research Objectives

- To analyse the short stories of Manoj Das and Ruskin Bond in the light of Indian cultural richness.
- To study the significance of Indian folk tradition through the writings of both the authors.

1.4 Research Methodology

- The methodology here uses a qualitative study of the selected writings of Das and Bond.
- The study involves primary literature as the works of both the authors.

1.5 Manoj Das: A Brief Sketch

Manoj Das is an Indian bilingual writer and mostly known for his short stories for children. Das was born and brought up in the coastal belt of Odisha. The setting of his works are generally the rustic places of Odisha. The society, culture, community, religion, belief, notion, and various other aspects of Odisha as a whole have been displayed in his writings. His works have been a mirror that shows the realistic picturisation of the then Odisha. A few of his collections are: *Mystery of the Missing Cap and Other Stories*, *Bridge in the Moonlit Night and Other Stories*, *Farewell to a Ghost and Other Stories*, *The Crocodile's Lady*, *a Collection of Stories*, *The Submerged Valley and Other Stories*. He is recognized both nationally and internationally. He got 1965 and 1972, Odisha Sahitya Akademi Award; in 2000 Saraswati Samman; in 2001 Padma Shri the fourth highest civilian Award and in 2020 Padma Bhusana the third highest civilian Award of India. The list of his awards is quite long as many writers, critics, literary personnel and scholars are in praise of his works. Giving his view Raja (2014) states, "As can be seen from the stories in his nine collections, the writer covers a wide range. There are stories, where the natural and the supernatural mix, realistic stories where animals are made to play a vital role, satires on the contemporary life in a frame of realism or a fairytale frame" (Raja 83). Das's narration and presentation with trace of humour, irony, satire and admiration, makes him special and unique as he highlights Indianness in proper atmosphere and perspective.

1.6 Ruskin Bond: A Brief Sketch

Ruskin Bond is a well-known Indian author of British origin, renowned for his short stories, novels, and children's literature. Born in beautiful Kasauli and raised in the hills of Northern part of India, Bond began writing early in his life. His first novel *The Room on the Roof* won him the John Llewellyn Rhys Prize at age seventeen. His writing is primarily in English language, reflect the rustic simplicity of mountain life, themes of nature, identity, nostalgia, childhood, and human relationships. His popular story collections are set in different parts of Mussoorie, Dehradun and Himalayan Valleys, his narratives portray the beauty and wonder of the day-to-day life. For his literary compositions, he got in 1992 the prestigious Sahitya Akademi Award; in 1999 the fourth highest civilian award Padma Shri and in 2014 the third highest civilian award Padma Bhushan. Critics praise his simple storytelling, emotional depth, and skill to find meaning in the ordinary. As Mehta (2010) point out, "Bond's writing is a quiet reminder that beauty lies in simple things" (Mehta 112). His narrative style, subtlety, empathy, gentle humour, and nostalgia, makes him a beloved figure in Indian literature and mostly among children.

1.7 Discussion

Many parts of these above-mentioned stories are related to *The Panchatantra*, one of the ancient Indian collections. The stories from *The Jataka Tales* and *The Panchatantra* draw attention of the readers. The life of Gautama Budha, the dynasty of king Vikramaditya, ghost stories of Vikram-Vetala, story of Akbar and Birbal are some themes that come under the folktale literature of Odisha. Presenting A. K. Ramanujan's view on English folktale, Mukherjee (2016) writes, "The most remarkable thing about folktales is their fluidity. In his preface to *Folktales from India*, the author (A.K. Ramanujan) says, no selection can truly 'represent' the multiple and changing lives of Indian tales'. Each of the tales in this collection has variations in other regions" (Mukherjee). This fluidity is no doubt found in Das's works so vibrantly. His narration has that clarity, beauty and charm to take the readers into a similar world and experience everything firsthand. As a man from the rural land, it is obvious for Manoj Das to be rooted in ancient culture and tradition.

A Turtle from the Blue

The very first short story here under discussion is "A Turtle from the Blue". The story tells about some fantasies. We find two swans and a turtle as the leading characters of the tale. The beginning is somewhat extraordinary. Those two swans and the turtle were good friends. When the swans fly in the sky, the turtle feels lonely and therefore one day the swans decide to make the turtle fly. They took a long stick, grabbed the two ends in their beaks and the turtle hold the middle part of the stick in his mouth. Many people exclaimed to see the view of a turtle flying. But an emissary of a certain king became boastful and said that he has seen buffalo like big birds carrying hog in the sky. This statement demeaned the honour of the flying turtle, Kambugriva. He

tried to shout at the emissary, but unfortunately fell on the terrace of the palace and died. Everyone was astonished to see such a big turtle. But the astrologer of the king's court came up with prophetic words; "The next turtle will drop from the sky even as this one, nine hundred years and nine months and nine weeks – ah – yes, nine weeks, for I can clearly see that in the future ten weeks will make a month – and nine days and nine hours from now" (Das 300). After this the chef of the palace was ordered to cook the turtle and it was a question that who would eat it. A process went on and finally the decision was made that the king would eat the whole of it. The story ends here and no doubt it is a fantasy. Never can swans take a turtle for flying and nor can the later utter the word 'you fool!'. These things are found in folktales and fantasies. There are numerous folktales available in Odia literature regarding different temples, kings and queens. For instance, we have heard about the dream of king Langula Narasingha Deva to build the Jagannath temple. Similarly, about Dharmapada, the small boy who fixed the top of the Konark temple and sacrificed his life for the sake of his father and other workers. The story "A Turtle from the Blue" is one of such stories displaying folk literature.

The Crocodile's Lady

The second story "The Crocodile's Lady" is even more interesting and entertaining. The two characters from ancient time create an impression on the readers' mind. There is a character of an old lady who mesmerizes an educated English man with her story. The old lady is famous in her village because of her past days. She claims that she had spent days under water with a magical crocodile and one day she returned to her village. When Dr. Batstone, from the West wanted to know about it eagerly. The lady was taken away by a certain crocodile and to everyone's shock she returned alive after a decade. They lived happily together and swam from place to place under water. They could change their shapes and forms. She states one such incident that one day she wished to visit temples and holy ghats and the crocodile helped her change its body. "She went near the ghat, recited the mantra, assumed her human form, visited the temple and returned by evening. As soon as she jumped into the water the crocodile uttered his mantra and changed into his mate" (Das, 2015, 20). These things are hard to believe, yet truly fascinating. According to the old lady, the crocodile could change its incarnation and he was a knowledgeable creature. Moreover, the speaker says that Dr. Batstone was so influenced by the story of the elderly lady that when he returned from her little hut, he went straight to the river side to look for the crocodile and years after remembered it thoroughly. In Das's words the astonishment is expressed by Batstone to the speaker like this, "Often I pass into a reverie remembering the days and nights I spent in your village. Surely, I was under the spell of a mantra (who uttered it?) for a brief time. Fantastic! (Das, 2015, 21)".

Man Who Lifted the Mountain

Last story "Man Who Lifted the Mountain" is somewhat about supernatural element. The protagonist Thieffou is the

man who lifted a whole mountain. Once a princess of a kingdom fell ill and her disease remained undiagnosed. Many physicians from far and near came but it was of no avail. Fortunately, one saintly person came and he suggested a remedy for the princess's ailment. Under the mountain, there was some magical sand that could heal her. No one but Thieffou could lift the huge mountain. But he became proud about his power and started threatening everyone as well as demanded to marry the princess. But seeing this, the mountain decided to punish him and came down rapidly. The scene is presented in the following way, "Next moment the mountain touched the ground and settled quickly. The spirit of the mountain had promised to keep its body feather-light for an hour. The hour had passed (Das, 2018, 150)". It is never possible for a mountain to promise or punish like humans. But in tales and stories we see such personifications. Such as in fairy tales, the birds, trees, animals talk and react that seem unreal, yet pleasant. Similar characters, actions, presentations are found in folktales to. "Folktales are variously characterised as simple stories, often handed down orally, embodying the cultural beliefs of the community they are a part of (Sharma 95)". The same way both Das and Bond signify the importance of folktales and through literary genre of short story popularise them.

The Ganga Descends

In "The Ganga Descends", Ruskin Bond skilfully includes folk elements by blending mythology, nature, spirituality and moral storytelling. The river Ganga here is depicted not merely as a physical entity, belonging to nature but as a living, sacred presence, reflecting the essence of Indian folk tradition of personifying natural components. Bond evokes a sense of admiration for nature, a key feature of folklore, portraying the sacred river as a guide and moral force in human existence. The narrative draws on mythic references and local beliefs, connecting the characters' actions to spiritual implications, which mirrors the ethical lessons incorporated in traditional folk tales. The clarity of the language and the evocative depiction of rural landscapes, traditions, villagers, temples, and the riverbanks, elevates the oral, storytelling excellence of the tale. Moreover, the plot carries subtle moral teachings about devotion, admiration, respect, and the interconnectedness of humankind and nature, which are essential characteristic of folk narratives. Through these ideas, Bond preserves the value of Indian cultural identity and memory, combining ecological awareness with mythological representation, and demonstrates the way folklore can influence contemporary storytelling.

Tales of Tunganath

"Tales of Tunganath" is wrapped in folk elements, particularly through its narration of forest life, rural societies, and human-animal interactions. The story unfolds in an episodic, oral-storytelling pattern, reminiscent of traditional folk stories passed down to generations. Bond portrays the rural people and forest dwellers with simple, authentic life-style, emphasizing local customs, superstitions, and insights. Birds, animals and natural

surroundings are fundamental, often acting as symbolic or ethical mediums, reflecting the fable-like aspects of folklore. The stories highlight suspense, humour, and occasional supernatural signs, blending realism with the mythical, a symbol of folk literature. Themes such as bravery, kindness, and respect for nature as well as ethical lessons without extreme moralising. Bond's use of lucid imagery, colloquial language, and episodic adventures inspire tales with a rhythmic expression, preserving the virtue of storytelling traditions. Overall, "Tales of Tunganath" demonstrates Bond's way of focusing on folklore to celebrate India's rustic life, ecological awareness, and cultural heritage, creating stories those are both entertaining and morally rich.

Bond's love for India, its rich cultural diversities, simple living and natural landscape, is immense. He sees the beauty even in the ordinary elements of Indian environment. Rahman and Sharma observe, "For Bond, India and Indian are, if anything, better than Western society's civilised people. In several of his stories, he attacks Western culture and civilisation, all done in a humorous way" (Rahman et al. 93). So is the case with folktales and ancient traditions. He accepts and glorifies them with equal love and admiration.

The work focuses on the similarities and differences in choice of theme and narrative technique in Das and Bond. It reflects the critical approaches while dealing with society, culture and ecology. And, we find the authors distinctive way of glorifying the lands those provide both the authors' creative input.

1.8 Analysis and Conclusion

The genre of folktale is very rich and Indian folktale is quite interesting, it has ghost stories, fables, parables, miracles, mysteries and what not. Das and Bond have been unmatched in including all these ideas in their stories and displaying folktales of their region. Many of their stories are inspired by the old mythologies or epics or even other stories from the past. They never fail to bridge the gap between the society, culture and the future generation. The stories of Das and Bond aptly preserve and present Indian folk traditions, rustic life and cultural systems through engaging narratives. Both writers employ myth, fantasy and oral storytelling techniques to express moral lessons and celebrate local beliefs. Das deeply rooted in Odisha's realistic charm, infuses his tales with fantasy and folklore, while Bond reflects the harmony and simplicity of Himalayan village life. Their tales not only entertain but also teaches, capturing the essence of Indian personality. Through vivid characters, fantastical yet realistic plots and cultural motifs, both writers contribute significantly to Indian folktale study. Manoj Das and Ruskin Bond stands as a witness to successful upbringing about a perfect blend between ecological balance and aesthetic experience in their potency of storytelling. Bond's skill in shifting traditional narratives to modern storytelling is a unique approach to the supernatural through literature. And also, establishes how narratives can transcend the boundaries of fiction, serving as an input to eco-literature through the authors' observant lens and sensitive depiction of the

natural world. It serves as a self-motivated force that engages with global environmental issues. Both the writers' skills a narrative that not only fascinates readers but also inspires them to implement further a conscious and sustainable relationship with the nature and culture. Hence, storytelling is just not for entertainment but provides motivation to show constructive attitude towards the preservation of nature and culture

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